GENDER INEQUALITY
AND DECLINING SEX
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India is a predominantly patriarchal society. In all patriarchal societies women have subordinate position, so is the case in India. Women have been deprived of many civic amenities in traditional Indian society. However evidences suggested that opportunities had widened immensely at certain level in modern Indian society. Despite emerging and increasing opportunities for women there are still inequalities between men and women in each and every sphere like education, economy, polity and social sphere i.e. Family, marriage etc. Sex discrimination in education and literacy exist in large measure, no doubt the literacy rate of female has grown from 8 per cent in 1951 to 39 per cent in 2001, but the corresponding increase in male literacy during this period was much more i.e. from 25 per cent to 64 per cent (Mundunri, 2007: 268). According to census 2001 male literacy is 75.85 per cent and female literacy is 54.16 per cent. Thus more than three fourth of the male population and a little more than half of the female population were literate which is a distressing situation (Murthy, 2007:442). Female work participation is also much lower than the male work participation both in rural and urban India. According to census 2001 women work participant rate is 30.8 per cent and 11.9 per cent as compared to male work participate rate in rural and urban India respectively. Thus there is wide gap between male and female work participation rate, more over the occupational distribution of women indicates
the gender segregation of task and the underlying reality of illiteracy among female workers which confines them to low paid and unskilled jobs as compared to males (Kundu, 2007: 85; Murthy, 2007: 224).

Similarly women are poorly represented in political and decision making bodies. Women representation in the Lok Sabha has never reached the mark of 10 per cent of the total member of the house. The highest representation of women was in the 13th Lok Sabha (1999) with 9 per cent of the total members. Even in the state legislature the representation of women is worse. The legislators can play a pivotal role in empowering the women by making reservation in various decision making bodies. The bill for reservation of 33 per cent for women in the parliament and state legislative assemblies has not yet passed for lack of unanimity among various political parties, this reservation is the prime need of the hour, no doubt by reserving 33 per cent seats for women in the local governance (Panchayati Raj and Municipalities) the presentation of women increase in the political bodies. But it should be noted that at the national level their representation is still below one-third of the total seats and reservation policy is also open to abuse, because the women political participation are merely proxies for some male member of the family. Hence women remain subordinate in spite of their reservation at gross root level (Kundu, 2007: 89-91).

Actually the status that is accorded to women by law and by the constitution of India there is a gap between the theoretical possibilities and their
actual realization i.e. a gap between the stated social objective and achievement, between legal frame work and empirical realities. In this way we find that reform in law and other policies don’t always make the desired impact or change because of structural unprepared ness of Indian society to accept their goals and means. Thus there are some sociological reasons which are responsible for gender inequality and declining sex ratio in Indian society which are discussed as below.

2.1 Normative Structure And Gender Inequality

Social structure cultural norms and value system are important determents of women’s roles and their position in society. They influence social expectations regarding behaviour of two sexes (Toward Equality GOI -1974). These normative structure vary from region to region, time to time and within time from one group to another group, nonetheless, there are some values which are being practiced through out the ages one of the most conspicuous value is patriarchy. According to Nelly P. Stromquist (1998) patriarchy is a historical system of dominance of men over women. Thus social structure of patriarchal order subordinate women to men and perpetuate all kinds of discrimination and oppressions against women in India in general and north India in particular, which resulted into the behavioral violence like violence within the family, at the work place, insults, oppression etc. The feelings of subordination often destroys self-esteem, self-respect, its sets limits on women aspirations so on (Andal,2002: 98, Sinha,1983: 23).
In this way patriarchal ideology as a cultural norm enforce gender construction which is oriented toward hierarchical relations between the sexes and neglect of women (girl Childs) in Indian society. Such norms and values which define women as subordinate and inferior are present everywhere i.e. in social relations, religious texts etc. In the religious texts of Hinduism the dominant religion of Indian society which influence the ethos of the Indian society. In Manu Smriti (about 200 B.C.) For Manu “women is a perpetual minor and has to lead whole life under the guardianship of either father, the husband or the son. The women salvation lies only in the devoted service to her husband”(Jahan,2004:16-17). Similarly son is considered as essential to the family in Hindu religion, because sons alone could perform the last rites to their departed ancestors or parents, the daughter could not perform these rites and was therefore considered as inferior to the son. Like Hindu religions other religions like Islam, Christiniy etc. also place women at lower pedestal than that of men and considered as subordinate and inferior (Panda,2008 :16-25). Thus the Indian world is a male world with ambivalent attitude toward female, i.e. majority of the Indian population follows the patrilineal mode of descent. The male is the only perpetuator of the line of the family name, which effects the position of women in society. There are also some matrilineal communities, concentrated in some pocket of the Indian society in these communities or group the lineage is traced through mother and husband’s come to live in wife’s house after marriage but even in these
communities (structure) there is male domination. Although women may enjoy a higher position or status as compared to the patriarchal system (Pruthi, 2003: 6-10). Beside patriarchal discriminative values Indian society is also characterized by hierarchy, hierarchy in groups, sex, age etc.

According to Angli Behave (1995) the Indian caste system has a rigid hierarchical form of four varna (caste)... she pointed towards the cultural practices of lumparing women and shudras i.e. the untouchable who are considered as pollutant, the former due to menstruation and later is due to their lowly caste and occupation (N, Anand, 2002:29). In this way a multitude of derogatory attribute have been ascribed to women, like shudras she must not study Vedas or perform any scarifies. The impurity associated with menstruation and child birth restrict women from joining religious ceremonies and strengthen the view that they are naturally inferior to men (Pruthi, 2003: 1-4).

Thus the normative structure of the Indian society is the greatest obstacle to the status of women, as there is a considerable ambiguity about the status of women. Although some sacred text give them an exalted status by saying “the God reside or live where women are worshipped” but there is another profile of women that she is believe to be fickle and fragile impurity and thoughtless. She has to be kept under strict control, being fragile she needs protection at all stages of her life. Tulsi Das the well-known poet, in one of his off-quoted stanzas lumps women with the drum, the unlettered,
the shudras and cattle who need to be punished to be kept on the right path. Similarly the notion of pati parmeshwar and pativarta i.e. the husband as the supreme God, she was after all meant to be her husband shadow and to follow him through the course of life (Prabhu, 1997:154; Ghadially, 1988:90, Dube; 2005: 106-111). In this way the normative structure of the Indian society perpetuates gender inequality and violence and have a major influence in shaping attitudes as well as behaviour patterns of human groups towards women (girl child) and the emerging trend of declining sex ratio cannot be viewed in isolation from it (Toward equality GOI, 1974 : 37).

2.2 Institution Of Family And Gender Inequality.

The institution of family and types of family organization provide the major contours of the socio-cultural setting in which women are born, brought up, and live their lives. This institution of family in the Indian society have implications for the status of women and is more or less responsible for gender inequality in the society (Toward Equality, 1994:54).

Indian family system are joint and patriarchal the status structure is very complex, one of the determining factor of status in the family is sex. The women member of the family get a subordinate status i.e. as a wife, as a mother, as a daughter and as a sister is subordinate to male member of the family. Women are primarily associated with the home, as home makers they are expected to look after domestic chores such as cooking and serving foods, they are expected to play the role of mother to nourish the children, as
a sister to care the sibling and as a daughter to help the mother in domestic chores. Thus all the work that women do viewed collectively as being an important component of feminine role and it is not forgotten that they are being performed by those who have certain identity in the family i.e. As mother, as sister so on (Toward equality, GOI, 1994:84). Thus it is socially acceptable that within the family the male is the master and women is inferior and subordinate, social pressure force women to maintain this status quo. A women who do not accept this traditional role of submissiveness and subordination need to be tamed into accepting the particular position and any means including varying types of violence is justified in achieving this goals (Ghadially,1988:151-152).

Thus in the Indian patrilineal and patrilocal family system, a son is looked upon as the father successor and supporter of the parents in old age and perform the last ritual when they die. Where as on the other hand a daughter even in domestic ritual cannot take the place of a son and a discriminatory feeling about girl is existed in the family that a girl is of no use in her family, her contribution will have to be made in some common description of a daughter in family like “a bird of passage, another’s property, a guest in parents house, a things which has to be given away so on” (Toward equality,GOI,1974:56-57), son should remain in the parental household after marry and equally share in property, where as daughters customarily leave their natal family on marriage. (Baum,pp.34.). This transfermality of the girl from
parents house to the husband house is a poignant reality of the Indian society.

Bida, rukhasat and doli signify a goodbye to the daughter after marriage (Toward equality, GOI, 1974: 57). After marriage daughter have no share in family property, according to chief text book of Hindu law The Mitakshara of twelfth century each male is entitled to an equal share of the family property from moment of his birth, but women whether in the status of daughter, sister, wife, or widow are entitled to maintenance by their male kin they had no other vested rights in the family property. Thus women have no voice and harassed and discriminated by giving such justification and the sphere of men’s and women’s activities tend to sharply separated, especially among those in north India who observe purdah, although only a small portion of Indian families ever wanted or could afford to practice purdah but the principal of restricting women away from the male men out side their kinship circle has been common in Indian family system (Mendalbaum, 1996: 35-38). The highest percent of purdah was found in Haryana (72.61%) Rajasthan (62.18%) similarly the rate of violence against women is also highest in other north Indian states (Pruthi, 2003: 9). The most pitiable condition is of the single women like unmarried, widowed, deserted or divorced, these women are considered to be easily available and are more vulnerable to rape or sexual assault (Sinha, 1989: 16-19).

Sociologist and lawyers Freeman and Maidment agree that all these problem of discrimination and violence against women is deep rooted in
societal one, arising out of the family system. Individual right from their birth socialize to accept i.e. the male member develop a negative thinking toward female, and female are socialize to accept their secondary position in the family. Since marriage of a daughter is a matter of anxiety and expenditure in family so many of them are not welcomed and violence manifested them selves directly in feticide, infanticide etc. (Sinha, 1989: 68). Thus the female or the girl child is neglected and crushed from birth and even before birth in the family, she is socialized and conditioned to accept all the humiliation heaped on her and women today are not safe in and secure in their own family, the concept of home, sweet home is no more for many women they become the victim of men in their own families (Misra, 2007). Times of India Feb. 02, 2009 reads as “a 13 year old girl was allegedly raped by her cousin and when he complained to her father, he too sexually assaulted her”. In this way family which traditionally perceived as an arena of love, affection, gentleness and a centre of solidarity and warmth has now become a centre of discrimination, exploitation, assault and violence ranging from slapping, homicidal assault, infanticide, foeticide etc. Thus in spite of the legal provisions and constitutional protections the rate of violence and crime against female are increasing and it is true that social problem or violence against women cannot be put down with the legal measure alone, what is need is a change in the attitude of (family members) society towards girls and boys, laws are also needed to be straightly implemented.
2.3 Institution of Marriage and Gender inequality

Like the institution of family, the institution of marriage also greatly responsible for many problems of major importance for women. Various issues like age at marriage, procedure for contracting and executing marriage, customs of dowry and bride wealth, pattern of presentation between the wife and the husband’s kin groups, multiplicity of spouses, divorce and separation, widowhood and remarriage are vitally relevant for assessing women status in the society (Toward equality, GOI, 1974:62).

The term used it for this institution in Indian society is “Vivah” i.e. marriage, vi-vah means to carry. Marriage thus signifies the transfer of a female from one family to another, this transfer of female in Indian society is a mere transfer from one patriarchal group to another i.e. her natal patriarchal group (father, brothers etc.) to that of her husband and father in-laws where they perform the inferior and subordinate role. It is an inescapable choice because the person of pubescent daughter in a house unwed and unclaimed is uncomfortable, even ritually dangerous. It was believe to be a sin to keep a daughter or girl in her parental home after she started menstruating. Thus the unmarried girl may bring social disgrace, but on the contrary the need for marrying off a grown sons is not quite so urgently felt as that of marrying a daughter in Indian society. This implies that women are discriminated in each and every sphere in their life (Mandalbaum, 2008:97-98). As the institution of marriage mature discrimination and violence prevail in each and every sphere,
i.e. during the selection of spouse, during marriage, after marriage i.e. violence prevail in each and every form. During the selection of spouse or girl as “Manu Smriti prescribe that a man must not marry a girl with reddish hair, or who have extra bodily limb or who has no hair or too much hair on the body, nor should marry one who has no brother” (Prabhu, 1963:169-219). All these are baseless and discriminating ideologies against females as virginity at the time of marriage was an essential condition for the women but not for the men, the entire ritual was oriented towards men’s happiness and pleasure, the wife vowed to obey the husband implicitly (Andal, 2002:22-23). Similarly during the most important rite of marriage viz. the Saptapadi rite (sapta-seven, pade-step) the bridegroom leads the bride for seven step, again here the bride (female) is directed to follow the bridegroom (male) hence remain subordinate and inferior or unequal partner in marriage life (Prabhu, 1963:169-219). After marriage a women is expected to adjust to her father-in-law’s house hold and merge her individual identity into that of her husband. She is placed under several restrictions and has little or no say in decision making and is directly subordinate to her mother-in-law, women (wife) observe several fast that they get same husband life after life the notion of patiparmeshwar i.e. considered husband as supreme God (Pruthi, 2003:8-9, Dube 2005).

Thus according to Hindu Dharma Sastra individual has to pass through many samskar and each in one way or other bow the seed of discrimination or inequality against the female, as after the marriage the male making rite
(Pumsavarna samaskara) is performed during the third month of the wife pregnancy. On the birth of male child the period of ritual uncleanness was seven days and for girl child it was fifteen days (Prabhu, 1963:218-219). In this way female child is unwelcome in Indian society. All these ingrained hatred toward the female or girl give way to further discrimination and violence in the institution of marriage, like dowry, bride price, divorce, widowhood etc. Wife on account of their failure to bring the promised or expected dowry have been beaten up, kept without food for days together, locked up in dingy rooms, tortured physically and mentally, strangulated to burn alive or lead to commit suicide. Various act of non physical violence such as harassment insulting behavior, cession of marital intercourse and refusal to provide treatment, food, clothing or accommodation by the husband. Dowry indicate a loss of status for girl in her father’s house where she becomes liability rather than asset. This social evil is widely prevalent in the institution of marriage and there are numbers of social and cultural sanctions for the practice of dowry and the monster of dowry has ruined families and drunk the blood of many girls (Srivastav, 2005:190).

2.4 Gender Inequality And Women Empowerment

Women empowerment is a global issue and debate on women’s rights are at the forefront of many formal and informal campaigns world wide. Empowerment is used widely, but seldom define, empowerment is a multi
dimensional process which enable women to realize their true potential and empower them in all sphere of life (Sahay, 1998).

The world bank defines empowerment as ‘the process of increasing capacity of individuals or groups to make choices into desired actions and outcomes’ for women such freedom is often severely curtailed due to gender inequality in the house hold as well as in the society (Murthy, 2007:222). Empowerment in its simplest form means the manifestation of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male domination. It is both a process and the result of the process. It is transformation of the structures or institutions that reinforces and perpetuates gender discrimination. It is a process that enable women to gain access to and control of material as well as information resources. It is since the mid 1980’s that this term become popular in the field if development in reference to women. In India it is the sixth five year plan (1980-85) which can be taken as a land mark for the cause of women. It is here that the concept of women and development was introduced formally for the first time (Sahay, 1998:17-18).

The provision of the constitution of India granting equality to women in various spheres create the legal frame work within which the depart of women and child Development functions for women developments. The paradigm of social developments have been swiftly changing with greater attention to gender issue at the global and National level. The Government of India has continuously been formulating strategies and initiating processes to
bring women into main stream. Women constitute half of the country’s population and it is abundantly clear that there can be no developments unless their needs and interests are fully taken into accounts. The department of women and child development since its inception has been implementing special programmes designed to improve the socio-economic status of women. In line with this integrated approach to the empowerment of women and enhancement of the status of girl child. The government was sought to change attitudes in the family, the community and society towards women and the girl child and to mobilize these social units to play their rightful roles in creating a conducive environment. The intervention under taken by the government are directed to empower women and girl children legally, socially, educationally, economically and politically.

Some major programmes and schemes implemented by the government in this regards are Balika Samridhi Yojana of 1997 with specific objective of changing community attitudes towards the girls child, and also encourages enrollment and retention of girls children in schools, Adolescent Girl Scheme is a specific intervention for girls in the age group of 11-18 years aimed at meeting their specific needs in the areas of nutrition, health, education and skill developments, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) Of 1993’ Indira Mahila Youjna of 1995, Hostel for working women, Short Stay Homes for women and girls of 1969. Similarly the other helping hand of governments in empowering women are Sarve Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Education Guarantee
Scheme (EGS) Distance Education Programme, Mahila Samakhya Scheme of 1989, Khasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas, Swadhar Scheme of 2001-02, above all The National Commission for Women of 1992 and National Policy for the Employment of 2001, to safeguard the rights and interests of women’s.

In addition, the government of India has brought special legislation and amendments to protect and safeguard their rights. The enactment of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendment i.e. Panchayati Raj and Nagara Palikas in India. No doubt a landmark in empowerment and a revolutionary measure by reserving 33 percent seats for women at all level in the local governance. But despite all these no substantial can be achieved in practice, except the ideological consciousness. The bitter truth is that women suffer from one kind of discrimination or the other everywhere and anytime. Despite rapid growth in literacy gendered deprivation still exist. However census 2001 show increase in female literacy significantly from 39.4 percent in 1991 to 54.2 percent in 2001, but the shameful state is that more than three-fourth of male and a little more than half of the female population were recorded literate and the situation is quite distressing and more vulnerable for rural women (Joshi, 2008:7-9; Sharma and Bordoli, 2008:10-12). Further the gross enrolment exhibits a pyramidal structure with a broad base at the primary level and gradual tapering as one moves to higher level. Kerala is the only state in India where gross enrolment ratio across sex at the secondary level is greater than at primary
level. Undoubtedly the gender gap in enrolment still persists (Kundu, 2007:83). There is also a low proportion of women in political bodies in spite of reservations of seats at local level as mentioned earlier, the highest representation of women was in thirteenth Lok Sabha (1999) with 9 percent of the total member, their representation in the Lok Sabha has never reached the mark of 10 percent of the total member of the house. Reservation policy is also open to abuse, because there has been more discussion in India about the possibility that women political participation are merely proxies for husband or powerful men within their families or caste.

In the same way in spite of various legislation for social development of women like domestic violence Act 2005, dowry prohibition Act 1961 as amended in 1986, sati prohibition Act 1987, prohibition of child marriage Act 2006, National Commission for Women Act 1990 etc. the women are not empowered to get rid from the shackles of patriarchal structure inside and outside their home (India, 2009; Kundu, 2007). In this way discrimination of women from womb to tomb is prevalent in the society. The National Plan for Women 1988 made a free, and objective analysis that there is a continued inequality and vulnerability and women are oppressed in all sphere of life, they need to be empowered. Hence when we talk of women development, it is important for us to recognize that intervention at all levels namely social, cultural, economic, educational, political etc. are required and are possible if
change take place in the existing system and social structures which are not at all favorable to the women today.

Thus there is a need to review the meaning of gender and sexuality and the balance of power between men and women at all level (Murthy,2007:441-447). Otherwise empowerment of women and equal status are more easily said than put into practice in such a society ridden with orthodox and conservative ideologies and more than that where religious sanction and support are lacking regarding the prejudice against women as discussed in earlier paragraphs of this chapter. Thus discrimination against the girl child from womb to tomb is prevalent in India society.

2.5 Declining Sex Ratio In India

As discussed above that the women and especially the girl children in India has been the most vulnerable for centuries, and are even today, vulnerable to deprivation as well as discrimination. Our social set up, societal laws, customs, traditions, religious beliefs and above all the sophisticated medical technology has shattered the natural laws for balancing its natural sex ratio (Singh and Chaduary,2007:89). Sex ratio i.e. the number of females per thousand males is one of the important demographic indicator of social health of a society, it is a sensitive indicator of women status, imbalance in sex ratio generates a lot of demographic, social and ethical problems. Declining sex ratio has become one of the major social problems of Indian society. It has decline from 946 in 1901 to 927 in 1991, It means that the sex ratio of
the country has fallen 19 points in 40 years, as shown in the below table 2.1 which present the trend in sex ratio in India since 1901 to 2001.

Table 2.1: Sex Ratio in India from 1901-2001.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>census year</th>
<th>Sex Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1901</td>
<td>972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>934</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>933</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The sex ratio in the country had always remained unfavorable to females it has shown a long term declining trend. The sex ratio at the beginning of the twenty century was 972 and there after showed continuous decline until 1941. In 1951 there is a marginal increase of one point, but there after it again dropped for two consecutive decades to reach 930 in 1971. In fact between 1961-71 the country saw the sharpest decline of 11 points in the sex ratio, there after it fluctuated marginally around 930 in successive censuses. Although decennial census of India 2001, recorded 6 points increase in the sex ratio i.e. from 927 in 1991 to 933 in 2001, but it remain lower than that was in 1951.

Sex ratio is not uniform in all the states and union territories of the country. High sex ratio as per census 2001 was recorded in the state of Kerala with 1058 females. It was lowest in the Daman & Diu with 709 females.
Among all the districts in India, Mahe district in Daman and Diu recorded lowest sex ratio with 591 females (Waheed, 2007:33). As census 2001 registering an improvement of six points from 927 in 1991 to 933 in 2001 census. But a matter of serious concern is the decline in child sex ratio i.e. the number of female children under 5 for every 1000 males children under 5. The 1991 census tabulated for the first time sex ratio for the age group 0-6 and 7 and above separately. From the single year age data by sex, it has always been possible to obtain sex ratio statistic for any age group (Premi, 2001:1875-1876). India is one of the few countries in the World to have a low sex ratio, as the over all sex ratio in the country is declining steadily during the last half century. It has decline form 976 in 1961 to 964 in 1971, 962 in 1981 to 945 in 1991 and now to 927 in 2001. It is clear that the sex ratio in the age group 0-6 has decreased at a much faster pace than the over all sex ratio of the country after 1981 (Waheed, 2007:37). The juvenile sex ratio has been declining in all states and union territories. However this decline is lower in southern states as compared to north Indian states which will be discussed in detail in the fourth coming chapter.

CONCLUSION

From this analysis we can say that in spite of increase in the level of social awareness, growing education, prosperity etc. and of various legislation for social development of women like domestic violence Act 2005, dowry prohibition Act 1961 as amended in 1986, sati prohibition Act 1987, prohibition
of child marriage Act 2006, National Commission for Women Act 1990 etc. the women are not empowered to get rid from the shackles of patriarchal structure inside and outside their home. In this way discrimination of women from womb to tomb is prevalent in the society and numbers of females decreasing in our society. Glance at daily newspapers would bug the splashing news of female foeticide, infanticide, child prostitution, child marriage, sexual abuse, dowry deaths, eve teasing, abduction etc. are easily found in Indian society. Thus there are various socio-economic and technological factors of declining sex ratio in various states of the country, while the position of the states especially of the North Indian states will be examine in following chapter, causes and consequences of declining sex ratio will be presented in detail in the fourth chapter.