

Gender gaps and Women's Empowerment in India – Issues and Strategies

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Abstract- 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 are most obvious in: health and education, economic development, violence against women, participation in public life and policymaking and social attitudes and gender stereotyping. Health discrimination against women in India starts early and is evident in the skewed sex ratio of 933 women to 1,000 men (world average: 990:1,000). Maternal mortality in India is the second highest in the world and close to 125,000 women die due to pregnancy and pregnancy-related illnesses every year. In rural areas, 60% of girls are married before the age of 18, and 60% of married girls bear children before they are 19. 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 245 million Indian women cannot read or write and they form the world's largest number of unlettered women. Female literacy is 54.16, and there are wide disparities within 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 siblings. A look at the economic development sector indicates that, official data does not reflect the amount of work that women actually do 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. The present study analyses the gender gaps and lists out the strategies in the Twelfth Five Year Plan of Government of India for women's empowerment. The Twelfth Plan endeavours to increase women's employability in the formal sector as well as their asset base. It aims to improve the conditions 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 into employment requiring higher skill sets.

Key Words: gender gaps, empowerment, gender gap index

Introduction

Rural women and girls have many roles and many responsibilities. They are farmers, care-givers, wage labourers and micro-entrepreneurs and they often spend many hours fetching water and collecting firewood. The empowerment of women is fundamental to reduce poverty, hunger and malnutrition. Gender equality and women's empowerment are important factors for the social and economic development of a nation. The promotion of gender equality and empowering of women is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to which India is a signatory.

Gender gap

The differences between women and men, especially as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes. The Global Gender Gap measure was introduced by the World Economic Forum to examine four critical areas of inequality between men and women:

1. **Economic participation and opportunity** – outcomes on salaries, participation levels and access to high-skilled employment
2. **Educational attainment** – outcomes on access to basic and higher level education
3. **Political empowerment** – outcomes on representation in decision-making structures
4. **Health and survival** – outcomes on life expectancy and sex ratio

The Gender Gap Index assesses countries on how well they are dividing their resources and opportunities among their male and female populations, regardless of the overall levels of these resources and opportunities. India ranks 123 in terms of economic participation, 121 in educational attainment, 134 in health and survival and 17 in political empowerment.

India, with 1.3 million elected women representatives, has the largest number of women participating in local governance among the Asian countries, exceeding its own 33% reservation. A study of Indian local governments by Munshi and Rozenweig (2008) said that women in local government roles came out with better outcomes for communities in budgetary decisions and were more competent in procuring resources despite significantly lower education and labour market experience, so politically empowering women is a good thing.

Examples of gender indicators

International indicators

1. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

A framework for incorporating gender equality across the MDGs: Many practitioners and policymakers agree that gender equality and women's empowerment are central to the achievement of each of the MDGs, and the achievement of Goal 3 in turn depends upon the extent to which the other goals address gender-based constraints.

Goal 3. Promote gender equality and empower women

This central goal dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment depends on the achievement of all other goals for its success.

2. The Gender-related Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure

The **Gender-related Development Index (GDI)** adjusts the Human Development Index (HDI) for gender inequalities in the three dimensions covered by the Human Development Index (HDI), i.e. life expectancy, education, and income. It is important to note that the GDI is not specifically a measure of gender inequality.

The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) seeks to measure relative female representation in economic and political power. It considers gender gaps in political representation, in professional and management positions in the economy, as well as gender gaps in incomes.

The GDI and GEM need to be used with **caution**: they are useful in their capacity to identify gender gaps in developing countries, rather than an overall picture of growth or education.

Composite Indices

International composite indices to measure gender equality have been developed, partly to complement and expand on the GDI and GEM. For example, Social Watch's **Gender Equity Index** (GEI) combines indicators from both the GDI and GEM, with a separate gender equality rating estimated for three dimensions (Social Watch 2005):

- **Education:** measured by the literacy gap between men and women and by male and female enrolment rates in primary, secondary and tertiary education.
- **Participation in the economy:** measured by the percentage of women and men in paid jobs, excluding agriculture, and by the income ratio of men to women.
- **Empowerment:** measured by the percentage of women in professional, technical, managerial and administrative jobs, and by the number of seats women have in parliament and in decision-making ministerial posts.

Gender Gaps in selected sectors in India

The gender gaps with respect to education, health and economic sector have been discussed as follows.

Educational Sector:

There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India: effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) in 2011 were 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. The census provided a positive indication that growth in female literacy rates (11.8%) was substantially faster than in male literacy rates (6.9%) in the 2001–2011 decadal period, which means the gender gap appears to be narrowing table 1.

Children's school attendance

- Only two-thirds of girls and three-fourths of boys' age 6-17 years are attending school. The sex ratio of children attending school is 889 girls per 1,000 boys.
- There is gender equality in school attendance in urban areas; but, in rural areas, the female disadvantage in education is marked and increases with age.
- Age-appropriate school attendance is lower than any school attendance for both boys and girls. However, boys and girls who are in school are about equally likely to be in an age-inappropriate class.
- School dropout beyond primary school is a major problem for both girls and boys.

Literacy and educational attainment among adults

- Gender disparity in literacy is much greater in rural than in urban areas and declines sharply with household wealth.
- Forty-one percent of women and 18% of men age 15-49 have never been to school.
- Educational attainment remains very low: even among the 20-29 age group, only 27% of women and 39% of men have 10 or more years of education.

Health Sector:

Discrimination against women in India starts early and is evident in the skewed sex ratio of 943 women to 1,000 men (Census 2011) has been presented in table 2. This is attributed to the cultural bias in favour of male children, which results in the abortion of female foetuses. Other causes are the social neglect of women and girls, manifested in less access to nutrition and healthcare, and in high maternal mortality. Maternal mortality in India is the second highest in the world, at 385-487 per 100,000 live births. Close to 125,000 women die due to pregnancy and pregnancy-related illnesses every year. In rural areas, 60% of girls are married before the age of 18, and 60% of married girls bear children before they are 19. Almost one-third of babies are born with low birth weight because of poverty, early marriage, malnutrition and lack of healthcare during pregnancy.

Key Findings

- The sex ratio (females per 1,000 males) of the population age 0-6 and in the sex ratio at birth for births in the five years preceding each survey.
- Females are under-represented among births and over-represented among births that die.
- Sex ratios at birth decline with wealth, suggesting that sex selection of births is more common among wealthier than poorer households.
- Ultrasound tests are being widely used for sex selection, with sex selection being more evident for the wealthiest women than for women in the other wealth quintiles.
- Sex ratios of all last births and last births of sterilized women show clearly that couples typically stop having children once they have the desired number of sons.
- The child mortality rate, defined as the number of deaths to children age 1-4 years per 1,000 children reaching age 1 year, is 61% higher for girls than for boys.

Economic Sector:

Women, as half of the human capital of India, will need to be more efficiently integrated into the economy in order to boost India's long term competitive potential. The census does not accurately identify many activities as work that women actually do to enable their families to survive collecting fuel, fodder or water, keeping poultry, working on family land etc. Women also work in home-based industries, bidi and agarbatti-rolling, bangle-making, weaving, etc. They do not get social security benefits and are paid very low wages for this informal work. One-third of agricultural workers are women. On an average, their wages are 30% lower than men's wages. Women find it difficult to get credit from banking institutions because they are often unable to provide collateral. They get much smaller loan amounts even though their repayment record is much better than that of men. Women's right to land and other assets is weak. Though legislation has been introduced to ensure that women share equally in ancestral property, enforcing such rights in a patriarchal society requires resources that poor women may not have. The work participation rate and gender gaps have been presented in table 3 and 4.

Employment

Key Findings

- Women age 15-49 are about half as likely as men in the same age group to be employed: 43% vs. 87%.
- Women in rural areas are more likely than women in urban areas to be employed; but the reverse is true for men.
- The relationship of employment and wealth for women suggests that, for many women, employment is largely a result of economic necessity.
- Marriage is negatively associated with a woman's likelihood of being employed and is positively associated with a man's likelihood of being employed.
- Most employed women work for someone else, away from home, and continuously throughout the year; about one in three women do not receive monetary compensation for their work or receive at least part of their payment in kind.
- Most employed women work in agriculture; only 7% work in professional, technical, or managerial occupations.

Gender Pay Gap in India

Various Articles of the Constitution of India attempt to ensure that there is no prevalence of gender pay gap. Specific legislations also address gender pay gap. These articles of the Constitution are as follows:

- **Article 14:** Men & women to have equal rights & opportunities in the political, economic & social spheres.
- **Article 15(1):** Prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc.
- **Article 15(3):** Special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discriminations in favour of women.
- **Article 16:** Equality of opportunities in matter of public appointments for all citizens.
- **Article 39(a):** The State shall direct its policy towards securing all citizens men and women, equally, the right to means of livelihood.
- **Article 39(d):** Equal pay for equal work for both men and women
- **Article 42:** The State to make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

The analysis of gender pay gap in India based on a voluntary online Salary Survey conducted by Paycheck India with 16,500 online observations (13,729 males and 2771 females) indicated that a wide gender pay gap exists in India. The average gender pay gap is approximately 54% for years 2006 to 2011. The data also revealed that gender pay gap has narrowed over the years. It was above 70% before 2008 and has come down to almost 40% in 2011. Gender pay gap changes with increase in wages, for wages below Rs1 Lakh and above Rs 50 Lakhs, the gender pay gap is negligible. However, for the wage group between Rs 1 Lakh to Rs 50 Lakhs the gender pay gap is above 40%. The pay gap increases with age, the gender pay gap is highest for the age group 50-60 years at 157% and lowest for the age group 20-30 years at 38.

It was observed that as the education level increases, the gender pay gap increases in most of the cases. The gender pay gap is lowest for Plus 2 or equivalent education level at 11.54% and is highest for Post Doctoral Education level at an alarming 180. Data reveals that men and women with same work experience are not paid equally. Gender pay gap is low at junior level and high at senior levels. The extent of gender pay gap also depends on the occupation data shows that the gender pay gap is highest for health professionals at more than 65%. It is lowest for cleaners and helpers under elementary occupations at just a little above 1%. It is also worthy to note that the gender pay gap is remarkably low for information and communication technicians at only 4.37%.

Marital status is also one of the factors for gender pay gap. For women who were single, the gender pay gap is the lowest at 27%. It increases for married women and divorced women at a little above 40%. It is highest for widowed women at more than 60. The gender wages gap varies across Indian States. The gender wage gap is highest in the state of Assam and Rajasthan at 64% and 59% respectively. The gap is relatively low in the southern part of India. The gender wage gap is lowest for New Delhi at 20%.

Programs, Mission and Strategies for Empowerment of Women

A few of the Programs, Missions and special provision for women's empowerment being adopted by the Government of India have been discussed below.

National Mission for Empowerment of Women India

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the Government of India (GOI) on International Women's Day in 2010 with a view to empower women socially, economically

and educationally. The Mission aims to achieve empowerment of women on all these fronts by securing convergence of schemes/programmes of different Ministries/Departments of Government of India as well as State Governments. The Mission utilises existing structural arrangements of participating Ministries wherever available and partners with Panchayati Raj Institution (PRIs) in implementation of activities. In light with its mandate, the Mission has been named Mission Purna Shakti, implying a vision for holistic empowerment of women.

Focus areas of the Mission

- Access to health, drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities for women
- Coverage of all girls especially those belonging to vulnerable groups in schools from primary to class 12
- Higher and Professional education for girls/women
- Skill development, Micro credit, Vocational Training, Entrepreneurship, SHG development
- Gender sensitization and dissemination of information
- Taking steps to prevent crime against women and taking steps for a safe environment for women

National Policy for the Empowerment of Women of India (2001)

Goal and Objectives

The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include

- (i) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential
- (ii) The *de-jure* and *de-facto* enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres – political, economic, social, cultural and civil
- (iii) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation
- (iv) Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc.
- (v) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
- (vi) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- (vii) Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
- (viii) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child; and
- (ix) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

Provisions under twelfth Five Year Plan of India

Economic empowerment

The Twelfth Plan endeavours to increase women's employability in the formal sector as well as their asset base. It will improve the conditions of self employed women. Focus will be on women's workforce participation particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors, ensuring decent work for them, reaching out to women in agriculture and manufacturing, financial inclusion, and extending land and property rights to women.

Skill development

One of the major impediments affecting women's participation in the workforce, particularly in secondary and tertiary sectors, is the lack of skills. The Twelfth Plan envisages a major scaling up of skill development from traditional skills to emerging skills, which help women break the gender stereotypes and move into employment requiring higher skill sets. Training of women as BPO employees, electronic technicians, electricians, plumbers, sales persons, auto drivers, taxi drivers, masons, and so on will be incorporated in the skill development programmes. Skill development would be seen as a vehicle to improve lives and not just livelihoods of women.

Strategies: A three-pronged approach

Women can be powerful change agents. Empowering poor rural women involves three critical and interrelated dimensions: expanding access to assets such as capital, land, knowledge and technologies; strengthening decision-making and their representation in community affairs; and improving women's well-being and lessening their workloads.

The lack of basic amenities affects women more than men, as women are often responsible for a larger share of time-consuming household activities. Better electricity and access to water and sanitation may reduce the burden of women in providing essential household inputs for their families, and allow for more time to be directed toward entrepreneurial activities.

According to National Statistical Commission Chairman Pronab Sen, rural women are shifting towards self-help groups and self-employment, which is clear from the percentage of women taking up self-employment rising to 59 per cent in 2011-12 from 56 per cent in 2009-10. Also, it could also be that a large segment of rural women are not being categorised in the employable workforce in the WPR, as their activity may be designated as family household chores (Ashok Gupta 2013).

John Coonrod (2013) has suggested the following ways in which programs need to be designed to help and empower women.

- 1. Gender analysis.** Too often, gender is an afterthought in project design. Often, mid-project it is discovered that women are not participating and then steps are taken to empower women to participate in a program that simply does not work for them, only adding further burden and anxiety.
- 2. Reducing drudgery.** Working on an average twice the hours of men, women don't have time for development. They are the first to rise and the last to go to bed, often with the most backbreaking work: hauling water and firewood, pounding grain, weeding farms using short-handed hoes and with children on their back, head-carrying produce to market and working as labourers.

3. Rights awareness. Many of the women are confined to their households and lack mobility and freedom of association and have no opportunity to learn their rights and take action to improve their lives and those of their family members. Even if they are aware they are not culturally tuned to assert themselves.

4. Equal leadership. Women are denied a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Leadership among women can be greatly accelerated by mentoring, building an organized constituency among the women of the community, leadership training and building federations with other women leaders.

5. Organize. Investments in building strong grassroots women's organizations, federations and cooperatives provide women sustainable platforms for advocacy and mutual empowerment.

6. Functional Literacy. Eliminating gender differences in access to education and educational attainment are key elements on the path to attaining gender equality and reducing the disempowerment of women. Around 245 million Indian women cannot read or write the world's largest number of unlettered women. Female literacy is 54.16, and there are wide disparities within states.

7. Financial services. Women need credit not only for starting or supporting small enterprises, but also for coping with great seasonal fluctuations in family income. Several studies have shown that women spend money, on the health, nutrition and education of children than when men control the money.

8. Health services. Access to affordable health services is a fundamental human right for women and their children.

Table: 1 Literacy rate and Gender gap in India-1951 to 2011

Census year	Males	Females	Male-female gap in literacy rate
1951	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India 2011

Table: 2 Sex Ratio of Population in India: 2001, 2011

Residence	2001	2011	Change
Total	933	943	+10
Rural	946	949	+3
Urban	900	929	+29

Table: 3 Work Participation Rate and Gender Gap India: 2001, 2011

Residence	Sex	2001	Gender	2011	Gender	Change
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		(%)	gap	(%)	gap	
Total	Persons	39.1	26.1	39.8	27.8	+0.7
	Males	51.7		53.3		+1.6
	Females	25.6		25.5		-0.1

Source: worked out based on Census Data

Table: 4 Type of Workers and Gender Gap India: 2001, 2011

Residence	Sex	2001	Gender gap	2011	Gender gap	Change
Main Workers	Persons	77.8	30.0	75.2	22.7	-2.6
	Males	87.3		82.3		-5.0
	Females	57.3		59.6		2.3
Marginal Workers	Persons	22.2	-30.0	24.8	-22.7	2.6
	Males	12.7		17.7		5.0
	Females	42.7		40.4		-2.3

Source: worked out based on Census Data

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