Abstract

GENDER INEQUALITY IN RURAL AREAS: A STUDY OF CHAKDAH AND HARINGHATA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCKS IN NADIA DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

The concept of gender inequality may be perceived as a concept culturally implanted or socially extended. Etymologically, gender inequality refers the entrenched and buried disparity between two halves of gender. Basically, it is a multi-faceted social problem which varies across geographical regions and social groups. It is therefore difficult but essential to find out the factors responsible for gender inequality and formulate strategies towards reduction of this inequality.

The association between development discourse and gender inequality is multidimensional and very specific to temporal as well as socio-cultural conditions within a space. The analysis of gender perspectives based on certain assumption and beliefs in a particular social milieu is very important. The aspect of gender is controlled by activities and roles allocated to women and men in a particular society both in domestic and community sphere. Both the men and women characterize gender roles and gender regulations through their different actions and blend them according to tradition and choice.

The specific thrust of the present research is given on ‘inequality’ which links gender with the development process in two facets namely, individual, person specific inequality and structure embedded inequality. Individual gender inequality talks about the resource allocation within genders whereas the structural inequality focused on the overall inequality which may be socio-cultural, economic or demographic. Gender equality is a kind of equal valuation of genders in a particular social arena.

The present study is an effort to provide locality specific micro level gender development initiatives and its proper implementation. So, the relevance of the present study lies in the explanation of community specific variations in the determinants of gender inequality issues both in a quantified and descriptive manner in an account of rural society.
Rural areas of Chakdah and Haringhata C.D. Blockshave been selected as the study area which covers the southern part of Nadia District in West Bengal. Both the C.D. Blocks have proximity to Kalyani and its industrial belt, the Satellite town of Kolkata.

The main objectives of this study incorporate the analysis of spatio-temporal variations of gender inequality in rural areas of Chakdah and Haringhata C.D. Blocks in Nadia District, West Bengal during the period of 1991 to 2011. An attempt has also been made in this study to identify factors responsible for gender inequality and formulate effective measures for reduction of gender inequality in the study area.

Secondary data have been collected mainly from published Government reports, documents and relevant publications of different NGOs. Primary data have been collected from field survey through survey schedule, in-depth interviews and participant observations. A total number of 2373 households have been surveyed.

Both the quantitative and quantitative techniques have been used in this study. To analyse gender inequality, descriptive statistics, modified Sopher’s Disparity Index of Kundu and Rao (1986), Ibrahim Index (Mo Ibrahim Foundation of African Governance, 2012) and Factor Analysis with principal component method (Hotelling, 1933; Sharma, 2004) have been used. Digital and analogue cartographic techniques have been used to present significant observations and findings.

Disparity indices considering the gender wise distribution of child population, literacy rate and work participation rate across Villages in the entire study area have been calculated following the technique of modified Sopher’s disparity index of Kundu and Rao (1986). Composite disparity index has been calculated dividing the sum of three disparity indices by three. Three gender inequality zones have been delineated based on composite disparity index for the years 1991, 2001 and 2011.

Considering the gender inequality zones of 1991, five villages from each zone, i.e. altogether 15 villages have been selected as sample Villages. 25 per cent of the total households in each Village have been randomly selected for household survey.
To analyse gender inequality in sample Villages, the following five indicators and 21 variables have been chosen for the years 1991 and 2011.

(i) Demographic indicator:
Variables: 1. Sex ratio, 2. Child sex ratio, 3. Percentage of household (Principal earner- male), 4. Percentage of household (Principal earner- female), 5. Female age of marriage (Years)

(ii) Educational indicator:
Variables: 6. Male literacy rate (Excluding 0-6 years), 7. Female literacy rate (Excluding 0-6 years), 8. Male mean years of schooling (Excluding 0-6 years), 9. Female mean years of schooling (Excluding 0-6 years), 10. Percentage of male dropout (Excluding 0-6 years), 11. Percentage of female dropout (Excluding 0-6 years)

(iii) Reproductive health indicator:
Variables: 12. Percentage of married female using family planning methods (15-49 years of age group), 13. Percentage of mothers received antenatal care (15-49 years of age group), 14. Mean age of mothers during first child birth (15-49 years of age group), 15. Percentage of mothers facing delivery complications (15-49 years of age group)

(iv) Economic indicator:
Variables: 16. Male work participation rate, 17. Female work participation rate

(v) Social indicator:
Variables: 18. Percentage of household decision makers - Male (18 years and above), 19. Percentage of household decision makers - Female (18 years and above), 20. Percentage of mothers ready to give dowry in their daughter’s marriage, 21. Percentage of married female facing domestic violence

To standardize data, Ibrahim Index ($I_b$ index)has been used. To analyse the level of gender inequality in sample Villages, Composite Ibrahim index has been calculated by summing up the Ibrahim index of the following selected variables and then dividing by the number of variables considered.

(i) Gender wise population, (ii) Gender wise 0-6 years population, (iii) Percentage of households having male as principal earner and percentage of households having female as principal earners, (iv) Gender wise literacy rate, (v) Gender wise mean
years of schooling, (vi) Gender wise work participation rate and (vii) Gender wise percentage of household decision maker.

The Village level observations based on selected variables in the study area evidenced that considerable gender inequality persists. Overall socio-economic background of the sample Villages provides a clear understanding to identify the specific interface of gender inequality issues in the study area. Sex ratio is highly uneven at Village level. Out of 15 sample Villages, child sex ratios have decreased in 11 Villages during the study period. A wide gap has been observed in the percentage of households having male and female as their principal earner across overall population as well as religion and caste groups for both the years 1991 and 2011. Female age of marriage is significantly low in the Muslim population. Both the male and female literacy rates have been increased, but the gender wise disparity has remained high. Female literacy rate varies remarkably across religions and castes. Female literacy rate of Muslim is much lower than the Hindu. Female mean year of schooling is very low, especially in the Muslim, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population. The high rate of female dropout is one of the crucial variables causing gender inequality. Gender inequality has remained very reflective in case of work participation rate. The female work participation rate in Muslim population is significantly low.

In the study area, female access to health services e.g. accessibility of reproductive health care system like awareness about family planning methods and proper services related to antenatal care is very poor. Adoption of family planning methods is not well accepted by all religious and caste groups. Moreover, ignorance towards family planning methods has been noticed in Muslim, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population. Receive of antenatal care is well pervaded only those limited Villages where both the communication system and medical infrastructure is sound. The level of awareness of antenatal care also varies across religions and castes. In Muslim and scheduled caste population, the mean age of motherhood is very low. Delivery complications have been observed as significantly high in Muslim and scheduled caste population due to low age of marriage and low mean age of motherhood. In spite of the legal obligations in practicing dowry, the dowry system widely
pervaded in the study area. Moreover, domestic violence has been identified as a key factor in determining the level of gender inequality in sample Villages.

During the assessment of the social perception of the inhabitants of the study area towards gender inequality it is noticed that the causes of gender inequality in the study area are structural as well as conditional. The gender inequality issue put into practice both from traditional practices or may results from the current pattern of rural socio-cultural livelihood. It is very difficult to identify the sole impact of the presence of diversity in the cultures of religious groups or the existence of different caste groups on the problem of gender inequality in the study area as it cannot be explained in terms of a single issue. But the religion and caste wise gender inequality has a strong impact on inter and intra household gender disparity in the study area. In case of present situation, it is observed that, the interlinked factors of gender inequality show an overlap in the analysis of religion and caste wise analysis of gender inequality. It is also very significant to notice that in the study area the benefits of reservation policies are mostly male accessible. These have a very little impact on the rural Muslim, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe women in the study area.

During the identification of the basic causes responsible for gender inequalities in the study area it is observed that the degree of gender inequality in the study area varied across religion and caste.

In 1991, considering overall population in sample Villages, the important variables responsible for gender inequality have been identified as the percentage of married female facing domestic violence, male literacy rate, percentage of mothers received antenatal care, percentage of household (principal earner – female) and percentage of household (principal earner – male). Similarly in 2011, the important variables have been recorded as the percentage of household (principal earner – female), percentage of household (principal earner – male), percentage of female dropout, female literacy rate and female work participation rate.

In 1991, for Hindu population the important variables are percentage of household (principal earner – male), percentage of household (principal earner – female), percentage of married female facing domestic violence, percentage of mothers received antenatal care and percentage of mothers facing delivery complications. On
the other hand in 2011, the important variables are percentage of married female facing domestic violence, percentage of decision makers (female), female literacy rate, percentage of household (principal earner – female) and percentage of household (principal earner – male).

In 1991, for Muslim population the important variables are percentage of household (principal earner – female), percentage of household (principal earner – male), sex ratio, percentage of mothers ready to give dowry in their daughter’s marriage and percentage of married female facing domestic violence. In 2011, the important variables are percentage of household (principal earner – male), percentage of household (principal earner – female), percentage of mothers facing delivery complications, male work participation rate and female work participation rate.

In 1991, for other religion, the responsible variables for gender inequality are mean age of mothers during first child birth, female age of marriage, female work participation rate, female literacy rate and percentage of married female facing domestic violence. In 2011, the important variables are mean age of mothers during first child birth, percentage of household (principal earner – female), percentage of household (principal earner – male), percentage of decision makers (female) and percentage of mothers facing delivery complications.

In 1991, for scheduled caste population the important variables for gender inequality are percentage of household (principal earner – male), percentage of household (principal earner – female), percentage of mothers received antenatal care received, female work participation rate and percentage of female dropout. Similarly in 2011, the important variables are percentage of household (principal earner – female), percentage of household (principal earner – male), female literacy rate, female work participation rate and male literacy rate.

In 1991, for scheduled tribe population, the important variables for gender inequality are percentage of married female facing domestic violence, percentage of household (principal earner – male), percentage of household (principal earner – female), female literacy rate and percentage of decision makers (female). In 2011, the important variables are percentage of decision makers (male), percentage of mothers ready to
give dowry in their daughter’s marriage, male literacy rate, mean years of schooling (female) and percentage of male dropout.

In 1991, for the category of other than scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population, the important variables for gender inequality are male literacy rate, percentage of household (principal earner – female), percentage of household (principal earner – male), female literacy rate and percentage of married female using family planning methods. In 2011, the important variables are female work participation rate, percentage of household (principal earner – male), percentage of household (principal earner – female), sex ratio and male literacy rate.

In case of measures to eradicate the existing gender inequality along with the associated factors of women subordination in the study area, it is noticed that the obliteration of gender inequality in the study area is possible through the overall socio-economic development of women. The measures to lessen gender inequality should be organised and implemented as per the requirements of the specific target group. There must be a balance of sex ratio and child sex ratio. An increase is required in percentage of households having female principal earner. Female marriage must be promoted at legal age. Increase in female literacy rate and female mean years of schooling are needed. Reduction in female dropout is highly effective. Adoption of family planning methods by rural married women is also crucial. Receive of proper antenatal care by mothers and reduction in early motherhood is also indispensable for lessening delivery complications. Increase in female work participation rate as well as female’s opinion in household decision making are vital. Moreover, the abolition of dowry system and obliteration of domestic violence are also effective.

The identification of gender inequality issued distinctly in every caste and religion in the study area is associated with the fact that how the rural female from the very particular group categorize themselves in terms of gender inequality and anticipates an up gradation in current rural livelihood. Therefore, the policy frameworks have to be reactive towards both the women of the privileged and non-privileged groups in the study area.
For overall socio-economic development of women and in turn to reduce gender inequality in the study area the essential prerequisites include provision of proper education, skill based training, special care in reproductive health, active participation in communal life, opening towards self-decisions and at household as well as community level. Case specific in depth analysis of gender inequality and outcome based strategies are necessitated at the present hour. However, complete eradication of indifferent social behaviour towards women is also a prime requisite.