

GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EDUCATION: ISSUES AND REMEDIES

Dr. Shazli Hasan Khan¹

Abstract

The condition of women in a society is an index of that society's place in civilization. Societies that discriminate on the basis of gender pay a significant price in terms of higher poverty, low quality of life, slower economic growth, and weaker governance. Women are dominated by patriarchal kinship system that results in socio-economic dependence of women on men and stipulate their relative lower status compared to men. As such women and girls have restricted mobility, access to education, access to health facilities and lower decision-making power, and experience higher rates of violence. Despite existing reservations of women, their political participation is also hindered even at the panchayat (local governing bodies) level and also at the state and national levels. Policies on women's welfare and empowerment exist at the national, state and local levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, and political participation etc. However there are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual practice at the ground level. The present paper tries to analyze gender inequality in education, employment, work and political participation and legislative measures taken in reducing gender inequality. Besides this, the paper also attempts to study the various socio-economic problems and issues faced by women in India. The present paper is based on secondary data collected from several journals, magazines, newspapers as well as from Internet. The paper has also suggested some remedies for eradication of gender inequality.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Gender discrimination, Egalitarian Society, Women's Education, Social issues, Employment, Legislation.

INTRODUCTION

"Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition of meeting the challenges of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance"-- Kofi Annan

Throughout history and in many societies including India, gender inequality has become part and parcel of an accepted male-dominated culture. Atrocities and discrimination are the two major problems, which the Indian women face in the present day society. Gender inequality in India constitutes one of the major concerns in the current development paradigm. It manifests itself in various forms and is a core determinant of majority's women's lives in the Indian subcontinent. Several research studies and reports by multilateral organizations have shown the existence of the different facets of gender inequality in India. The Global Gender Gap Report 2013, ranks India at 101 among 136 countries, behind Maldives but ahead of Nepal and Pakistan (Table 1.0). The report used the four parameters for measuring gender inequality, namely, economic participation and opportunity, health and survival, educational attainment and political empowerment. The United Nations Development Programme released its Human Development Report, 2015, ranks India at 130 among 187 countries with a GII value of 0.609, highlighting the glaring gender inequality in one of the world's largest and fastest growing economies. The Gender Inequality Index reflects gender-based inequalities on three vital parameters: reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity.

¹ Assistant Professor, MANUU, CTE, Sambhal-U.P.

Table 1. India's Rank in Gender Inequality, 2015

Sl. No.	Gender Inequality Parameters	India's Rank
1.	Economic Participation and Opportunity	124
2.	Educational Attainment	120
3.	Health and Survival	135
4.	Political Empowerment	9
5.	Overall	101

Source: UNDP Report, 2015

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 gnarl 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 is natural and therefore not changeable.

The gender inequality faced by women was much due to social and economical restrictions. This is a fact and India has witnessed gender inequality from its early history due to its socio-economic and religious practices that has resulted in wide gap between the position of men and women in the society. Clearly, then gender gaps 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. Many developing countries including India have displayed gender inequality in education, employment and health. It is common to find girls and women suffering from high mortality rates. There are vast differences in education level of tow sexes. Gender inequality is a result of the persistent discrimination of one group of people based upon gender and it manifests itself differently according to race, culture, politics, country, and economic situation. It is furthermore considered causal factor violence against women. While gender discrimination in happens to both men and women in individual situations, discrimination against women is entrenched, global pandemic. Any claims and efforts then, to remove poverty can show results only if they address the issue of gender inequality. In recent decades, there have been large gains, no doubt on comparable levels, in basic rights ands opportunities, in life expectancy and enrolment ratios for women. But despite these gains, the stark reality has not changed. There still are large gender disparities in basic human rights, resources, and economic opportunity, and in political rights—the world over.

As soon as a child is born families and society begin the process of gendering. The birth of a son is celebrated, the birth of a daughter is filled with pain; sons are showered love, respect, better food and proper health care. Boys are encouraged to be tough and outgoing; and girls to be homebound and shy. All these differences are gender differences and they are created by the society. Gender inequality is therefore a form of inequality which is distinct from other forms of economic and social inequalities and stems from pre-existing gendered social norms and social perceptions. Gender inequality has adverse impact on development goals as it reduces economic growth. It hampers overall well being because it blocks women from participation in social, political and economic activities and

it can thereby adversely affect society. The reality of gender inequality in India is very complex and diversified, because it is present in many ways, any fields and many classes. Fields like education, employment opportunities, where men are always preferred over women. So, gender inequality is especially tragic not only because it excludes women from basic social opportunities, but also because it gavel imperils the life prospects of future generations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the magnitude of gender inequality among women in India.
2. To study the various socio-economic issues and problems faced by women in India.
3. To study various legislative and Constitutional measures are taken by the Government of India so as to tackle and reduce the problem of gender inequality.
4. To suggest remedies to reduce gender inequality.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is mainly based upon the collection of secondary data. The secondary data was collected from various sources of publications such as magazines such as Frontline, Outlook, Journals like Economic and Political Weekly and research articles, research papers, Internet and published records.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Gender inequalities in India deserve a serious study and discussion among media, academic, researchers and policy makers of country. Economic survey (2011-2012) has emphasized that much needs to be done to reduce disparities between men and women. In gender Inequality index, India ranked 130 out of 187 countries. Gender inequality has adverse impact on development goals as it reduces economic growth. It hampers the overall well-being because blocking women from participation in social, political and economic activities can adversely affect this whole society. Many developing counties including India have displayed gender inequality in education, employment and health. It is common to find girls and women suffering from high mortality rates. There are vast differences in education level of the two sexes. India has witnessed gender inequality from its early history due to its socio-economic and religious practices that resulted in a wide gap between position of men and women in the society.

GENDER INEQUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Gender inequality is perhaps the greatest setback of census 2011 of India. Census 2011 has revealed that the child sex ratio in the country has declines to touch the lowest levels since independence. Provisional population data indicates a steep fall in the child sex ratio. The sex ratio in the 0-6 age group has been continually declining since 1961, but the fall from 927.31 in 2001 to 914.23 in 2011 is the worst since independence. It can only be explained by the deadly application of the strong preference for sons over daughters through sex-selective abortion, or female foeticide. Attempts to abolish tackle female foeticide through bans on sex-determinations tests imposed by legislations have been remained largely ineffective (See Table 2.0)

Table 2. Sex Ratio and Gender Gap in Literacy Rate

Sl. No.	Year	Total	Literacy Rate		Sex Ratio (Females per 1000 Males)
			Male	Female	
1.	1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	946
2.	1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	941
3.	1971	34.45	45.95	21.97	930
4.	1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	934
5.	1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	927
7.	2001	64.83	75.26	53.67	933
8.	2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	940

Source: Census 2011 Data, Govt. of India

The 15th Census (2011) indicates a dismal trend of preference for male children over females. The gender imbalance is there despite a ban on sex determination tests. Despite the laws to prevent female feticide and schemes to encourage families to have girl child, the child sex ratio has fallen sharply in the latest Census period. The male population has grown by 17.19 percent so as to reach 632.7 million (62 crore) while the female population has risen by 18.12 percent so as to reach 586.5 million (58 crore). The total number of children in the age group of 0-6 is 158.8 million. The proportion of child population in the age group of 0-6 years to total population is 13.1 percent while the corresponding figure in 2001 was 15.9 percent. The decline has been to the extent of 2.8 points.

Table 3. Gender Inequality Profile of India

Sl. No.	Categories	India 2013
1.	Human Development Index (HDI)	136
2.	Gender Inequality Index Rank	132
3.	Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 1,00,000 live births)	178
4.	Adolescent Fertility Rate (in %)	74.7
5.	Seats in National Parliament (% female)	10.9
6.	Population with at least Secondary Education (Female)* (in %)	26.6
7.	Population with at least Secondary Education (Male)* (in %)	50.4
8.	Female Labourforce participation Rate (in %)	33.1
9.	Male Labourforce participation Rate (in %)	82.7

Source: Census, 2011 & UNDP Report, 2013

Gender imbalances in States

- Overall sex ratio at the national level increased by 7 points so as to reach 940 at Census 2011 as against 933 in Census 2001. This is the highest sex ratio recorded since Census 1971 and a shade lower than 1961. Increase in sex ratio is observed in 29 States/UTs.
- Three major States (J& K, Bihar & Gujarat) have decline in sex ratio as compared to Census 2001.
- Kerala with 1084 has the highest sex ratio followed by Puducherry with 1038; Daman & Diu has the lowest sex ratio of 618.
- In India the average child sex ratio (0-6 years) is 914. Increasing trend in the child sex ratio (0-6) is seen in Punjab (846), Haryana (830), Himachal Pradesh (906), Gujarat (886), Tamil Nadu (946), Mizoram (971) and Adaman & Nicobar Islands (966). In all remaining 27 States/UTs, the child sex ratio shows the decline over Census 2001.
- Mizoram has the highest child sex ratio (0-6 years) of 971 followed by Meghalalya with 970. Hararyana is at the bottom with ratio of 830 followed by Punjab with 846.

Social, Economic and Educational issues of Women in India

Without socio-economic equality for women in poor sectors of India, the impacts of efforts at development cannot become fully realized. India must value women as human resources assets and not liabilities. Socio-economic development can both empower women and raise the status of the Indian economy. Women need employment justice. Education, vocational training and skill improvements would increase the capacity for gainful economic participation of women India. The needs of women in poor sectors of India should be included in a National approach to workforce development.

Poverty and hunger: Among the Eight Millennium Development Goals one of them is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. According to a rep[ort of the Committee constituted by the government of India to estimate poverty, nearly 38% of India's population is poor, based on indicators for health, education, sanitation, nutrition an income to estimate the extent of poverty.

Poverty affects the women most in as much bas the female members in he family are denied education, healthcare, nutritious food, and good sanitation because of poverty. Poverty directly affects the future of women. Girl children are discriminated in the matter of feeding compared to boys. Studies have shown that girls in rural areas take mean of 1355K.Cals/day in the 13-15 years age group and 1291 K.Cals/day in the 16-18 years age group, which is much below the recommended levels. The disproportionate impact of poverty on girls is the result of systematic discrimination.

Domestic Violence

Globally, one out of every three women faces violence at the hands of their husbands, fathers or brothers and uncles in their homes. Violence against women is also prominent in India which leads to the fact that every 42 minutes a sexual harassment at workplace is occurring, every 43 minutes a women is being kidnapped and every 93 minutes a woman is being burnt for dowry. And by the pre quarter of reported cases, every 26 minutes a woman is molested and every 34 minutes a rape takes place. Psychological violence includes verbal abuse, harassment, confinement and deprivation of physical, financial and personnel resources. For some women emotional abuse may be more painful than physical abuse because they effectively undermine women's security and self-confidence.

Official statistics show a steady rise in crimes related to dowry. More than 9, 5000 women are killed every year in India over dowry. While Bihar and Uttar Pradesh still recorded the maximum number odd wiry related crimes, Bangalore, India's fastest growing city shows an alarming rise of dowry harassment and domestic violence. Cases of torture of women over dowry are the highest, accounting for 32.4% of all crimes against women in India.

Educational for Women: Education is the single most effective and potent weapon for social and economic transformation and inclusive development. For horizontal and vertical in the society, it is imperative to promote educaioton among all backward sections who have fallen behind the national average in the field of education. A well educated population is not only essential to support economic growth, but is also a pre-condition for growth to be inclusive since it is the educated employment opportunities which growth will provide. Education opens up new opportunities for individual and group entitlements, productive employment and participation in various arenas of social life. In all, education ignites social changes and catalyzes economic growth. The world community recognizes 'Education for All' as an important Millennium Development Goal---India is actively pushing forward with its agenda for revamping and restructuring education towards inclusive education.

Education empowers women that increase the economic social and political opportunities available to women. Over the years, the gender gap in education has been narrowing, yet substantial disparity still persists and need to be overcome (Table 1.0). According to the released dates, literacy rate has gone up for 64.83 percent in 2001 to 74.04 percent in 2011 showing an increase of 9.21 percentage pints. Literates constitute 74 percent of the total population aged 7 and above and illiterates form 26 percent. Percentage growth in literacy during 2001-2011 was 38.82; with males at 31.98 percent and females at 49.10 percent. While literacy among males rose from 75.26 percent to 82.14 percent, an increase of 6.9 points, it rose among females from 53.67 percent to 65.46 percent, an increase of 11.8 points. Of the additional literate, women (110,069,001) outnumbered men (107,631,940). The gap of Male-female literacy gap of 21.59 percentage points between men and women in 2001 stands reduced to 16.68 points in 2011 (Table1& Table 4.0). The Census data should provide policymakers a comprehensive view of where India stands on key indicators of socio-economic development, set against the goal of creating a more egalitarian and just society.

Table 4. Literacy Gap by Sex (Percentage)

Sl. No.	Year	Males	Females	Total	Male-Female Literacy Gap
1.	1951	27.16	8.86	18.33	18.30
2.	1961	34.44	12.95	24.02	21.49
3.	1971	39.45	18.70	29.45	20.75
4.	1981	46.89	24.82	36.23	22.07
5.	1991	64.10	39.30	39.30	24.80
6.	2001	75.30	53.70	64.80	21.60
7.	2011	83.14	65.46	74.04	16.68

Source: Census, 2011

Only 27% of women in India received secondary education between 2005 and 2014, compared to 95.1% in the United States which ranked 8th on HDI table and 100% in Canada, which ranked 9th overall on HDI. The framework for action to implement the World Declaration on “*Education for All*” states that there is urgent need to improve access to education for girls and women and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation.

While India’s robust growth over the past few years has helped into reduce the income gap with developed countries, the country still lags far behind in terms of gender equality. The sex ratio has fallen very sharply in States like Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat and Maharashtra, which are among the rich Indian states. Uttar Pradesh has better child sex ratio than Maharashtra and Gujarat, while Bihar betters the National average (Census). Rural areas had 918 girls for every 1,000 boys under 4 as opposed to 905 in urban areas (2008 Sample Registration System). The latest Census numbers show that literacy rate stands at 74.04 percent, an increase of 9.2 percent form the last decade but child sex ratio has fallen sharply. Maharashtra, with a literacy rate of almost 83 percent, has a child sex ratio of 883, while Chhattisgarh, with just 71 percent literacy has a child sex ratio of 964.

Women in Education

Since independence, there has been a phenomenal growth in women’s enrolment in higher education. Women’s enrolment was less than 10 percent of the total enrolment on the eve of independence has risen to 41.5 percent in 2014-15 (Table 5.0). The rise of women enrolment is not confined to a particular stage, but it is consistently rising at all stages namely; graduate, post graduate and research (Agarwal, 2004).

Table 5. Women’s Colleges and Women’s Enrolment in India (1981 to 2015)

Sl. No.	Year	Women’s Colleges	Women’s Enrolment
1.	1980-81	609	748525
2.	1985-86	741	1067484
3.	1990-91	874	1556258
4.	1995-96	1146	2363607
5.	2000-01	1578	3306410
6.	2005-06	2071	4466348
7.	2014-15	3982	7048688

Source: UGC Annual Reports, various Issues

Problems of Working Women and Women’s Participation as Workforce

Working women i.e. those who are in paid employment, face problems at the workplace just by virtue of their being women. Social attitude to the role of women lags much behind the law. Such attitude which considers women fit for certain jobs and not for others causes prejudices in those who recruit employees. Only 29% of the Indian women above the age of 15 in 2011 were part of the country’s labour force, compared to 80.7% men. Participation of women in workforce fell to 27% in 2013 from 35% in 1990. Comparatively, in Bangladesh, labour force participation of women was 57.4% in the same year. Women are often subject to sexual harassment even while going to work in

the overcrowded public transport system. At the work-place, a working woman faces sexual harassment from colleagues and her higher officers.

Trafficking of Women and Children

Trafficking of women and children is the most abominable violation of human rights.. it is an obscene affront to their dignity and rights, including the very right to life, liberty, human dignity and security of person. Trafficking in its widest sense include exploitation of girls by forcing them into forced labor services, slavery or practices similar to slavery and the trade in human organs. In the case of children who have been trafficked or have become victims of child marriages, it violates their right to education, employment and self-determination.

Legal and Constitutional Safeguards against Gender Inequality

The Constitution of India ensures gender inequality in it permeable not only as a fundamental right but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women by ways of legislation and policies. India has also ratified at various International conventions and human rights forums to secure equal rights of women, such as ratification of convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in 1993. Women have been finding place in local governance structures, overcoming gender biases. Over one million women have been elected to local panchayats as a result of 1993 amendment to the Indian Constitution requiring that one-third of the elected seats to the local governing bodies be reserved for women.

The passing of Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act in 1994 was a step in removing gender inequality and gender discrimination. This Act sought to end sex-discrimination tests and female foeticide and prohibited doctors from conducting such procedures for the specific purpose of determining the sex of the foetus.

Article 15 of the Indian Constitution provides for prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex also apart from other grounds such as religion, race, caste or place of birth. Article 15 (3) also authorizes the State to make any special provision for women and children. Moreover, the Directive Principles of State Policy also provides various provisions which are for the benefit of women and provides safeguards against discrimination. Various protective legislations have been passed by the Parliament to eliminate exploitation of women and to give them equal status in society. For instance, the Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 was enacted to abolish and make punishable the inhuman custom of Sati; the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 to eliminate the practice of dowry; the Special Marriage Act, 1954 to give rightful status to married couples who marry inter-caste or inter-religion; Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Bill (introduced in parliament in 1991), passed in 1994 to stop female infanticide and many more such Acts. Furthermore, the Parliament time to time brings out amendments to existing laws in order to give protection to women according to the changing needs of the society, for instance, Section 304-B was added to the Indian Penal Code, 1860 to make dowry-death or bride burning a specific offence punishable with maximum punishment of life imprisonment. India is also a signatory to the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, or CEDAW. Another Act is Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937 (the inheritance rights as governed by Sharia) and the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 (Gives equal inheritance rights to daughter and sons-applies to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs).

The Government also announced the National Policy for Empowerment of Women in 2001 to bring out advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Government has also drawn up a draft National Policy for the empowerment of women which is policy statement outlining the state's response to problems of gender discrimination. Ministry of Human Resource Development has also launched a National Mission for Females Literacy, with focus on minorities, SCs, STs and other marginalized groups. During the year 2010-11, out of 2,573 Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) sanctioned, 427 KGBVs were sanctioned in rural and urban areas.

State Initiatives to Reduce Gender Inequality

Different states and union territories of India, in cooperation with the central government, have initiated a number of region-specific programs targeted at women to help reduce gender inequality over the 1989-2013 period. Some of these programs include Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, Sampoorna Gramin Rozagar Yojana, Balika Samridhhi Yojana, National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (to encourage rural girls to attend primary school daily), National programme for Education of Girls at Elementary level, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Ladli Laxmi Yojana, Delhi Ladli Scheme and others.

Gender Equality Index

The Gender equality index (GEI) is a new index of measurement of gender inequality. This index is a composite measure which captures the loss of achievement, within a country, due to gender inequality, and uses three dimensions to do so: reproductive health, empowerment and labour market participation. In terms of gender equality index, India with an index value of 0.609 ranks 130 out of a total of 187 countries in 2015. India tails behind most Asian countries including lesser developed countries Bangladesh and Pakistan which rank 111 and 121 respectively and fares not much ahead of war-ravaged Afghanistan at 152 (Economic Survey, 2014-15). The GEI indicates the loss in achievement due to gender disparities in other areas of reproductive health, empowerment and labor force participation with values ranging from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (total equality). Gender Parity Index (GPI) is another index for measurement of gender disparity in education. GPI is the ratio of girls' enrolment to boys' enrolment in education. Value of 1 signifies equal access of education for boys and girls. Over the years, the gender disparity in education has been decreasing, yet substantial gap still exists.

Table 6. Gender Parity Index: 1951-2011

Sl. No.	Year	Gender Disparity		
		Primary	Upper Primary	Elementary
1.	1951	0.49	0.69	0.49
2.	1961	0.43	0.52	0.42
3.	1971	0.32	0.42	0.33
4.	1981	0.29	0.35	0.30
5.	1991	0.25	0.31	0.26
6.	2001	0.17	0.18	0.16
7.	2011	0.08	0.09	0.10

Source: Hazra, 2009

Roadblocks in Eliminating Gender Inequality

There is high gender discrimination in the educational field even though it is declining. There are several challenges for bringing the gender parity. The economic factors significantly contribute to the low education of the girls in the family. High growth of population in poor families creates the urgent need to allocate the more to the education of son rather than that of daughter. The education of daughters is either not properly valued or insignificant resources compel to spend less on them. The direct cost of education in the form of tuition fees, other type of fees and the expenses such as books, notebooks, uniforms, and the traveling expenses as well as the indirect cost in the form of opportunity cost is high for girls in the poor families. They cannot afford to forgo their meagre earning in the labor market or the production in the household activities. They also cannot escape from the help rendered to mother to look after younger siblings when she goes on work.

The perceived benefits of female education in the labour market are less. The rates of return with the investment in this human capital are expected to be less due to marriage and natural responsibilities. Such future labour market discrimination reduces the investment in their present formal education. The child marriage systems, dowry system, caste system, joint family system are hurdles female education. Systematic preservation of the male domination and authoritarian control in the house and society is the basic factor in gender inequality.

Location or distance, physical facilities, availability of female teachers, number of instructional hours, examination policies, and the thought that highly educated girls may not have successful peaceful marriage as they become more aggressive, demanding and aware about their rights, all these are the constraints on female education. Creation of the economic opportunities through rapid inclusive growth with social upliftment ensures participation of weaker sections in the development.

These macro dimensions towards the micro decisions about enrolment of girls opt the schools and colleges become progressively worse of women in rural area and belonging to the weaker section as they are under the triple burden of gender. Child labour and domestic work makes the opportunity cost of girls' education high which has to be factored in to the decision of education. The child marriage system and early parenthood reduces the freedom of choice in the education.

Remedies

The following are the remedies suggested:

- Changes in the social mind set with patriarchal norms which undervalues women's work.
- Development of capital market where more loans are availed for women's education and employment on the priority basis and at low interest rate.
- Compulsion to lend certain targeted amount towards female's education as their social responsibility.
- Change in the perception of society towards the dignity of women treating them at par with men.
- More scholarships and free ships for women.
- Job oriented education suitable for females.

- Industry academia tie-up to develop entrepreneurs.
- Lower student teacher ratio with appointment of female teachers in rural areas.
- Compulsion and monitoring for the basic infrastructure and hostels for women.
- Public-private participation of female education.
- Childcare centres which are affordable and efficient with the provision of government subsidies and the tax benefits to them.
- Special job training program for females equivalent to digress if the females cannot complete their graduation.
- Discriminatory wage structure and higher payments to those females who are ready to go to rural areas for teaching.
- Expansion of the distance education, non-formal education, and open learning centres.
- Gender budgeting in education.
- Economically independent and greater self-reliance is needed, where they can fight their own fears and face the present world fearlessly.

CONCLUSION

Gender discrimination and inequality continues to be an enormous problem within Indian society. Egregious gender inequality still exists globally despite of substantial national and international measures that have been taken towards gender equality. Achieving gender equality is not a women's concern, but it is the responsibility of all in society. Empowering women and girls towards greater participation in development means working towards more balanced and equal power relations between the sexes. Traditional patriarchal norms have relegated women to secondary position status within the house hold and at workplace. This drastically affects women's health, financial status, education and political involvement.

Gender equality is considered a critical element in achieving social and institutional change that leads to sustainable development with equity and growth. Inequalities between men and women manifest themselves in all areas of development. Inequalities mostly exist in: health and education, economic development, violence against women, participation in public life and policymaking and social attitudes and gender stereotyping. Health remains a niggling worry with India's Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) being one of the world's highest. Health discrimination against women in India starts early and is evident in the skewed sex ratio of 933 women to 1,000 men. Maternal mortality in India is second highest in the world and close to 125,000 women die due to child birth related mortalities and pregnancy-related illness every year. In rural areas of India, 60% of girls are married before the age of 19 years. Almost one-third of babies are born with low birth weight because of poverty, early marriage, malnutrition and lack of healthcare during pregnancy. In the education sector, the inequalities observed are: Around 255 million women in India cannot read or write and they form the world's largest number of illiterate women. Female literacy is 54.16, and there are wide disparities and inequalities within the states. Enrolment and retention of girls in education is poor and the average years of schooling for girls is only 1.2 years as against 3.5 years for boys. Girls miss school because they have to look after their siblings.

A look at the economic development sector indicates that, official data does not reflect the amount of work that women actually do so as to enable their families to survive, collecting fuel, fodder or water, keeping poultry, working as unpaid labour on family farms. Women also work in home-based industries, bidi and agarbatti-rolling, bangle-making, weaving etc. without social security benefits and are lowly paid for this informal work which forms an important part of the family's income. One-third of agricultural workers are women and many crops depend on extensive labour provided by agricultural labour, yet when it comes to wages, on an average, their wages are 30% lower than men's wages.

On the contrary, Indian women's workforce participation has plummeted from 35 percent in 1990 to just 27% in 2013. According to 2012 report on global employment trends by the International Labour organization, many Indian women are able to find only marginal work in the informal economy, with low wages and little or no job security. According to the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO, 2011), there are over 60 percent of urban females who are part of the informal sector and unemployment among these who have graduate degrees and above qualifications continue to be a high of 15.7 percent, state the report and close to 20 percent of urban females were working as domestic help, cleaners, vendors, hawkers and salespeople. Nearly 43 percent of urban women in India were self-employed and the same proportion of women had regular wage salaried jobs (NSSO, 2011).

National and International measures are at work but they are not sufficient to minimize eliminate gender inequality. For instance, the Society of Defending Women's Rights in Saudi Arabia is designed to empower women and protect their rights. In India, the Prevention of Immoral Traffic, the Dowry prevention Act and the Sati Act aim to prevent widow burning. Indeed India and China are both fighting feticide and infanticide. By providing financial assistance to families with girls, India is not only encouraging female education, but also helping parents with financial aid for their daughters' dowry under its various schemes.

From an economic point of view, gender discrimination is also a major impediment to growth as it prevents countries from reaching their maximum productivity potential. Women constitute almost 40 % of the global work-force, despite being equally capable and skilled. Furthermore, their status and promotion is limited to middle or below ranks, they are laid off pre-retirement age more frequently than men, they have limited educational opportunity, and they typically run smaller farms and less profitable enterprises. Due, to these obvious restrictions, many countries experience loss of productivity that amounts to 25% due to gender discrimination. The twelfth plan endeavours to increase women's employability in the formal sector as well as their asset base. It aims to improve the condition of self-employed women with a focus on women's workforce participation particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors, reaching out to women in agriculture and manufacturing, financial inclusion, and extending land and property rights to women. One of the major impediments affecting women's participation in the workforce is the lack of skills. The twelfth Plan envisages a major scaling up of skill development to promote skill development of women from traditional skills to emerging skills, which help women break the gender stereotypes and move in to employment requiring higher skills sets. India, also a signatory to the Millennium Declaration under Millennium Development Goals, adopted at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2000, has reaffirmed its commitment towards promoting gender parity. These include 33 percent reservation for women in local bodies, state legislatures and Parliament; elimination of all forms of violence against women; skill development for women; making women participation in education safe and secure; elimination of sex selection before birth, and universal access to sexual and reproductive health.

Thus, it is beyond doubt that the gender inequality and gender discrimination have been existing for a long time. The education sector could certainly play a pivotal role in eliminating this gender inequality. It is very much essential to bring awareness among people about the benefits of gender equality. It is important to know that the inclusion of the concept of gender inequality in the curriculum and making of laws to remove gender inequality have significant impact on the need to achieve constitutional goal of establishing an egalitarian society. In this regard, our University, Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) has recently started a complete paper on gender discrimination and gender inequality, which is, "Gender, School and Society" in B.Ed Programme (2015-2017). Gender inequality and discrimination is rooted in history, tradition and culture. So to eliminate gender inequality, all measures have to be taken so as to assure women equal access to and full participation in decision making bodies at every level, including the legislative, executive, judicial, corporate, statutory bodies, as also the advisory Commissions, Committees, Boards and trusts etc. Affirmative actions such as reservations/quotas, including in higher legislative bodies should be considered whenever necessary on a time bound basis. Women-friendly personnel policies are also drawn up to encourage women to participate effectively in the developmental process. Ultimately it is the change in social mindset and involvement of all sections of society that is required to achieved the desired targets regarding reducing the gender gap and gender inequality.

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