

Fondation Course
Semester 1
UNIT 2
CONCEPT OF DISPARITY-I

2. Gender Disparity

Unit Structure

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Introduction:

The concepts of disparity and disability are often used interchangeably. However it is essential to understand the difference between the two. Though the origin of both the terms comes from inequality, the nature of inequality and stratification is different in both the concepts. The term disparity means to be different. Gender disparity for that matter is the differences between the genders which are often treated as unequals. Disability is the condition of being unable, impaired to maintain equality. Disparity is often man made but disability can be natural too. For e.g. Women are physically weak and cannot do adventurous activity (which is not true) is a statement coming from gender disparity created by social systems.

Gender disparity- as a form of inequality

Gender disparity as a form of inequality is a manifestation of socio-cultural discrimination against women in society. Physical difference between man and woman, which is biological in nature is regarded “Sex”. However there is not hierarchy attached to the phenomenon of “sex” i.e. biologically being a man or a woman does not attach superiority or inferiority to either of them. It is the socio-cultural norms and the structure of patriarchy that converts ‘sex’ into ‘gender’ and then associating it with power and authority to

one at the cost of the other. The term Patriarchy is derived from two words 'patri' and 'arch' which means father and rule respectively. It means 'rule of the father' or male domination. And it is this patriarchal structure of society in general and of family in particular that creates gender disparity or gender bias.

Gender disparity can be defined as "a situation of unequal and hierarchical relations and the socially constructed roles or stereotypes assigned to women as that of a housewife and mother are considered as 'norms' to be followed invariably across class, caste, race and culture. This bias often leads to denial of opportunities and injustice to women"

Female Foeticide

Sex ratio is calculated as the number of females per thousand of males. Sex ratio of any country is not just a demographic variable but an important indicator of country's gender development index. India is one of those female deficit countries in the world where sex ratio is calculated per thousand of males. In most of the developed nations sex ratio is always calculated as number of males per thousand of females as there is a natural tendency of female foetus to survive longer than their male counterparts.

The sex ratio, which was 972 per 1000 of men in 1901, has declined to 933 in 2001. It has marginally increased to 940 in the year 2011. There is also a concept of child sex ratio that is calculating the sex ratio in the age group of 0-6 years which is also declining drastically in India. From 976 in 1961 to 927 in 2001 and as per the provisional census report for 2011 it has further declined to a devastating 914.

Causes of Female foeticide

Sex Determination (SD) and Sex Selective Abortion (SSA) - With the introduction of new reproductive technologies in 1970s in India ultrasound sonography was a big hit amongst the doctors and families expecting a child. Apart from knowing the abnormalities in the foetus, this technology also revealed the sex of the child which helped the parents to determine the sex and abort an unwanted female foetus. This is considered to be the major reason for declining sex ratio.

Female infanticide and foeticide - Several Indian states historically were known for its practice of female infanticide. With the idea of girl child being a burden to the family, there was a rampant elimination of female infants through various practices like 'doodhpiti' (drowning in milk) in Gujarat, suffocating the child, consumption of opium seeds etc. After the new reproductive technologies were available the heinous practice shifted from infanticide to foeticide. Son preference and patriarchal value system - The patriarchal system reinforces certain norms from Indian religions and cultures. Son is preferred in an Indian household for social, economic and religious reasons. He is considered to be the bread winner and a support to parents in their old age. It is also believed that son continues the family name and lineage (Vansh). According to Hindu tradition a son is required to ignite the funeral pyre of his parents for them to attain salvation. These myths and beliefs expect to have at least one son in the family and with a small child norm or one child norm in urban educated

families, daughters are eliminated to maintain the family size and structure.

Dowry and burden of marriage cost- Dowry is the gifts in terms of cash or kind given by the bride's parents to the groom's family. The high demands of dowry converts girl into a liability for her parents and marrying her to a suitable groom becomes a burden. With increasing cost of marriages, which are forced to be borne by the bride's family alone and ever increasing evil of dowry practice are the root cause for considering a girl child in the family as a commodity to be disposed through infanticide or foeticide to avoid the financial burden later.

Lower nutritional and health status of women-

Biologically, female foetus are stronger to sustain illness, or escape miscarriages, but later the cultural inequalities end up in women of the house eating less, left over and last, making her susceptible to low nutritional value and low health status. Early and unsafe pregnancy, lack of maternal and post natal health care all result in high female mortality rates leading to low sex ratio. declined to a devastating 914..

Causes of Violence against Women

India has always lived with a paradox with glorifying women as goddess (Devi) on one hand and giving a devil treatment on the other. From cradle to death (in fact much before she reaches a cradle) or from womb to tomb she is subject to discrimination and step motherly treatment. At every level of her life in all the institutions of family, marriage, religion, education, economy, law, media and politics, she faces the brutal exploitation from the pre-existing and omnipresent structure of patriarchy.

Meaning of violence Against Women

United Nations Declaration 1993, defined violence against women as “any act of gender base violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, psychological or sexual harm or suffering to a woman, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”. This is an all inclusive definition of VAW. The violence of her basic human rights often take place in various ways. It may take a form of sex determination and sex selective abortion, neglect of infant and girl child in the areas of nutrition health care, illiteracy and drop outs, under estimation of house holdwork, inequality and harassment at the work place, dowry and related harassments including bride burning, sexual assault, rape, religious rituals, cultural practices, misrepresentation in media and many others.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau's facts

Every three minutes there is a crime against women

Molestation happens every 15 minutes

Sexual harassment every 53 minutes

Rape case every 29 minutes

4 out of 10 women in India face violence in their homes.

A woman is killed for dowry every hour.

Types of Violence Against women

Violence against women can be classified broadly into three categories....

A) Domestic violence: The violence which takes place within the household or by a known perpetrator is considered to be domestic violence. Wife beating, wife battering, dowry harassment, emotional torture by family members, sexual abuse, marital rape(sexual Intercourse which is non-consensual in nature), deprivation of basic rights necessities, discrimination in the family and denial of economic care all a part of domestic violence

B) Criminal violence: The act which are considered to be crime and punishable under Indian Penal Code termed as criminal violence. They are Rape, molestation, trafficking of women, sexual harassment at work place, bride burning, abduction and kidnapping, eve teasing, female foeticide or infanticide are all part of Criminal Violence

C) Social violence: The violence which women face due to societal norms and religious practices are part of social violence. It includes Sati, prohibition of widow remarriage, child marriage, devdasi, denial of entering or worshipping at religious places, atrocities against woman in the name of caste, community etc.

Measures of violence Against Women:

There are several government and non-government organizations working towards gender equality and fighting against all forms of violence against woman. Following are some of the landmark legal measures and acts pertaining to woman's rights. There are several articles in the Indian Constitution which promise equal rights and liberties to each and every woman in India. There are special provisions for woman in terms of positive discrimination or affirmative action in terms of reservation of woman in local self government, educational institutions, job opportunities and public transport. There are a number of government bodies, NGOs and civil society organizations helping women to gain justice and equality in the society. They work in the areas of research, sensitization, awareness, law making or amendment in the existing law, campaigns for empowerment of woman. There is a special ministry for women and child welfare at the centre and state to look into the policies and programmes for woman in the nation. The National Commission for Woman (NCW) is the statutory body of Government of India at the central level that looks in to the matters pertaining to gender justice.

Portrayal of Women in Media:

Media is a plural form of medium. Media is a unit through which messages, information, data, thoughts and ideas are transmitted or communicated. Mass media is a form of media where transmission and communication takes place across society to large number of people at the same time. Media can be classified as print media which includes

newspaper, magazines, journals, pamphlets, leaflets, printed advertisements etc. whereas audio-visual or electronic media includes television, films, radio, computers and internet etc. Since these tools of media communicates to masses at the same time and over a period of time, its content and ideas have a great influence on society's mind set. Media has been used to change the perception of society. Hence portrayal of women in media definitely influence and shape the ideas and perception towards women in that society. Media can create awareness and sensitize people regarding issues pertaining to women. An affirmative image portrayed in media creates a positive environment towards women and traditional stereo typed image can create a degrading status of women.

Awareness and sensitization- Media especially newspapers, journals and news channels help people to become aware of current scenario and status of women in the society. It can analyse problems of women and make its readers or viewers sensitive towards the same. For.e.g.recent television show Satyamev Jayate to some extent has covered several issues pertaining to women. or reporting on cases of violence against women with a great sensitivity.spreading the information regarding policies and programmes for women.

Highlighting achievers- Women's achievements can be highlighted in the fields of science, technology, education, economy, industry, entertainment, art, literature, music, social work or politics. For e.g. making story of Kiran Majumdar Shaw as an industrialist or on Lata Mangeshkar as an artist create a positive image of women in the minds of people.

Women as sex symbols- Women in media has beenmisused as a sex symbol for selling products in the advertisements or providing entertainment in the TV shows or films.

Beauty pageants and western standards- Rampant beauty pageants where woman is seen as a model with an ideal face and figure often misjudge her as a dumb characteror beauty without brains. Western standards of fairness and slim figure have become a craze amongst young Indian girls thanks to media.

Conclusion :

World over with the advent of globalization and liberalization the status of women is changing. The disparity between men and women is decreasing with woman being economically and socially advanced. However she still faces many problems and discrimination of different kinds and which needs to be addressed with the help of legal measures and renewal of her role in media. There is a call for restructuring the patriarchal system and attitudes towards the women.