
**Gender Discrimination in India
Themes and Perspectives**

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*For All Gender-neutral and
Gender-biased People*

Preface

General tendency of the society is to equate the meaning of gender with the meaning of sex. For a long time in sociology and also in other social sciences, the term 'gender' was used to be discussed as an alternative word of 'sex'. But with the development of feminist discourses and with the growing academic pressure of defining gender discrimination from a scientific, sociological as well as psychological point of view, it was felt necessary to discuss gender as a separate broad category and the process of bringing out the concept of gender from its overlapped meaning meshed with sex began. Thus, today separate tools and indexes are used to define sex and gender.

After independence in India one of the issues which has attracted the attention of the policy makers was gender issues and concerns. Gender issues have become central policy arena. The issues of gender equality and justice assumed added significance in the context of the interface between new economic policy perceptions and gender relations. 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.

Gender Discrimination subsists in Indian economy and prevails in all sectors of life like health, education, economics and politics. Men have always had the upper hand in these

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fields, depicting how deeply patriarchy is entrenched in India. Even though gender equality soars to great heights in the post-independence era, many steps have been taken in various sectors of life to bridge the gap between men and women and to bring them up to the same level. Gender discrimination simply means the situation in which people are treated differently only because they are male or female, rather than on the basis of their individual skills or capabilities.

Gender Discrimination has been a social issue in India for centuries. That in many parts of India, the birth of a girl child is not welcomed is a known fact. It is a known fact too, that discrimination starts from even before the girl child is born and sometimes she is killed as a foetus, and if she manages to see the light of day, she is killed as an infant, which makes up the highly skewed child sex ratio. In such a scenario, it is obvious that for myriad reasons, many girls across the country are forced to drop out of school. Patriarchal norms have marked women as inferior to men. A girl child is considered a burden and is often not even allowed to see the light of the world. It is hard to imagine this state of affairs in the 21st Century when women have proved to be strong leaders in every field possible. From wrestling to business, the world has been revolutionised by exceptional women leaders in fields that were until recently completely dominated by men. Across India gender discrimination results in unequal opportunities, and while it impacts on the lives of both genders, statistically it is girls that are the most disadvantaged.

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 discrimination 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 idea of empowerment contains exciting possibilities. It is a wide term with no specific meaning. The term is very vogue and is more a context driven rather than theory driven. It is about social transformation. It is about the people rather than politicians. It is about power, although the concept of power contained in it is generally left unspecified.

Empowerment is both a means to an end and an end in itself. 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 discrimination 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 discrimination in basic capabilities of women. It focuses on gender discrimination in the key areas of social-economic-political scenario.

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This volume is mainly based on a collection of research papers on women and gender discrimination. We have touched and traversed new horizons on gender discrimination in the present volume. We are ever thankful to our energetic and enthusiastic contributors of this volume. Lastly, we are thankful to all of Manglam Publications in publishing this volume in time. Special thanks from us to Mahendra Yadav of Manglam Publications. We hope this volume would provide value and insights regarding the gender discrimination not only to the special readers of sociology or political science but also to the general readers at large.

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Introduction

India as a nation is revered in a feminine form i.e. 'the Bharat Mata', the first citizen of our country presently is a woman, many important government posts are occupied by women and educated women are pouring into the professional workforce with profound implications for national and multinational corporations. However, ironically, these are accompanied by news about dowry killings, female infanticide, and domestic violence against women, sexual harassment, rape, illegal trafficking and prostitution. Gender discrimination prevails in almost all areas, be it social, cultural, economic or educational. An effective remedy for these evils needs to be sought in order to ensure the Right to Equality guaranteed by the Constitution of India, to the fairer sex.

Gender equality facilitates the empowerment of women. Since education begins at home, the upliftment of women would be accompanied by the development of the family, the society and in turn, would lead towards a holistic development of the nation. Among these problems the foremost that needs to be addressed is the atrocity committed against females at birth and during childhood. Female infanticide i.e. killing of the female child is still a common practice in many of the rural areas'. Further female foeticide is common in some parts of India, despite the passage of 'Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act in 1994. In case they survive, they are subjected to discrimination throughout their lives. Traditionally, since sons are thought to take care of their parents during old age and daughters are considered a burden because of dowry and other expenses that have to be incurred during their marriage, female children are neglected in the matters of nutrition, education and other important aspects of well-being. The sex ratio in our country is abysmally low. It was only 940 females per 1000 males according to the 2011 census.

Throughout the world, gender discrimination and stereotyping limit the full development and participation of girls and young women as well as boys and young men. Until all girls receive the same opportunities as their male counterparts, their fundamental human rights are denied and the conditions for sustainable development are unfulfilled. It is vital for the future that girls and young women grow up to become leaders in their families and communities, and increasingly in the workplace and in society.

Women play a crucial role in the socio economic development of a country. But both in the industrially developed and less developed countries, women are burdened with cumulative inequalities as a result of discriminatory socio-economic practices. The situation is much worse particularly in the case of rural women. The essence of gender discrimination is unequal treatment on the basis of sex. The treatment must not simply be different, but unequal and therefore unfair. It is not gender discrimination to require women and men to use separate restrooms. It is gender discrimination to provide different working conditions, salaries, hiring, promotion or bonus criteria, admissions standards, or athletic and scholastic opportunities to women and men. As modern society has made clear, women have the ability to perform with equal skill and success in virtually every endeavor put in by men, including employment, athletics, academics and politics.

The present volume intends to divulge different dimensions of gender discrimination. Altogether twenty four articles have been included to understand its specific ramifications and meanings in different social contexts and different life world. The first article is written by Aratrika Roy, who examined the scope of singlehood and its impact in society with reference to the feminist understanding of gender roles and cultural ideology. Banashree Roy has tried to find out the prominent cyber crimes committed against women in India. It gives a glimpse of the legal framework and the difficulties with regard to the investigation of these crimes. Shrishti Sharma examines the Crime against women is a serious

problem that affects women from all walks of life. Upasana Roy Barman discusses women discrimination in MGNREGA programme. Her article is divided into three parts- first a small theoretical outlook of the work, secondly, a brief discussion of women participation in respect to MGNREGA and thirdly, a study of positive discrimination in respect to Women participation. Sananda Sen tries to find out the violence that women face in intimate relationships. The incidents, mainly, the Shraddha murder case, Niki Yadav, and Aradhana Prajapati created uproar in the nation where these women were mercilessly killed. Her paper would endeavor to reflect upon the increased rate of crime since the pandemic, the kind of violence, and lastly, the role of law that may play a fundamental role in arresting atrocities against women.

Mrittika Nandy analyses the future of political participation of women in India signifying the key areas of intervention. The specificity of the issue requires exclusive legislation meticulously drafted by women lawmakers thereby ensuring a difference and impact simultaneously. An impact denting the gender ratio equations and difference resulting in spurting of women's participation in politics largely defined as a male arena. G. Yogapriya, R. Nareshkumar and G. Thulasi have highlight the necessity, significance, and reciprocal health benefits of menstruation leave. They have dicuss about global insights on menstrual leave policy and hygiene. Rimi Sarkar analyses the evaluation of women in patriarchal folk society special emphasis on Bengal folk songs. In the patriarchal family structure, the attitude towards women is that they are not to be left independent. So at every stage of life they are under the domination of some male member of the family: father, husband or son. In this circumstance, how Bengali folk songs performed by the women and dominated through male counterparts are discussed by the Sarkar's paper.

Shyamal Kumar Daripa in his article portrays the condition of female foeticide and mention how it related to other major issues i.e. child sex ratio and gender discrimination. Aritra Ghosh has examined the gender discrimination from theoretical perspectives. He points out that how different

theory discussed gender discrimination in different way. Gender discrimination and societal discord at the wake of twenty-first Centuries and the combat with Covid-19 have been studied by Debalina Sengupta. Pallavi Sinha Das highlight how pandemic and social isolation has squeezed the scope of gender equality and has led to their exploitation. Sayani Ghosh, Krishnendu Sen and Surat Sheikh highlight innovative and sustainable farming practices adopted by women and their economic contributions to rural communities. Furthermore, the paper suggests future prospects and recommendations to empower women in agriculture, such as providing access to technology, improving infrastructure, and developing targeted policies and programs for women in agriculture. Overall, this paper emphasizes the crucial role that women play in agriculture and their potential as agents of change in rural societies. Ramandeep and Ram Kumar's article emphasizes the concept of social issues such as gender inequality, suffering and suppression that men and women face in relation to the play "Dance like a Man" (1989) and "Tara" (1990) by Indian playwright Mahesh Dattani. Namit Lepcha attempts to assess the nature of women's participation in the electoral process and the issues emerging out of it that impacts subsequent stages of them being granted tangible political power in the long run. This article elucidates women's participation in the electoral process as electorates, voters, candidates, and elected representatives.

Paramita Ghosh attempts to study the position of women while also examining the different factors that influence social position, such as education, the law, poverty, property rights, marriage etc. Saket Bihari emphasizes the importance of creating a society where individuals can pursue their goals and ambitions freely, without fear of discrimination or bias. Both multiculturalism and gender equality are interconnected, as gender and cultural identities intersect in complex ways. His paper highlights the importance of multiculturalism and gender equality and their interdependence in creating a thriving, prosperous society. Sashka Jovanovska traces the history of the scholarship on language, gender, and sexuality

encompassing three main topics - sex and sexism in language systems, how discourses of gender and sexuality are encoded in language use in both public and private contexts and how people use language in ways that are linked to their gender. Shehnaz Salahuddin seeks to show gender disparities and inequalities being vehemently practiced under the cloak of religious personal laws in India. It shows that whether be Hindu laws or Muslim laws, it is the women who have been deliberately discriminated against by various religious traditions and practices.

Sumanpreet Kaur attempts to focus on the rationale for foeticide and the consequences of this phenomenon on Indian society. For a balanced society, this paper reviews the measures taken to combat this heinous phenomenon. Suvapriya Chatterjee examines the particular societal and political pressures on gender and the responses that they engender. Her paper study the problematics of gendered resistance analyzing and evaluating the representation of the female children in these four Indian films - *Water* (2005), *Highway* (2014) and *Parched* (2015), *Article 15* (2019). Amrita Chatterjee seeks to analyse the state of women empowerment in India and sheds on its problems and challenges. This paper concludes that access to education and employment are the enabling factors, although the focus on goal attainment depends largely on the attitudes of people towards gender equality. Jayanta Kumar Mandal tries to explain the terrible impact that acid attacks have on the victims physically, psychologically, socially and economically. Last paper of this volume written by Sweta Sarkar discusses on the meaning of female foeticide, infanticide, its causes and measures to curb the acts of female foeticide.

Total twenty four (24) articles are included in this volume. The present volume is an attempt to encapsulate different connotation of gender and gender discrimination.

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Gender in Sociolinguistics

-Dr. Sashka Jovanovska¹

Introduction

Before discussing how language, gender, and sexuality are dealt with in sociolinguistics, we need to define the terms gender, sex category, and sexuality to discuss how these concepts are involved in the study of sociolinguistics. Sex categories are based on the biological distinction – not always completely clear – between ‘male’ and ‘female.’ There may also be additional culturally specific categories that define people who do not fall easily into these first two categories. Native American cultures have a tradition of what has been called ‘two spirit’ people (Jacobs et al. 1997), and in India there are hijras and kotis, which are different groups of people who exhibit physical and/or behavioral characteristics of both sex categories; in Indian society, they have a societal role and the linguistic means of constructing such a role in society (Hall 1997, 2005). The term transgender is often used in the United States to talk about people who are transitioning or have transitioned from one sex category to another, or have biological attributes of a sex category which does not match their gender (see below) or of both sexes; the term cisgender

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is used to talk about people whose sex category matches their gender. The term transgender may also be used for individuals with biological attributes of both sexes. Thus, while sex categories make references to biological characteristics, and are often perceived as binary and mutually exclusive, they are not entirely in synch with the reality of human diversity and some societies have more than two categories and may accept more fluid membership in sex categories.

On the other hand, gender, although based on sex categories, is culturally constructed. What is considered to be masculine or feminine differs from one society to another. It is also usually conceived of as being on a continuum of masculine and feminine, that is, you can be more or less masculine or feminine, while sex categories are generally thought of as being discrete groups so that individuals must firmly and permanently belong to either one or the other category. Within the contemporary social theory, gender identities, like other aspects of identity, may change over time, and vary according to the setting, topic, or interlocutors. West and Zimmerman (1987) talk about 'doing gender,' that is, the idea that gender is not something we have, but something we do. Cameron (2006:724) says: 'Sex is a word used connection with the biological characteristics that mark humans and other animals as either male or female, whereas gender refers to the cultural traits and behaviors deemed appropriate for men or women by a particular society.' Elsewhere (1998b, 280-1), she points out that: Men and women . . . are members of cultures in which a large amount of discourse about gender is constantly circulating. They do not only learn, and mechanically reproduce, ways of speaking 'appropriate' to their own sex; they learn a much broader set of gendered meanings that attach in rather complex ways to different ways of speaking, and they produce their own behavior in the light of these meanings. . . . In performances of gender, speakers draw on ideologies about what it means to be a man or a woman; for instance, women may give each other compliments on their appearance, while men exchange ritual insults, speech acts which draw on stereotypes of women seeking solidarity and

men constructing hierarchy in conversation. However, performing masculinity or femininity 'appropriately' cannot mean giving exactly the same performance regardless of the circumstances. It may involve different strategies in mixed and single-sexed company, in private and public settings, and in the various social roles (parent, lover, colleague, friend) that someone might regularly occupy in the course of everyday life. We cannot talk about gender without reference to sexuality, or vice versa. Sexuality has to do with an individual's identity in terms of his or her sexual activities. For example, certain types of masculinity rely heavily on heterosexuality while other identities explicitly involve gay masculinity. We also have stereotypes about identity categories such as 'butch' or 'femme' lesbians. Sexual identities are not just about being gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning, of course; they include performances of being available, promiscuous, asexual, or fetishizing certain things, acts, or types of sexual partners. Such aspects of sexual identity are intertwined with gender identity. The next section will address how languages encode ideas about gender and sexuality, and the broader issue of how ideas about gender and sexuality are produced and reproduced through language. Finally, we will address how speakers' language use can be linked to gender, sex categories, and sexuality.

The Whorfian Hypothesis

There are several theories concerning the relationship between language and culture. The neutral claim states that there is little or no relationship between the two. Significantly a different theory suggests that the culture is reflected in the usage of a language and things that are valued in a specific society influence the language. But the most well-known theory is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, known also as the Whorfian hypothesis – the second name may be considered more precise as Whorf developed the claim the most. The strong form of the hypothesis is labelled as linguistic determinism – different languages represent different ways of thinking about the world around us. In other words,

language determines thought. As stated by Sapir “humans do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society.” This idea was further extended by Whorf, a Sapir student, who concluded that the grammar of each language is a shaper of ideas and largely determines the way its speakers view the world. Since the languages differ structurally the experience of the world is different for speakers of different languages and it is impossible to see the world objectively as it is because the perception is based on a particular language system.

Whorf based his findings on the work with American Indian Languages. He contrasted the linguistic structures of Hopi with the structures of languages such as English which he named as Standard Average European. According to him, Hopi and English differ significantly in their structural characteristics and in the ways of expressing the same concepts. As he stated, Hopi centres on events and processes whereas English on things and relations. In SAE events occur in a definite time – either in the past, present, or future, and the time itself is apportioned into fixed segments such as minutes or days. For Hopi speakers, however, of importance is whether an event can be warranted to have occurred, or to be occurring, or to be expected to occur. The world is seen as ongoing set of processes and emphasis is laid on how the action is performed (aspect) rather than when the action is performed (tense). Because of these differences, according to Whorf, speakers of the two languages view the world differently.

In Whorfian hypothesis language functions like a filter to reality – it determines the way the speaker perceives and organises both social and natural world which helps to form one’s world-view. Therefore if a language has a word describing a certain concept it is easier for its speakers to talk about the concept than for speakers of another language which lacks appropriate word. Moreover, if one language makes grammatical distinctions that another language does not make,

then the speakers of that language become conscious of the kinds of distinctions that must be referred to.

Many researchers tried to prove the hypothesis or at least attempted to test it. Examples like describing one thing by using several different words in one language while in other languages there is just one term describing the concept were provided. Others like Lucy focused on grammar of different languages – he compared category of number in English and in Yucatec Maya with the results showing there exist only some evidence to proof the claim. Others tested the statement that it is impossible to describe certain things in some languages as they lack the necessary resources. In each and every instance the results were not concluding and the claim still remains unproved as it appears that thanks to circumlocution it is possible to talk about anything in every language. Some concepts, however, are easier expressed in some languages than in others.

Word's Relationship

The way people use the language in social life is visible in kinship system. Because of the importance of family in social organisation the kinship system is universal. Some systems may be richer than others but they all make use of such factors as sex, age, generation, blood and marriage. The system regulates not only nomenclature but also it explains the way how people should behave towards others in the society.

Obviously, societies may differ significantly in they approach to family matters and it is best visible in the vocabularies of different languages. Extensive family vocabulary is typical for societies which social organisation revolves around family. For instance, in Australian Aboriginal language Njamal, every member of the tribe has their own specific kinship term. More developed societies tend to have restricted family vocabulary as the importance of family is significantly lower.

In English more complicated family relations cannot be referred to directly as hardly ever there exists a word to

describe them. Therefore, it is impossible to name, for instance one's brother's wife's father in a single word nor there is distinctive vocabulary for a father's sister or mother's sister – in both instances she is referred to as *aunt*. In some cultures, like in Polish, extensive kinship vocabulary has existed but it loses its significance and often more general terms are used. For instance, a father's brother may be called *stryj*, but currently the word *wujek* (uncle) is in common usage. The same situation may be noticed in the instance of the father's brother's daughter. In the past she would be called *siostra stryjeczna* but now she is referred to simply as cousin.

Some terms like father, older brother or even husband carry with them certain ideas suggesting how they should behave towards others in the society using a specific kinship system. In this case *fathers*, *older brothers* or *husbands* can enjoy certain rights but they also have some duties. In reality they may behave otherwise as it is not the behaviour which classify them as such but the kinship system itself. That is why in some societies a *father* may be regarded as the head of a family and is expected to function as a decision-making body.

In the most extreme examples kinship terms may regulate a right way of addressing other people. In the system found in Rossel Island in Papua New Guinea the elaborate system determines how one's father calls other men (there are nine ways possible) or women (six ways possible) and so the son has to correctly address those people according to the way his father does. But not only exotic tribes make use of such systems. In Japan honorific system is very elaborate as well. It even extends family relationships as a member of a society is expected to address more important people or their seniors with due respect by using more formal words or adding honorific *-san* or, in very official situations like addressing an emperor, honorific *-sama*. Analogically, referring to juniors or younger people require the usage of different honorifics (like *-chan*). These are just general rules as there are many other possibilities.

Worth highlighting is that in many instances the usage of kinship vocabulary may be extended to naming people outside

the family. The Polish word *wujek* (meaning uncle) may be used by children to refer to the close friends of a family or even to the neighbours – in this case the most important factor is familiarity and age. The case in which different relationships may be described by the same words is not so uncommon. In the aforementioned Japan in some marked situations young girls may be referred to by a child as “*onee-chan*” (literally meaning older sister) and the word “*obasan*” may mean both aunt or older woman.

Conclusion

As presented above, the claim that language and culture are interrelated is of little doubt. There are still some discrepancies between researchers in terms of the exact relationship between language and culture though. Some like Whorf claim that language determines our world-view, some suggest a contrary idea. Either way the words describing objects of cultural importance are omnipresent in every language system in the world.

The relationship between culture and language is manifested in many linguistic areas and certain parallels are universal in the majority of languages. Therefore terms describing kinship, colours, or taboo subjects are present in every language although their coverage may be different in different languages. Some make use of the abundance of terms describing a family whereas others have rather limited colour vocabulary. The important fact is that the culture-language relationship is subject to change and new linguistic expressions may be introduced in a language when the need for changes arises.

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