DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER INEQUALITY: THEORETICAL ISSUES

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INTRODUCTION

Sociologically the word gender refers to the socio-cultural definition of man and woman, the way societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles. The distinction between sex and gender was introduced to deal with the general tendency to attribute women’s subordination to their anatomy. For ages it was believed that the different characteristics, roles and status accorded to women and men in society are determined by sex, that they are natural and therefore not changeable. Gender is seen closely related to the roles and behaviour assigned to women and men based on their sexual differences. As soon as a child is born families and societies begin the process of gendering. Boys are encouraged to be tough and outgoing, girls are encouraged to be homebound and shy. Gender Inequality is therefore a form of inequality which is distinct from other forms of economic and social inequalities. Statistic reveal that in India males significantly outnumber females and this imbalance has increased over time. The sex ratio according to 2001 census report stands at 933 per 1000 males. From a global perspective India accounts for 19% of all live births and 27% of all maternal deaths. The deaths of young girls in India exceed those of young boys by over 30000 each year and every sixth infant death is specifically due to gender discrimination. Women face discrimination right from childhood. Gender disparities in nutrition are evident from infancy to adulthood. Infact, gender has been most statistically significant determinant of malnutrition among young children and malnutrition is a frequent, direct or underlying cause of death among girls below age 5. Girls are breast-fed less frequently and for a shorter duration in infancy. In childhood and adulthood males are fed first and better. Women receive less health care facilities than men. Many women in rural areas die in child birth due to easily preventable complications.
MANY FACES OF GENDER INEQUALITY

Noble Laureate Amartya Sen has worked on problems of discrimination against women in the development process, on survivorship differentials between men and women under conditions of social discrimination against women, and on women's agency in the process of social development. Gender inequality exists in most part of the world. Inequality between women and men can take many different forms. Indeed gender inequality is not one homogenous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate abd interlinked problems. Seven faces of gender inequalities are as follows :-

1) Mortality Inequality:- In some regions in the world, inequality between women and men directly involves matters of life and death, and takes the brutal form of unusually high mortality rates of women and a consequent preponderance of men in the total population, as opposed to the preponderance of women found in societies with little or no gender bias in health care and nutrition.

2) Natality Inequality:- Given a preference for boys over girls that many male-dominated societies have, gender inequality can manifest itself in the form of the parents wanting the newborn to be a boy rather than a girl. There was a time when this could be no more than a wish, but with the availability of modern techniques to determine the gender of the foetus, sex-selective abortion has become common in many countries.

3) Basic Facility Inequality:- Even when demographic characteristics do not show much or any anti- female bias, there are other ways in which women can have less than a square deal. There are others deficiencies in basic facilities available to women, varying from encouragement to cultivate one's natural talents to fair participation in rewarding social functions of the community.

4) Special Opportunity Inequality:- The opportunities of higher education may be far fewer for young women than for young men. Indeed, gender bias in higher education
and professional training can be observed even in some of the richest countries in the world.

5) Professional Inequality: - In terms of employment as well as promotion in work and occupation, women often face greater handicap than men.

6) Ownership: - In many societies the ownership of property can also be very unequal. Every basic assets such as homes and land may be very asymmetrically shared. The absence of claims to property can not only reduce the voice of women, but also make it harder for women to enter and flourish in commercial, economic and even some social activities.

7) Household: - The family arrangements can be quite unequal in terms of sharing the burden of housework and child care. It is quite common in many societies to take it for granted that while men will naturally work outside the home, women could do it if and only if they could combine it with various inescapable and unequally shared household duties. This is sometimes called “division of labour”. The reach of this inequality includes not only unequal relations within the family but also derivative inequalities in employment and recognition in the outside world.

GENDER INEQUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Investing in human capital is one of the most effective means of reducing poverty and encouraging sustainable development. In the last few decades, women’s issues and concerns have been debated widely, the major issue being equality. Though their contribution in different economic, social and political activities is very well recognized, yet the idea of equality is still a distant dream. Status of women in Indian society is a reflection of unequal relationship sustained by patriarchy built on male superiority and female inferiority, sex stereotyped roles, expectations and economic, social and political predominance of men and dependency of women. Gender inequality that are widespread in access to basic rights, access to and control of resources, in economic opportunities and
also in power and political voice are an impediment to development. It has an adverse impact on development goals as reduces economic growth. It hampers the overall well being because blocking women from participation in social, political and economic activities can adversely affect the whole society. Many developing countries including India has displayed gender inequality in education, vast differences in education level of two sexes. Women in general enjoy far less employment opportunities than men the world over. India has witnessed gender inequality from its early history due to its socio-economic and religious practices that resulted in a wide gap between the position of men and women in the society.

**IMPACT OF GENDER INEQUALITY ON DEVELOPMENT**

1) **Gender Inequality and Education** :- If one believes that boys and girls have a similar distribution of innate abilities, gender inequality in education must mean that less able boys than girls get the chance to be educated, and, more importantly that the average innate ability of those who got educated is lower than it would be the case if boys and girls received equal educational opportunities. This would lower the productivity of the human capital in the economy and thus reduce economic growth.

2) **Gender Inequality and Employment** :- Reducing the employment chances of women is likely to ensure that the average ability of the work force will be lower than in the absence of such gender inequality in employment. This will inturn reduce the growth of the economy.

3) **Gender Inequality in Technology** :- Gender inequality in access to technology may hamper the ability of women to increase the productivity of their agricultural, domestic or entrepreneurial activities and thus reduce economic growth.

4) **Increase in Poverty** :- Gender inequality leads to increase poverty in the country. Women and girls who are at the bottom of the social, economic and political ladder in the poorer societies, get even lesser opportunities to have a command over productive
resources such as land or credit. Access to the means to influence the development process is a rare and difficult possibility.

MEASURES TO REDUCE GENDER INEQUALITY

1) Lower gender inequality in education effectively means greater female education at each level of male education, it should promote a higher quality of education and thus promote economic growth.

2) Increase the role of women in employment opportunities outside of the home will lead to a substitution of unrecorded female labour in the home with recorded female labour in the home with recorded female labour in the female economy. Greater access to employment for women may enhance economic growth.

3) There should be a sustainable care system, care and carers must be better supported and more highly valued to involve more men in caring and reduce gender inequalities.

4) The constitution of India ensures gender equality in its preamble as a fundamental right but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women by ways of legislation and policies. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights forums to secure equal rights of women.

5) The 73rd and 74th amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.
NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN (2001)

The Government also announced the National policy for empowerment of women in 2001 to bring out advancement, development and empowerment of women. The goal and objectives of the policy are as follows:-

1) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.

2) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.

3) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

4) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participicipation and involvement of both men and women.

5) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

CONCLUSION

The current situation can not continue. Many people, largely women, are not getting the care they need. Many carers, also largely women, are not getting the support they need and the opportunities they deserve to take part in society. The paid care sector is failing to plug the gap through lack of funding, leading to recruitment and retention problems. All this is producing an unsustainable situation that reinforces existing gender inequalities. As persistent gender inequalities continue we need to rethink concepts and strategies for promoting women's dignity and rights. 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. There is a need for new kinds of institutions, incorporating new norms and rules that support equal and just relations between women and men. Today women are organizing themselves to meet the challenges that are hampering their development.