

# WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

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## I. Introduction:

The gender equity became part of country's strategy for eradicating poverty and human misery. The policy makers are strongly believed that a positive commitment to gender equality and equity will strengthen every area of action to reduce poverty because women can bring new energy and new insights. A lot of debate is going on women and development since last few decades. Several interventions had taken place both at national and international level leading to passing of several laws including laws against physical violence IPC Section 498 (a) and Section 125 for maintenance. The importance of feminism has been steadily growing and gaining intellectual legitimacy.

## II. Developments at Global Level:

There has been global effort with a strong support from U.N., since 1975 to understand the discrimination and restore status of women through equality, development and peace. The year 1975 was declared as the international year of the women by the United Nations. It organized 4 world conferences on at Mexico in 1975, one at Copan Hagen in 1980, one at Nairobi in 1985 and one at Beijing in 1995. The World Summit for Children 1990, set goals for health, education and nutrition for women and their children. The international conference on nutrition in 1992 held at Rome, emphasized the elimination of malnutrition among women and children. The international conference on population and development in 1994 brought out a link between demographic issues and advancement of women through education, health and nutrition. The 1994 international conference on population and development placed issues of gender at the center of discussion. Thus, several international organizations are trying to promote the advancement of women and their full participation in developmental process and trying to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

### III. Developments in India:

The most deep-rooted forms of gender inequality had been built into the structure of traditional Indian society. Through gender inequality exists a large measure in the society under different dimensions for long time, its importance has grown in the recent times only. In the traditional society the inequality between males and females existed to a large extent. Women were looked down socially, economically and politically. Women became scape goats of many traditions and customs. She was brutally killed in the name of Sathi. The practice of child marriage, Kanyasulkam, Prostitution was taken it granted by society and women has no voice what so ever for centuries together. Women's role was restricted to domestic life especially kitchen work and bearing and rearing of children. She has no place in economic and political activities. Girl children were discriminated in terms of basic necessities of life such as food, clothing and shelter. Woman is the last person in the family to eat. She is the person who does all types of menial jobs. But still women continue to suffer from many social and economic and political disadvantages, since the attitudes did not change as fast as the change in laws. Gender issues are ideologically motivated and need a change in mindset in terms of attitudes and behavior of both men and women of all dimensions.

### IV. . Objective and Data Base:

The main objective of the present paper is to examine the gender discrimination in India in demographic social, economic and political context. The data required for the present paper was collected from secondary sources. The women discrimination can be visualized on various angles. In a male dominated society like ours one has to accept that women are at the receiving end. The sex ratio is unfavorable to women and it has declined overtime. The literacy rates are low among women. The expectation of life is low for women in India up to the recent times. The opportunities and access to decision-making institutions are not equal to both men and women. There is clear division of labour among men and women, designating certain tasks exclusively to each and another. Mostly activities, which have low market value, are attached to women. Women mostly spend their time in household maintenance.

### Gender Ratio:

Sex is an easily identifiable characteristic and its dichotomous nature presents few problems of classification. The sex structure of any population can be measured through the

percentage of males in the population or masculinity proportion or the sex ratio. The sex ratio of the population thus may either be expressed as the number of males per thousand females or as the number of females per thousand males. The former definition is followed all over the world but the Indian census followed the later definition. The sex ratio above thousand indicates a high sex ratio while that below thousand indicates a low sex ratio. Sex and age are the basic characteristics or the biological attribute, of any demographic group and affect not only its demographic but also its social economic and political structure, for the influence birth and death rate, internal and international migration, marital status composition, man power, the gross national product, planning, regarding educational and medical services and housing, etc.

#### Sex Ratio of Deceased persons :

Data and sex ratio of the dead in various countries indicate that with the exception of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh the value of sex ratios of diseased much above 1000. In other words more than thousand males per thousand females. The male fetus is biologically, more delicate than the female fetus. It means that even after the birth the male baby continues to be biologically disadvantaged. The fact is reflected in the higher male mortality rates not only in the first day, in the first week and in the first month and in the first year but throughout life. In fact, in most countries the crude death rates for males are higher than those of females. It has also been observed that the expectations of life at birth for females are almost universally higher than that for males including India. As age advances the sex ratio exhibits an increasingly numerical access of females according to 1959 census in Soviet Union there are 21 million more females than males. Wars widen the gap between males and females as is observed during the second world war period. Migration is ordinarily sex selective but it cannot have significant impact on the sex structure of the population. In India, the sex ratio in urban areas is favourable to males because of male domination in internal migration.

Sex ratio is a crucial indicator of development in a population. The analysis is mostly used in sociological analysis. India is an exceptional country where females are less in number as compared to males, upto the last century. Women are fewer than men in almost all the states in India, except Kerala. However, the expectation of life for females crossed males in the recent years. In India discrimination against female sex is prevailing centuries together and the situation has deteriorate over time.

In Andhra Pradesh in 1991 and it declined to 939 in 2001 and in Kerala the childhood sex ratio was 958 in 1991 and it increased to 963 in 2001. Factors for paucity of females in India: 1. Higher mortality of females (young girls, maternal mortality, female infanticide) 2. Change in sex ratio at birth (Because of sex selectivity induced abortions) is becoming more and more favourable to men. 3. To a certain extent differential under counting (however differential under counting of girls cannot explain the decline in child sex ratio during 1981-91 and 1991-2001.) Throughout the census history of India till 1991 the main factor responsible for numerical deficit of females was access female mortality

#### Age at Marriage:

The age of marriage is very low in India. Universality of marriage and child marriages are very much prevalent in India. The prevalence of spinster ship is very less in India since it is associated with social stigma. Even women who are physically and mentally handicap also get marry for some reasons or the other. Traditionally the Hindu religion has laid stress on marriage and begetting of children. Even today marriage is universal. A man after Brahmacharyam (a period of pursuit of knowledge as student) enters Grihasthasharam by getting married. The aims of Hindu marriage are Dharma, Praja (progeny) and Rathi (pleasure). For the women marriage is essential because though a man goes through several sacraments throughout his life, marriage is only sacrament that she is allowed. Procreation is the second aim of Hindu marriage and bringing forth a son is necessary since putra is needed to save parents from Punnaminaraka (Hell).

#### Feticide:

In the case of rape and in unforeseen social and economic, circumstances abortion is the only alternative. Because of high incidence of abortion, women's health is affected. Even though the risk associated with normal abortions is not very high, but repeated abortions are associated with high risk of mortality and morbidity. It is an extreme and particularly reprehensible form of violence against women in our society. In the long run only a broad and successful movement to transform the structure and policies of our economy and society in a democratic direction can eliminate all forms of violence against women. To tackle the problem of over population Plato recommended infanticide, exposure and abandonment of deformed infants on grounds of eugenics.

### Infant Mortality:

Infant mortality is considered to be a fairly sensitive index of the health condition of population in a society. It is affected by both biological and environmental factors. Apart from genetic factors, the age of the mother, order of birth, spacing of children play a very significant role in determining the level of infant mortality in society. Infant mortality in India has declined over time. Childhood diseases, child malnutrition, lack of safe drinking water, are some of the reasons for child mortality in India. The child mortality rate is very high among female as compared to male children. During the period 1979-81, the male child mortality was 41 as against female mortality of 44.8 similarly during 1989-91 the male child mortality was 26.3 as against 26.9 among females in India. There exists clear discrimination in child mortality between male and female children and there is every need to curb the same. Son Preference: In patriarchal society there is strong son preference.

### Family Planning Acceptance:

Women bear a gigantic share of family planning burden especially in rural India. The complications arising after tubectomy and IUD and side effects of oral pills have further shackled the health of the rural women. Male members are not coming forward to share the burden of family planning. There is a myth and fear among people that men will become impotent by undergoing vasectomy operation. That is most of the women along with care undergo family planning operations. That is most of the women along with care undergo operations. Due to poverty some women are becoming victims of STD, TB, Goiter, etc. Thus, women's health is affected finally leading to low sex ratio in the country. Under Counting of Women: One of the main reasons for gender inequality in India may be under counting of women in India. There is a lot of social stigma associated with counting of women. The information with regard to female members of the family is mostly kept secret as compared to men. There is a lot of bias and under reporting about women due to cultural factors. In a family where there are only daughters the possibility of under reporting is very high. If they are divorced women or widowed women in the family, the possibilities of under reporting are also high. Thus, under counting is one of the main reasons for enumeration of low females in the country.

### Social Inequalities:

Women are discriminated against men historically in terms of education, health and social justice. Education plays a crucial role in improving the possibilities for personal growth. Similarly, cultural norms, values, and customs are no less important in determining the women's

life choices and physical and mental well being. Gender inequalities exists not only in the rural areas but in urban areas too. Even though female literacy has grown over the past century, a number of females who remained as illiterate increased overtime. the illiteracy level in absolute terms has almost doubled even though literacy rate has increased over time. We all believe that if one male person in the family is literate, he along is literate, where as if one women in the family is literate the entire family will be literate.

There is need to implement measures to develop educational standards, taught the basics of primary health care, environmental sanitation use of safe drinking water and reproductive health care. There is every need to built positive attitudes among women. Separate schools, colleges, and other higher education institutions may be started exclusively for women, for educational purposes. These measures will help to increase literacy and education among women in the country.

#### V. Women and work participation :

In the west before industrial revolution the roles of men and women are well defined as man for plough and the women for the hearth. But, today situation has changed and many women gainful employment, though men have not taken house keeping. in the rural and urban areas. The table reveals that there exist, clear discrimination in work participation rates between males and females. The female participation rates are much lower as compared to males. It is also observed that women are the comparatively greater losers of changing technologies. The issue of women work and child care are widely debated. There is strong relationship between women's health we need to consider the totality of women's work, whether paid or unpaid or working in the organized or unorganized sectors.

#### VI. Women and Political Participation:

The universal declaration of human rights declares that every one has the right to take part in the government of his or her country. The United Nations Economic and social Commission endorsed a target of 30 per cent of women at all levels of decision-making by 1995. It has been rightly remarked that although the recent years have witnessed an increase in the female voters changes in the voter participation did not change. The women who are going to participate did not improve. Globally women constitute 10 per cent of legislative bodies and less in parliament



positions. In India the 1996 Lok Sabha has only 5.9 per cent of women (32 out of 544) and out of the total contestants only 2.9 per cent were women. Political empowerment of women does not imply just a right to vote but to discuss. In recent years there have been increased participation of women at lower centers of decision-making.

## VII. Summary and Conclusion:

The paper has broadly discussed the issue of gender inequality, women empowerment and reproductive health among women in India. The measures under taken by the international and national organizations to improve the status of women in India were discussed at length. There is a good correlation between gender inequality and reproductive health of women

The sex ratio is very low in India as compared to many developing countries and most of the advanced countries. The high maternal mortality, infant mortality, child mortality foeticide, infanticide, abortion, low age of marriage social stigma associated with marriage, son preference are responsible for low sex ratio in India. Also under counting of women associated with many social factors is one of the main reasons for low sex ratio in the country. The Social factors, such as, illiteracy, ignorance, the economic factors such as low wage, unemployment under employment and political factors such as, low participation of women in the elections and other elected bodies are also equally responsible for gender inequality in the country. So, there is every need to bring about changes in social, economic, and political structure in order to reduce gender inequality in India and empower women in its true term. The term empowerment of women is an important popular concept among political spectrum. Empowerment through the expansion of the civil, political and social rights of citizenship is a laborious and unexciting process. Empowerment is only effective answer to oppression, exploitation, injustice, and other melodies of society. The focus on empowerment has given a new emphasis to the building of economic and social capabilities among individuals, classes and communities. It is theories of social change in particular, a change from a hierarchical to and egalitarian type of society. It is based on democratic society, which is based on recognition of equal rights to all individuals in its place. Empowerment appears to be an alternative path for dismantling the old structure and putting new one in this place. Empowerment is to change the society through re-arrangement of the power. So there is a need for empowerment through civic, political and social rights of citizens. Gender empowerment measure is a measure for women development. It measures gender inequality in a society. India ranks 86 out of 175 countries in the world, as far as gender empowerment is concerned. The measure indicates whether women are able to actively participate in economic and political life. It measures the gender inequality in basic capabilities of women. It focuses on

gender inequality in the key areas of social economic political scenario. The lack of access to land, to credit, better employment opportunities, handicaps women's ability to free from poverty. Poverty is more among women as compared to men. When women are disproportionately poor, they are dis-empowered and bounded by strains of productive work, the birth of children and other household and community responsibilities.

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