



GENDER EQUALITY: A STEP TOWARDS WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Ms.Goldy Gupta

Teaching Assistant, BPSITTR, BPSMV, Khanpur Kalan, (Sonapat),

e-mail: goldyalwar16@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Society with gender equality means, the society where women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors. They both are having economic participation and decision-making, and where the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of both men and women are equally appreciated and favoured by the society. But it is a far away dream for women in the world especially in Indian society. Gender inequality is still deep-rooted in India. Women are facing lack of access to decent work and work related segregation and wage gaps. In many situations, they are denied access to political, economic and social equality. Even basic education and health care services are out of their reach. They are not given the chance to live life at the fullest. They are victims of violence and discrimination irrespective of their age, education and status. To eliminate this inequality strong steps are need to be taken for empowerment of this gender like equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes and most important one safety. Empowering the women will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large. Together we can benefit the world's citizens, eradicate prejudice and work for equal rights and respect for all. This paper will deal with both these sensitive issues and highlight the reasons, problems and solutions so that the world can be a better place for women.

Keywords: Gender, Education, Society, Gender equality, Women Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

India at present is facing many problems. The biggest of these; is the problem of gender inequality. It is the biggest danger to humanity and to the unity and integrity of the country. India is a land of great contrasts and combinations of very rich, upper caste and class people on the one hand, and extremely poor lower caste and class people on the other hand. All the members belonging to various castes and communities do not have equal chance or access, and hence they are denied in distributing justice. Such type of situation of unequal opportunities in life, which itself results into socially structured inequalities, aggravates tensions, stress, distrust and frustration. A level of integration can be achieved by bridging up this gap between male and female.

For centuries, women have been asking for a dignified life, a life where they will be treated as equals, where they can enjoy freedom like men, where they will feel that they also matter for society and for families. Women are not accorded equal

status with men practically all over the world. The women constitute almost half of the world's population. They are working in power with men in all sectors. But still they are facing various disadvantageous positions due to gender differences and bias. For centuries past women all over the world have not only been denied full justice, social, economic and political but also as a weaker sex. The status of women was not same in ancient times. They were given high status in society in olden days (Veda's times). They were treated equal to men but in later stages male dominance increased in the society. The principle of gender equality can be seen easily in each and every part of the Indian constitution such as in its preamble, fundamental rights and duties and directive principles. The constitution not only grants equality to gender, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of gender inequality in favour of women. But this equal status is only a myth to millions of women for whom life is stalked by various kinds of violence within their homes, work place and in education system. They are the deprived of fundamental freedom, equal access to participation and decision making, health care, quality education, employment, remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security, birth right, and human rights. Even they are not treated like human beings. Now the time has come to make this human being for feel like human being and enjoy all the privileges and rights of human beings.

MEANING OF GENDER

Gender is a term which should be treated with care, as it is not a synonym for sex. A person's gender is a social and historical construct and is the consequence of various kind of conditioning. It mainly refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. Gender is defined in relation to sex because gender is simply the social elaboration of sex biological characteristics that categorize someone as either male or female. It refers to the way society encourages the two sexes to behave in different through socialization. Gender and the hierarchal power relationship between women and men based on the gender are socially constructed, and not derived directly from biology. Gender identities and associated expectations of roles and responsibilities of men and women on the basis of gender are therefore varying from culture to culture. Gender power relations permeate social institutions so that gender is never absent from society.

Gender is defined as “the relationship between men and women both perceptual and material. Gender is not determined biologically, as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men, but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies and often governs the process of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution”.

GENDER EQUALITY

Gender is a social construct which is based on social roles, not sexual differences. The dichotomous nature of gender leads to the creation of inequality that manifests itself in many dimensions of daily life. Gender inequality refers to the gender based deficiency of observable or unseen disparities among individuals. These disparities

comprise the inequity in areas like: opportunities, resources, services, benefits, decision-making power and influence. Gender equality means an equal visibility, empowerment and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life. It means giving women and men, girls and boys, the same opportunities to participate fully in the development of their societies and to achieve self fulfilment. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same but that their opportunities and life changes are equal.

CHALLENGES TO GENDER EQUALITY

Access to benefit of development has been conditioned by the prevailing social discrimination that women face. The problem of discrimination starts with less nutritional food to girls/women, which lead to unhealthy women in many areas of our country. They get less health care facilities and face the problems of poor functioning of the body thus, not become able to do equal work due to health conditions. Hence, are treated as the weaker section of society. Equal access to education for all the girls is at par yet, it makes them dependent on males where they find themselves unable to earn their livelihood as they do not have any vocational training that can help them to come out of the burden of poverty. Even women are termed as the maker of house though they do not have any right to make decisions and sharing power in homes. In these circumstances, many a time she has to face the worse conditions like domestic violence. Thus, the social cultural norms, traditional practices and prejudices and patriarchal values are major obstacles towards achieving equality for women. Certain critical areas of concern /challenges are:

- Under nutrition
- Unequal access to health care
- High rate of illiteracy
- Lack of access to legal information
- Less control over assets and resources
- Inequality in decision making
- Inequality in sharing power
- Increasing domestic violence
- Burdon of poverty
- Lack of vocational training
- Inequality in employment
- Discrimination against of girl child
- Domestic violence

MEASURES OF GENDER INEQUALITY

To eliminate the disparity towards women there is a strong need to close the existing gender gap at every level. We can give equal chances to every gender for its empowerment by taking the measures like: providing opportunity to achieve high level education, accessible social integration, more opportunities employment, active politics and social involvement, awareness among parents, scholarships programmes, awareness against child abuse and violence, stopping sex identification, helping them to be tech-savvy.

Giving equal chance to women is not sufficient to fill the gap of inequality. Along with this, we must try to teach or train the male society to understand and share equal responsibility of work at home and workplaces. The following measures will help to remove the inequality or discrimination against women and empower them:

Gender Equality in Education:

In order to achieve the development of society, gender equality should be included in learning and teaching process. During the learning process students are provided equal opportunities for learning in a classroom. Students help each other for having required knowledge, understanding and application of one or other aspects of content included in their curriculum without any discrimination on the basis of their sex. Gender equality and education are related to each other and we can evaluate it through following points:

- **Gender Equality and School:**

All the living creatures on this earth have the abilities and capacities for learning irrespective of their nature. Schools play an important role in every aspect of life. School is responsible for building a strong society. Schools have to give the equal opportunities to both sexes. It means not in equal number of students in class only, but in sports, NCC, NSS and other extra co-curricular activities also to obtain gender equality a school should maintain following:

- a) In order to promote gender equality schools should neglect negative gender role stereotyping.
- b) All types of sports vocational courses and subjects should provide to girls and boys equally.
- c) Schools need to reinforce and nurture safe and secure environment for both girls and boys.
- d) Separate toilets for girls and boys should be provided.
- e) School infrastructure, school community, school clubs should maintain more gender equitable.
- f) Incentive schemes are a more recent innovation to change behavior and promote gender equality.

- **Gender Equality and Teachers:**

To achieve gender equality in schools, the teachers have important roles to play. Attitudes of teachers and school authorities must change. Teachers play a crucial role in every classroom They are the actors who shape the success or failure of their students Their interpretation of the curriculum, interaction with learners, and way they assign duties and homework, are important factors in a child's schooling. The following are some of the role of teachers to reinforcing gender equality:

- 1 Actively encourage students to engage in activities like sports, Drama, dance etc.
- 2 Encourage mixed group work and seating arrangements.
- 3 Aim to use gender natural language. Teachers should prepare students for spiritual aspects, human values.

4 Teacher prepares students to live for their nation to fulfill this need teachers conduct, seminar, workshop debate, declamations, camp, and excursions time to time.

5 Engendered teaching approaches should be employed.

6 Teacher and teacher educators should examine the introductory themes on gender, any by exploring gender issues within some

- **Gender Equality and Curriculum:**

Curriculum should be so designed so as to foster togetherness among children. In the suggestions by Board of Education, London, we read, “Our attitude towards the curriculum has been influenced by a desire to assist children to acquire the habits, skills, interests and sentiments which they will need both for their own well being and for that of the people among whom they will live.” In the present age, the curriculum should be such as provided such type of knowledge and practice which will prepare generation in developing values like equality, justice, self dignity and group living. So the curriculum should contain the aspects. This is discussed below:

Content-Matter: There is need to consider what girls and boys are offered by their schooling. For example, learning them in a way, that enhances their confidence; so that they can begin to transform their lives.

Methods of Learning: Very often, images in textbooks are simply ‘check-listed for their portrayal of gender images. Children do not necessarily have simplistic, preconditioned responses to images in textbooks and need a more sophisticated understanding and response to how children learn about gender textbooks.

Language of Instruction and Literacy: Children who are geographically or culturally marginalized from mainstream education may find themselves being taught in a language that they do not use. Girls and women often have less access to, and use of national “prestige” language than men.

Evaluation in Curriculum: Examinations tend to dominate assessment, but other methods should be used, such as continuous assessment. In addition, “girls could have core equal opportunities in school if teachers talk to them more and encourage them, for instance by giving them more prizes for participating in different classroom activities”. For teaching and the curricula to be gender equitable in schools, it is important to properly educate teachers on gender quality teaching through the courses and practical materials that are provided.

Sensitive to Changing Needs and Values: Teacher education also needs to address not only how teachers and educational managers teach gender equality. But, how they live this in their private lives by changing personal behaviour and challenging some of the deeply held assumptions that perpetuate inequalities. Student teachers, and in-service teachers, need opportunities to examine and understand their own gender identities and to understand how gender discrimination takes place in schools

Teachers and Gender Equality:

At a general level, it would mean changes to curriculum the breaking down of hierarchies and power network that believes in racial inequality. Head teachers and teachers would have a greater understanding of the conditions which lead to bullying, sexism, and homophobic behavior, replacing them with more successful forms of

intervention. In addition, some value would be placed on students experience and knowledge, with students being more actively involved in planning and evaluating their work. Students would be encouraged to challenge narrow-minded concepts, prejudices, and envision as expanded.

Text Books, Libraries and Gender Equality:

Text-books should be reviewed from a gender perspective to ensure that students are getting positive message of equality and mutual respect to support gender equality in education. There is a need for text-book revision to remove gender bias. Anti-sexual harassment politics needed to be implemented in school.

In sum, this is particularly important for teachers to admit that classrooms are a microscopic form of society and a place for reflection and transformation of culture and notion. In response schools should include practical steps to examine negative gender stereotypes, methods, strategies and devices of learning responses.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Empower means to make one powerful or equip one with the power to face the challenges of life to overcome the disabilities, handicaps and inequalities. Women empowerment is an active, multidimensional process which should enable women to realise their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It would consist in providing greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making greater ability to plan their lives, greater control over the circumstances to influence their lives and freedom from the shackles imposed on them by customs, beliefs and practice.

HOW TO EMPOWER WOMEN

To face the challenges of life one must have adequate capability, chances and skills. No doubt women have much capability to deal with all the disparity and problems of life yet they got less chances and less training/education to handle the situation. Both are the hurdles on the way of empowering the women. There are many ways by which we can empower of the women at different level. **Equal access to health care** is the first and most important aspect that requires special attention and efforts towards the direction of empowering women. As a well said proverb 'healthy mind lives in a healthy body', thus proper health care facilities will be helpful to support the women physically as well as psychologically. It will encourage them to increase their active participation in the society.

Educational Empowerment of Women

In the current scenario, the schools have less number of girl children. Even very few girls can reach up to the higher education. To increase this number is the first step towards empowering the women. It can be achieved by the following means:

- Providing equal right to education
- Increasing the level of educational attainment
- Making them skill citizen
- Quality education at all level
- Providing vocational education/training
- Improving women capabilities by training

Economic Empowerment of Women

Economic empowerment of women will show a positive impact on women's control over resources and their participation in decision making. At present, the dependence of women on men is mainly due to the weak economic conditions of women. It is regarded as the responsibility of men to feed the women and other family members. Thus they enjoy high status in the society. To become empowered, women have to learn to be economically sound. She will have to share economic responsibility with men. For this, there is need to provide such environment/situations in which she can work and explore her capabilities at the most. The following steps are needed to be taken at employment level to make the women economically empowered:

- Equal rights at workplace
- Equal reward for equal work
- Occupational health and safety
- Safe environment at workplace
- Equal remuneration
- Access to economic opportunities

Social empowerment of women

Our society, mainly in India is a male dominated society. There are many social evils and restriction for women. All the other measures can be fail to bring gender equality if we fail to provide social equality to the women. Following measures must be done to make the women socially empowered:

- Access to political empowerment
- Strengthening legal system and its awareness
- Active participation in decision making
- Social security
- Changing societal attitude
- More community participation
- Removing social evils
- Gender sensitization
- Gender budget initiative

CONCLUSION

In brief, we can say that in direction to empower the women training of capacity building should be given. They should not keep undue pressure on them. The government should regularly interact with women by organising workshops and seminars. Adequate information relating to various programmes and activities and schemes should be provided. To sum up, if all the measures and suggestion are implemented, we can together achieve the goal of gender equality and women empowerment. Gender equality should be included in learning and teaching process. During the learning process students are provided equal opportunities for learning in a classroom. Giving equal chance to women is not sufficient to fill the gap of inequality. Along with this, we must try to teach or train the male society to understand and share equal responsibility of work at home and workplaces.

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