Gender Equality for Social Sustainability

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Abstract

In the largest democracy of the world, gender discrimination is still prevalent and perpetuates Indian mentality even after over six decades of independence. The skewed survival rates for girls, the dropping sex ratio, and incidences of dowry deaths, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence against women are indications of the same. Inequalities that condemn millions of children, particularly girls, to a life of missed opportunities.

This 'University Grants Commission' funded minor research study compares gender perceptions in four major cities of Maharashtra State in India. The status of women in any society is determined by the interplay of various socio-economic features. The present study evaluates gender biases of adult men and women from different localities in the supposedly developed cities of Maharashtra, with a sample size of over 530 individuals. Findings indicate that gender biases are not limited to men; they are widespread in women too. With growing industrialization and urbanization, responsibilities of women and men have changed but their role stereotypes have remained the same. Gender perceptions of people intermingle with many relevant social justice issues regarding women. Gender equality is important not only for women, but for the society as a whole to achieve a discrimination free existence and sustainability.

KEYWORDS: Gender Equality, Gender Perceptions, Social Sustainability, Gender Biases.

Introduction:

The position of women in the Indian society is in the process of transformation and will have an important impact on future social development. In the recent past, there has been an increasing awareness about the longstanding patterns of discrimination that created conditions for women which threaten their lives even before birth, limit their opportunities for education and training, deny them choices, restrict their economic participation and curtail their social, political and economic rights.

The status of women in any society is determined by the interplay of various socio-economic factors. Some of these may be 'objective' in nature like education,

employment, income, etc., or 'subjective', depending on the social values prevailing in the society. Women's status is determined by social norms. These 'social norms' which support inequality between men and women is the one of the major causes of the backward status of women socially, economically, educationally, politically and health wise. For generations the institutions like religion, family, school, media and marriage etc. have worked to propagate and confirm the pre-determined gender ideas and stereotype values in the upcoming generations. The incidences of rape, sexual harassment, wife battering and dowry deaths, female feticide are rampant in Indian cities.

Even today in Indian society, a daughter is seen by society to be of negative worth. Sons, in the Indian context, are traditionally seen as assets in economic, political and ritualistic terms by a male-dominant society. The badminton icon of India Ms. Saina Nehwal who has won a number of international tournaments has openly shared her experiences of gender discrimination and expressed regret about the way even today women are treated in Indian society. (Daily Sakal, 2010)The norms, values and customs, especially those pertaining to property, make the girl child the lesser child. The birth of a daughter is therefore not celebrated. The girl child if survives the neglect and continues to live, she experiences trials and tribulations as a reproductive being. At what age she marries and how many children she bears, how many she avoids by using contraception, influences her health and limits her abilities and also has an implication on sustainability of Indian society as a whole. Therefore, gender equality is still an improbable dream for India.

Statistical Justification:

Human Development Report, Maharashtra (2002) mentioned that in the absence of gender discrimination, a population should contain as a norm at least 1,050 women for every 1,000 men, because of the inherent biological superiority of women. However, due to the non-acceptance of a female child in the society; the deficit of women, in absolute terms, has been rising steadily from slightly more than 2,00,000 in 1901 to nearby four million in 2001, jumping by more than a million in the last decade. A deficit of this magnitude is a sure sign of socio-economic condition that are so punitive to women as to wipe out their biological advantage. 'Despite the booming growth rates and rising illiteracy, more girl children are being muffled into the silence of death at or before birth. Statistics of 2001 showed that the capital state of Delhi, with all its cosmopolitan pretensions, has registered a 47-point drop from 915 girls to 868 girls per 1000 boys.' (Times, 2006)The most adverse child sex ratios are among the prosperous states of Punjab, Haryana, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. It seems to be their prosperity, which enables them to exercise the 'choice' of preventing the birth of a baby girl. (Rustagi, 2003) 'It was revealed that in the age group 0-6 years, the gender ratio is 914 girls to 1000 boys. Which means, for every 1000 boys, there are at least about 60-70 girls under the age of 6 years were missing. This is the lowest gender ratio recorded since India's independence in 1947.' (Census, 2011)In Maharashtra in year 2002, 56% pregnant women were found suffering from anaemia. (IIPS-2002)National Family Health Survey (1999) revealed that 50% women in India marry before the age of 18 years and 47.7% in Maharashtra.

'A study conducted jointly by the Indian Council of Medical Research and the Harvard School of Public Health confirmed that girls under 5 years of age in India were dying at an abnormally high rate. The study observed that infant girls, who were one year and younger were 50% more likely to die because of violence than boys that age.' (Census, 2011)'Female infanticide has a long history in India. Each region has had its own established, traditional way of killing infant girls, methods that include drowning the baby in a bucket of milk, or feeding her salt, or burying her alive in an earthen pot.'(Murthy, 2008 & Kumari, 2012) These observations and claims are strongly supported by Aravamudan (2007). Sinha (2010) makes a critical observation that the skewed survival rates for girls are a reflection on social bigotry against girls. The root causes of such 'unnatural' behaviour lies in distorted social perception of gender and lack of education. 'Every year about 9000 dowry deaths are reported in India. This number increases at a rate of 1-2% every year. It is also a reason why many parents don't want to have daughters, because of the dowry they will have to shell out at her marriage, and the stress they go through due to never-ending demands from her in-laws.' (Chawla, 2010) According to Basu (2011) the only way to overcome the problem of dowry is by educating girls and making them independent. According to the statistics, nearly 40% of women are married before the age of 18 and almost 63% women are illiterate in rural areas. 'Studies reveal that sexual harassment touches lives of nearly 40-60% of working women'. (Raymond, 2003)UNICEF (2012) declared that education can address some of societies' deeply rooted inequalities. Inequalities that condemn millions of children, particularly girls, to a life of missed opportunities. Klaveren (2010) stated that the most recent UNESCO report (2010) concluded that India's divide in education are among the largest in the world and that it is reinforced by regional and gender disparities. The report further revealed that in 2005 over three in 10 Indian females (30.7%) aged 17 to 22 were in 'education poverty', meaning that they had fewer than four years of education, nearly double the proportion of males of the same age (15.6%). Another source concluded for 2005-06 that 37% of Indian females aged 15 to 19 had less than six years of education with 45% in the rural areas against 19% in the urban areas.

Social Sustainability:

In India, women were traditionally brought up to become the homemakers. They were taught to cook, sew and care for children while their education was considered relatively unimportant. Their employment was always considered temporary. Women were encouraged to leave jobs if they found themselves a husband to 'provide for them' or to raise a family and take care of the home. With growing urbanization and globalization, life has become more challenging, giving impetus to education and employment of women. Economically also women have a tremendous ability to offer in the workplace since more and more women are gaining higher education and therefore are likely to acquire high-ranking positions in commerce, government sector and private enterprise. In the recent past, things have changed with around 42% (Thorat, 2006) of University graduates being females. In contrast, the stereotypes still prevail. In big cities of India, even though a large proportion of females is educated and holds important jobs, they are still held to be responsible for running the household and for child care. They find themselves juggling careers with child care arrangements and trying to fulfill other duties at home by being 'Super Woman'. In reality this kind of pressure may not be good for the

women, for the children, and for the society as a whole. Social sustainability needs real gender equity and real change.

The present investigation tries to find out a comparative as well as a comprehensive picture of the inbuilt gender biases of adults by taking up a quantitative study of four cities of Maharashtra state in India.

Materials and Methods:

An exhaustive questionnaire was designed to carry out a survey on gender equality for data collection. A pilot survey was conducted on 50 individuals and three gender experts were consulted to validate the questionnaire before the final questionnaire was prepared and used. Adult men and women from moderately educated and working middle class population (belonging to a monthly family income of Rs. 10,000/- to 50,000/-) from different locations in the cities of Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur and Nashik were surveyed. The sample consisted of 531 adult men and women of 18 years and above. Data collection was carried out by post graduate students of 'Social Work'. A formal training was given to investigators to sensitize them before they were sent to the field. During the data entering process, it has been observed that few respondents have not answered to few questions due to privacy and other issues. Those gaps in the data are treated as missing values.

Results:

Data was collected from 506 individuals from four cities i.e. Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur and Nashik of Maharashtra state in India. In all 267 females and 237 males participated in this study. Median age was 38 years. (Minimum age =17 years and maximum age =72 years).

It is many times argued that education is an input for social change so it was natural to expect high association between educational level and response to questions on gender bias. It can be seen from the following table that the sample consisted of Undergraduate (UG), Graduate (G), and Post Graduate (PG) males and females. It is usually claimed that males are more privileged in our society as far as educational opportunities are concerned. We checked this claim. (See Table No. 1)

Table No: I: Gender and Education Level:

It is found that there is no statistically significant (Chi-Square = 1.867, DF = 2, P-Value = 0.393) relationship between educational level and gender. Both gender groups are equally distributed between education levels considered herein and therefore the claim that "males are more privileged in our society as far as educational opportunities are concerned" is not true in the four major cities of Maharashtra state.

Table: II: Distribution of Respondents' Sex wise Occupation:

With regard to the occupation, the Table No. 2 and the corresponding Chi-Square results indicate that a greater statistically significant (Chi-Square = 41.367, DF = 4, P-Value = 0.000) **imbalance** exists between Males and Females in Indian (Maharashtra) cities. Larger percentage of the Females in India (Maharashtra) are occupied in housekeeping

(46.38% = 109/235), while only a lower percentage of Indian Males (20.27%) occupied in the same category. On the other hand, greater majority of Indian males are in the Service group (45.50% = 101/222), while only about 26.81% percent of Indian females are engaged in the service profession. Insignificant differences exist in the other three occupation groups between Males and Females in the cities of Maharashtra.

In Table No. 1 and Table No. 2, it was observed that in the sample under study, even though there was not much inequality between males and females in gaining education, there was a significant imbalance between them in choosing occupation. Around 35% females and 33% males had at least graduation to their credit, however, highest percentage of women (24%) were found carrying out housekeeping and highest percentage of men (22%) were engaged in pursuing a job.

Table No: III: City wise most frequently found adjectives for MEN:

The most frequently found adjectives from the respondents belonging to four major cities of Maharashtra to describe a man are Strong, Aggressive, Daring and Ambitious; which depicts a particularly masculine image of a man.

Table No: IV: City wise most frequently found adjectives for WOMEN:

Similarly, the most frequently given adjectives to describe a woman from the respondents belonging to four major cities of Maharashtra are Beautiful, Loving, Caring, Tolerant and accommodative; that portrays a predominantly feminine image of a woman.

The above table shows that the respondents implicitly presumed that being tolerant or loving was propriety of women. Females were expected to be beautiful whereas these were not attributes of the men. Men were expected to be brave, strong, aggressive and achievers. Respondents' expectations appear to be stereotypical. The question is – why? Why people fail to think that if a particular trait or attribute is desirable, then it must be possessed by each one of us. From the above findings we can say that the status of women in any society is determined by the relationship of various socio-economic aspects. With growing industrialization and urbanization, responsibilities of women and men have changed but their role stereotypes have remained the same.

According to Tattwamasi (2005) socialization is the process through which individuals locate themselves in society through various agencies, such as family, peer group and educational institution. And these agencies keep on reinforcing the discrimination and stereotypes causing social conditioning. Anand (2007) emphasized that 'Media can act both as a perpetrator and a protagonist in the portrayal of women. If we survey the present situations in different channels of media it reveals that women and girls are depicted as highly stereotypical; with lack of dignity, courage and subordination as their features.' In Aram's (2007) view 'News and media stories are more likely to reinforce than challenge gender stereotypes.' A study by World Association for Christian Communication (2005) revealed that the mass-media is male dominated because even if women constitute 52% of the world's population they are most underrepresented in media making up to only 21% of people featured. Janus (2012) further added that males in our mass-media have varied roles emphasizing their importance in spheres of

employment, politics, science, history, and the family while females have only two spheres circumscribed by their sexuality and domesticity.

Table No: V: Comparison of city wise Bias-Scores:

Figure No: I: City wise mean Bias Score of Respondents:

Figure No: II: Comparison of City wise median of Bias Score:

A city wise comparison of gender bias scores is important for describing the gender perceptions among different cities of Maharashtra. Table No. 5 summarizes several descriptive statistics of the calculated Bias scores for the four cities. Figure No 1. and Figure no 2. portray the mean and the median bias scores for the four cities. One-way analysis of variance, followed by 'Tukey post hoc pair wise comparison' was conducted to examine the significant differences in gender bias scores between the four cities. The results (F=13.68, DF= 3, p-value=0.000) indicate that the city of Nashik had significantly higher Gender bias compared to other three cities of Maharashtra. No significant differences were found in gender bias between Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur cities.

Nashik is a developing city just about 4 hours drive from the metro city of Mumbai. Nashik is known for its religious importance. It is described as 'Religious Nashik' which is an important city of India, as written in Epic Ramayan**.** Ram-Seeta-Laxman lived here for 14 years when they were in exile. That is why Nashik became a holy place. Nashik is one of the four cities in India that host the massive Kumbh Mela once in 12 years which has increased the religious significance of Nashik. There are many forts in and around Nashik like Trimbakeshwar which is one of the 12 Jyotirlingas in the country (India)**.**

Since religion is one institution that endorses the gender divide by defining morality, ethics and behavioural norms as well as the duties and rights of men and women; we can say that the same religious influence is responsible for the significantly higher Gender bias in comparison with all other 3 cities in Maharashtra State.

Discussion:
The present study compared gender biases of adult men and women from different localities in the supposedly developed cities of Maharashtra and finds out that gender biases are not limited to men; they are widespread in women too. In all the cities under study, Nashik, a city of religious importance, emerged as the most gender bias city in Maharashtra state in India. However, all the cities under study showed comparable biases despite differences in dimension, life style and socio-cultural background of the city. Though equally educated, 'More females in housekeeping and more Males in Service' pattern still exists!

The Indian community on the whole seems to harbors gender stereotypes even after over 60 years of independence that breeds social injustice. Gender equality is important not only for women's safety and well-being but also for their participation in development of the country to make it a sustainable society. Amartya Sen (2001) supported this view by saying that in dealing with gender disparity, there is a need to go beyond just the agency of women, but to look also for more critical assessment of received values. When anti-female bias in action reflects the hold of traditional masculinist values, what is needed is

not just freedom of action but also freedom of thought. Informed and critical thought is important in combating inequality of every kind.

Acknowledgements:

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Table No: I: Gender and Education Level:

Educational Level	Females	%	Male	%	All	%
Under Graduate	89	18.02	69	13.97	158	31.98
Graduate	97	19.64	100	20.24	197	39.88
Post Graduate	75	15.18	64	12.96	139	28.14
All	261	52.83	233	47.17	494	100.00

Table: II: Distribution of Respondents' Sex wise Occupation:

Sr. No.	Occupation	Female	%	Male	%	All	%
1	Housekeeping	**109**	23.85	45	9.85	154	33.7
2	Service	63	13.79	**101**	22.1	164	35.89
3	Self employed	24	5.25	33	7.22	57	12.47
4	Student	19	4.16	31	6.78	50	10.94
5	Professional	20	4.38	12	2.63	32	7
	Total	235	51.42	222	48.58	457	100

Table No: III: City wise most frequently found adjectives for MEN:

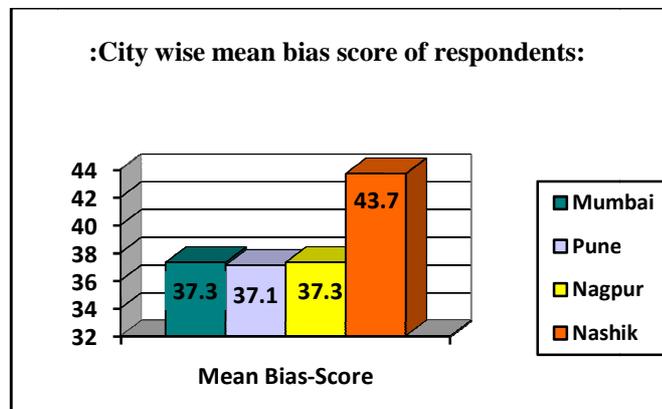| CITIES	Most frequently found 5 Adjectives for Men				
Mumbai	Strong	Daring	Ambitious	Dominant	Protective
Pune	Brave	Strong	Achiever	Aggressive	Ambitious
Nagpur	Strong	Daring	Aggressive	Leader	Ambitious
Nashik	Daring	Strong	Aggressive	Ambitious	Hardworking

Table No: IV: City wise most frequently found adjectives for WOMEN:

Cities	Most frequently found 5 Adjectives for Women				
Mumbai	Loving	Caring	Beautiful	Accommodative	Emotional
Pune	Tolerant	Beautiful	Loving	Achiever	Shy
Nagpur	Loving	Beautiful	Forgiving	Accommodative	Honest
Nashik	Beautiful	Loving	Caring	Tolerant	Delicate

Table No: V: Comparison of city wise Bias-Scores:

City	Mean bias-score	Standard Deviation	Co-efficient of Variation	Median	N
Mumbai	37.3	12.1	32.4	36.0	110
Nagpur	37.3	12.7	34.2	39.5	28
Nashik	43.7	10.7	24.5	45.0	266
Pune	37.1	12.1	32.7	37.5	102

Figure No: I: City wise mean Bias Score of Respondents:

Figure No: II: Comparison of City wise median of Bias Score: