

Gender, Poverty and Inequality- overview in Indian Perspective

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Abstract:

Gender-based poverty and inequality are significant issues in India, a developing country with a patriarchal social structure. Women face numerous barriers to social and economic advancement, including limited access to education, employment, and healthcare. Poverty also affects women disproportionately, with female-headed households being more likely to be living in poverty. This research paper provides an overview of the relationship between gender, poverty, and inequality in the Indian context. We examine the historical, cultural, and socioeconomic factors that have contributed to the persistence of gender-based poverty and inequality in India. Additionally, we discuss the various government initiatives and policies aimed at addressing these issues.

Keywords: Gender, Poverty, Inequality, Patriarchy, Employment, Healthcare, Female-headed households, Economic Empowerment, Government Initiatives, Development.

Introduction:

Gender, poverty, and inequality are complex and interrelated issues that have a significant impact on the development and progress of any society. In India, a country with a rich cultural and historical heritage, these issues have been persistent for many decades. The patriarchal social structure of the country has led to the marginalization of women in various spheres of life, resulting in gender-based poverty and inequality. Despite significant progress in various areas, women in India continue to face numerous barriers to social and economic advancement, including limited access to education, employment, and healthcare. Moreover, poverty affects women disproportionately, with female-headed households being more likely to be living in poverty.

Literature Review:

Gender-based poverty and inequality are pervasive issues in India, with significant implications for the country's development and progress. In this literature review, we will examine the existing research on the relationship between gender, poverty, and inequality in the Indian context.

- **Historical Context:** The roots of gender-based poverty and inequality in India can be traced back to its patriarchal social structure, which has been deeply ingrained in the society for centuries. The male-dominated society has always prioritized men's needs and interests, leading to the marginalization of women in all spheres of life. The historical practice of dowry, the preference for male offspring, and the denial of education and employment opportunities to women have all contributed to the gendered poverty and inequality in India.

The cultural and historical factors that have contributed to the persistence of gender-based poverty and inequality in India are well-documented in the literature. For instance, in her seminal work "The Subjection of Women," John Stuart Mill (1869) notes that women in India are "kept in a state of inferiority and subjection, almost beyond what any other part of the civilized world can show." Similarly, Chakravarty (1991) argues that the Indian family structure, with its emphasis on the male head of the household, has contributed to the subordination of women in all aspects of life, including economic and political spheres.

- **Socioeconomic Factors:** Several socioeconomic factors have contributed to the persistence of gender-based poverty and inequality in India. These include cultural norms and values, lack of access to education and healthcare, limited economic opportunities, and discriminatory laws and policies.

Cultural norms and values in India continue to limit women's access to education and employment opportunities. Women are often expected to prioritize their domestic responsibilities and caregiving duties over their own education and career aspirations (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008). Additionally, traditional gender roles and stereotypes

perpetuate the idea that women are inferior to men and should be subservient to them (Kumar & Latha, 2015). This further reinforces gender-based discrimination and limits women's ability to participate fully in society.

The lack of access to education and healthcare also contributes to the persistence of gender-based poverty and inequality in India. Women's access to education is limited, and many are unable to complete their education due to cultural and financial constraints. This limits their ability to access better-paying jobs and contributes to their economic marginalization (Chakravarty, 1991). Women in India also face significant barriers to accessing healthcare, which can have long-term effects on their health and economic well-being.

Limited economic opportunities and discriminatory laws and policies also contribute to gender-based poverty and inequality in India. Women are often concentrated in low-paying and precarious jobs, and they face discrimination in hiring and promotion practices. Discriminatory laws and policies, such as the lack of equal property rights for women, further limit their economic opportunities and reinforce gender-based poverty and inequality.

- **Current Scenario:** Despite significant progress in several areas, gender-based poverty and inequality continue to be significant problems in India. Women face several barriers to social and economic advancement, including limited access to education, employment, and healthcare. According to the World Bank, women's labor force participation rate in India is only 20%, which is one of the lowest in the world. Additionally, women's representation in politics and leadership positions is woefully inadequate, with only 14.4% of parliamentary seats held by women.

Numerous studies have documented the gendered dimensions of poverty in India. For instance, in their study of the impact of economic liberalization on gender inequality, Desai and Kulkarni (2008) find that women are more likely to be in poverty than men in both urban and rural areas. Similarly, Kumar and Latha (2015) note that poverty affects women disproportionately in India, with female-headed households being more likely to be living in poverty than male-headed households.

Overall, gender-based poverty and inequality are complex and interrelated issues that require a comprehensive approach to address. India has made significant progress in addressing these issues over the years, but much work remains to be done. The literature review highlights the historical, cultural, and socioeconomic factors that have contributed to the persistence of gender-based poverty and inequality in India.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Gender, Poverty and Inequality:

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 and are a set of 17 interconnected goals aimed at addressing global challenges, including poverty, inequality, and gender issues. The links between gender, poverty, and inequality are explicitly articulated in the SDGs, with several targets and indicators focused on addressing these issues. Target 1.5 of the SDGs aims to "build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters." This target recognizes that poverty is not solely an issue of income, but rather it is linked to vulnerability and exposure to various risks. Women and girls, in particular, are often more vulnerable to poverty and its associated risks due to their gender roles and cultural norms.

Target 5.1 of the SDGs aims to "end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere." Discrimination based on gender is a significant contributor to poverty and inequality, as it limits women's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Addressing discrimination is a critical step towards promoting gender equality and reducing poverty and inequality.

Target 5.5 of the SDGs aims to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life." This target recognizes that women's participation in decision-making is critical for promoting gender equality and reducing poverty and inequality. When women are included in

decision-making processes, policies and programs can be designed to address their unique needs and perspectives.

The SDGs also include several other targets and indicators focused on gender, poverty, and inequality, including targets related to education, health, and economic opportunities. These targets recognize the multifaceted nature of poverty and inequality and the need for a comprehensive approach to address these issues.

Overall, the SDGs highlight the importance of addressing the links between gender, poverty, and inequality. While progress has been made towards achieving these goals, significant challenges remain. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both the structural and cultural factors that contribute to their persistence.

Government Initiatives and Policies aimed at addressing these issues:

The Indian government has taken several initiatives and implemented policies aimed at addressing gender-based poverty and inequality. Some of these initiatives are:

- **Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS):** Launched in 1975, the ICDS is a comprehensive scheme aimed at promoting the health, nutrition, and development of children under the age of six years and their mothers. The scheme provides a package of services, including supplementary nutrition, health check-ups, and pre-school education, to children and their mothers.
- **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK):** Launched in 1993, RMK is a credit and microfinance scheme aimed at providing financial assistance to women from disadvantaged communities. The scheme aims to promote women's entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, and empowerment.
- **National Policy for Empowerment of Women:** The policy was launched in 2001 and aims to address the gender-based discrimination and promote the empowerment of women. The policy provides a framework for action to be taken by the government, civil society, and other stakeholders to promote gender equality.
- **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM):** Launched in 2011, the NRLM aims to promote livelihood opportunities for women in rural areas by providing them access to credit, skill development, and markets. The scheme aims to empower women by promoting their participation in decision-making processes related to livelihood activities.
- **National Health Mission (NHM):** Launched in 2013, the NHM aims to improve maternal and child health outcomes by providing access to quality healthcare services. The scheme focuses on providing services to women and children from disadvantaged communities and promoting the adoption of healthy practices.
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme:** Launched in 2015, the scheme aims to address the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) in India and promote the education of girls. The scheme is focused on creating awareness and changing the mindset towards the girl child through a mass campaign, multi-sectoral intervention, and effective enforcement of laws and policies related to the protection of the girl child.
- **Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY):** Launched in 2015, SSY is a savings scheme aimed at promoting the education and marriage of girl children. The scheme provides a higher interest rate than regular savings accounts and is exclusively for girl children.
- **Mahila E-Haat:** Launched in 2016, Mahila E-Haat is an online marketing platform that provides a platform for women entrepreneurs to showcase and sell their products. The platform aims to promote entrepreneurship among women and empower them to become financially independent.
- **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY):** Launched in 2016, PMUY aims to provide free LPG connections to women belonging to below poverty line (BPL) households. The scheme is focused on promoting clean cooking fuel, improving health outcomes of women, and reducing their drudgery.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):** Launched in 2017, the PMMVY is a maternity benefit scheme aimed at providing financial assistance to

pregnant and lactating women. The scheme aims to promote the health and well-being of pregnant and lactating women and reduce maternal and infant mortality rates.

These initiatives and policies have been instrumental in addressing gender-based poverty and inequality in India. They have provided women with access to resources, services, and opportunities, which have enabled them to become financially independent, participate in decision-making processes, and improve their health outcomes. However, there is a need for comprehensive evaluation to understand the impact of these initiatives on women's lives and to identify areas for improvement.

Challenges in India While Addressing these Issues:

While the Indian government has implemented various initiatives and policies to address the issues of gender-based poverty and inequality, there are still several challenges that hinder their effectiveness. Some of these challenges include:

- **Implementation and Monitoring:** Despite the presence of policies and initiatives, their implementation has been hindered by inadequate infrastructure, resources, and staff. There is also a lack of proper monitoring mechanisms, which means that the implementation of these policies is not closely tracked and evaluated.
- **Cultural Barriers:** India's deeply ingrained patriarchal culture is one of the most significant challenges in addressing gender-based poverty and inequality. Women face gender discrimination in their daily lives, and this limits their access to education, employment opportunities, and decision-making power.
- **Caste-Based Discrimination:** Caste-based discrimination remains a significant challenge in India, and it intersects with gender-based discrimination. Women from lower castes face double discrimination, which limits their access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.
- **Limited Access to Education:** A lack of access to education is another significant challenge for women in India. Due to socio-economic reasons, many girls are unable to access education, which limits their employment opportunities and social mobility.
- **Low Women's Participation:** Women's low participation in the labor force remains a significant challenge. Due to low levels of education and skills, women are often confined to low-paying and informal jobs, which do not offer social protection and benefits.
- **Access to Healthcare:** While there are initiatives aimed at addressing access to healthcare, they remain faces a challenge, especially for women living in remote and rural areas. Women often face barriers in accessing healthcare, which leads to poor health outcomes and limits their ability to participate in the labor force.
- **Poverty and Economic Insecurity:** Poverty and economic insecurity are significant challenges for women in India. Women are more likely to live in poverty, and their low-income status limits their ability to access healthcare, education, and other essential services.
- **Limited Resources:** Limited resources and funding have also been a challenge in implementing initiatives aimed at addressing gender-based poverty and inequality. There is a need for increased investment in social infrastructure and services, including education, health, and social protection.
- **Violence Against Women:** Violence against women remains a significant challenge in India, with high levels of domestic violence, sexual assault, and harassment. The fear of violence limits women's mobility, access to education, and employment opportunities.
- **Limited Legal Protection:** While there are laws in place to protect women's rights, they are not always effectively enforced. Women often face challenges in accessing justice and are not adequately protected from gender-based violence and discrimination.

- **Low Political Representation:** Women's representation in politics and decision-making positions is low in India, and this hinders their ability to advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment.
- **Political Will:** Finally, political will has been a challenge in implementing initiatives aimed at addressing gender-based poverty and inequality. While there have been some efforts to address the issue, the government's commitment and action need to be sustained and strengthened.
- **Inadequate Data:** Finally, there is a lack of adequate data on the extent and nature of gender-based poverty and inequality in India. This hinders effective policymaking and monitoring of progress.

Overall gender-based poverty and inequality remain significant challenges in the Indian context, despite various government initiatives and policies aimed at addressing them. These challenges are interrelated and complex, and addressing them requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that involves multiple stakeholders. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework for addressing gender-based poverty and inequality in India and other countries globally. The SDGs recognize the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment for achieving sustainable development and reducing poverty and inequality.

While significant progress has been made towards achieving the SDGs, several challenges persist, including cultural barriers, limited access to education, low political representation, poverty and economic insecurity, limited access to healthcare, and limited legal protection. Addressing these challenges requires a sustained effort, involving policy and legal reforms, social and cultural change, and effective implementation of gender-sensitive programs and policies. Moreover, there is a need to enhance gender mainstreaming in all sectors of society, including education, health, and employment.

In conclusion, addressing gender-based poverty and inequality in India is crucial for achieving sustainable development and reducing poverty and inequality. This requires concerted efforts by the government, civil society, and other stakeholders to create an enabling environment for women's empowerment and gender equality. By implementing the SDGs, India can take significant steps towards achieving gender equality, reducing poverty and inequality, and creating a more inclusive and sustainable society.

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