

Feminism And Gender Stratification: A Sociological Study

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ABSTRACT

Feminism is a social, political, and intellectual movement that seeks to achieve equality between men and women in all spheres of life. It challenges traditional norms and structures that have historically marginalized women and restricted their opportunities. At its core, feminism advocates equal rights, representation, and freedom from gender-based discrimination.

Gender stratification is the hierarchical arrangement of individuals in society by gender. It is a system in which men and women are unequally valued, resulting in unequal access to resources, power, and opportunities. This inequality is deeply rooted in cultural beliefs, social institutions, and historical practices that often privilege men over women.

Feminism is important because it challenges systemic inequalities between genders and advocates for equal rights, opportunities, and representation across social, political, and economic spheres. Feminism seeks to dismantle these structures by promoting awareness, legal reforms, and cultural change, ultimately contributing to a more just and inclusive society where individuals are not limited or discriminated against on the basis of gender.

The relationship between feminism and gender stratification is central to understanding how societies function. Feminist theories analyze how gender-based inequalities are created, maintained, and challenged. By examining issues such as wage gaps, education, political representation, and domestic roles, feminism seeks to dismantle gender stratification and promote a more just and inclusive society.

KEYWORDS: *Feminism, Gender Stratification, Patriarchy, Intersectionality, society*

I. INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a social, political, and intellectual movement that seeks to achieve equality between men and women in all spheres of life. It challenges traditional norms and structures that have historically marginalized women and restricted their opportunities. At its core, feminism advocates for equal rights, representation, and freedom from gender-based discrimination.

Gender stratification refers to the hierarchical arrangement of individuals in society based on gender. It is a system in which men and women are unequally valued, leading to differences in access to resources, power, and opportunities. This inequality is deeply rooted in cultural beliefs, social institutions, and historical practices that often privilege men over women.

Gender stratification refers to the social ranking, where men typically inhabit higher statuses than women. Often, the terms gender inequality and gender stratification are used interchangeably. Gender stratification can be examined at the level of individual outcomes and interactions or with a macro perspective that compares indexes of gender inequalities across countries. Although welfare states research examines many aspects within and across societies, it provides important insights in how state policies can shape patterns of gender stratification.

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A perfect example is the number of men vs women in politics. Literally, men have more power because more senators, congressmen, governors, and mayors are men. ... Gender stratification is basically unequal power based on gender.

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II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Gopalakrishnan, L. et al. (2024). The diminished empowerment of women constitutes a significant societal concern with detrimental effects on public health. In India, entrenched gender norms establish a patriarchal framework that engenders systematic disadvantages for women compared to men. These gender norms—socially constructed assumptions regarding the roles, attitudes, and characteristics of men and women—sustain inequality and restrict women's possibilities. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between community-level gender norms for men and women and women's empowerment in India. Women's empowerment

was delineated by four criteria: mobility autonomy, decision-making authority, economic independence, and health autonomy. A rise of one standard deviation in community-level inequitable gender norms for men and women correlated with diminished odds of freedom of mobility, decision-making authority, and health empowerment. No statistically significant correlation was detected between community-level gender norms for men and women and economic empowerment. Inequitable gender norms are a risk factor that adversely affects multiple aspects of women's empowerment. Our findings corroborate our assumptions that women's empowerment is influenced distinctly by the gender norms of both men and women. Our study highlights the urgent necessity for coordinated actions to confront and reform unjust gender norms, facilitating the attainment of gender equality and the empowerment of women, as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals.

Prakanshi (2024). Feminism is a broad movement that seeks to address various forms of injustice and to advocate for women's rights. Despite their diversity, women's groups globally articulate common issues related to reproductive, political, and legal rights. The principal aim of feminism is to liberate women from various forms of oppression and to promote international solidarity among women. Nonetheless, a significant disparity persists in the quality of life of women in economically disadvantaged nations of the Global South relative to their counterparts in affluent countries of the Global North. Women living in the economically advanced areas referred to as the Global North generally reap advantages from capitalism and the global economy. In contrast, women residing in the economically deprived areas of the Global South generally face poverty and difficult working conditions. Indian feminism emphasises the equal importance of economic exploitation, racism, and gender discrimination as critical issues. Indian feminism is regarded as more inclusive than other feminist movements, as it equally emphasises reproductive and productive roles. This research aims to analyse the disparities between Western and Indian feminist ideologies, with a particular emphasis on the obstacles of adopting Western ideals in India, especially the notion of essentialism. This study investigates the effects of rising inequality on systems reliant on male participation, alongside the philosophical issues related to feminism in both Western and Indian contexts. This study utilised qualitative comparative analysis to highlight the differences in the goals of feminist groups about gender equality and women's empowerment, thereby elucidating the complexities inherent in these two significant feminist traditions.

Khandelwal, P. (2024). Gender disparity affects all society strata and the majority of social institutions. The family is an institution where adjustments for gender imbalance progress slowly. Numerous ideas have been posited regarding the origins of gender disparity over the years. All theories for gender inequality in the household have been presented, including those rooted in biology, sex roles, and the concept of performing gender. These methodologies have faced criticism for being excessively preset, failing to tackle gender disparity at macrosocial levels, and overlooking the necessity for reform. Gender is analysed concurrently throughout all tiers of social reality from the perspective that it is structural. If we can leverage its complexity, we may utilise this dynamic, diverse theoretical framework to address gender imbalance within families. The structural view on gender is best suited to analyse gender disparities in contemporary families, which are marked by dynamic fluidity and complexity, and to propose feasible solutions for addressing that discrepancy. This follows the examination and analysis of various historical viewpoints on gender discrimination. Gender disparity in India is profoundly shaped by the nation's cultural and religious context. One must contemplate the equality of men and women, necessitate a reevaluation and restructure of many of India's ancient cultural traditions. Many Indian families that engage in sex discrimination perceive calls for reform or initiatives to eradicate prejudice as assaults on their political, social, or cultural traditions.

Dhanda, D.S. & Pareek, B. (2023). Gender role expectations are present in every nation, ethnic group, and culture, influencing individual behaviour and perceptions of feminism overall. Religious beliefs and ideologies significantly influence these behaviours and attitudes. If religious teaching supports traditionally established gender standards, it promotes gendered behaviour and sexist perspectives. The objective of this study is to examine the influence of religious fundamentalism and sexist attitudes on young individuals' views regarding gender role beliefs and feminism. A sample of 80 students aged 18-24 years was selected for this purpose. The participants were chosen using purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods. The acquired data were examined using a t-test and multiple regression analysis. The results indicated a considerable disparity in gender role ideas and attitudes toward feminism between male and female participants. The findings indicated that both religious fundamentalism and sexist ideologies are significant predictors of gender role attitudes and feminism.

Mukherjee (Majumdar), I. (2023). Disparities between men and women in India's political, economic, and health institutions are termed 'gender inequality'. India's ranks vary across multiple criteria, and overall, in several global gender inequality indices; these assessments are contentious. Gender inequality and its societal foundations significantly influence the sex ratio in India, women's health throughout their lifetimes, their

educational attainment, and their economic circumstances. The intricate issue of gender inequality in India impacts all genders uniformly and disproportionately disadvantages males compared to other genders. Nevertheless, when examining the population of India in its entirety, women face substantial disadvantages in various critical aspects. Notwithstanding the equal rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution, gender disparities persist. Research indicates that men predominantly face discrimination in the workplace and various other environments. Discrimination affects all aspects of women's lives, including career progression and mental health issues. Despite the prioritisation of women's protection in Indian legislation addressing rape, dowry, and adultery, these overtly discriminatory practices persistently afflict many individuals' lives today.

Singh, S. (2022). Gender imbalance is a widespread issue in India, impacting all sectors, including education and health. Notwithstanding substantial economic advancement and social reforms, gender inequities persist profoundly. This study examines the multifaceted aspects of gender inequality, utilising empirical research and policy documents to offer a thorough analysis. In the educational sector, women persistently trail in enrolment and literacy rates, primarily due to societal standards, economic limitations, and safety apprehensions. In the healthcare sector, women experience elevated death rates and encounter restricted access to medical services. These discrepancies are not consistent nationwide and demonstrate considerable differences among states. For example, states such as Kerala and Himachal Pradesh have achieved notable advancements in gender parity, whereas Uttar Pradesh and Bihar significantly trail behind. Policy attempts have been implemented to rectify these discrepancies; nevertheless, their efficacy has been constrained. The research finishes by underscoring the necessity for multifaceted interventions that employ a gender-sensitive approach. Policymakers, civic society, and other relevant stakeholders must unite to tackle the fundamental causes of these gaps, such as societal norms and economic obstacles, to promote a more equitable society.

Akman, S.U. (2021). Gender is a fundamental characteristic of human beings, and the initial association with gender is typically biological sex. The notion of social gender encompasses significantly more than inherent biological traits of males and females. Society establishes gender roles based on biological sex. It delineates the two genders by designating social responsibilities, roles, and behavioural norms, while also critiquing and guiding them concerning their attire, conduct, societal expectations, and accountability. Consequently, the two sexes, initially born as equals, cease to be equal due to societal roles and the tasks and responsibilities imposed by society, leading to the emergence of gender inequality. This undermines equality to the disadvantage of women. The public sphere is utilised as a reference in defining women's social existence, identity, and behaviours. In numerous aspects, including appearance, behaviour, and attitude, the public sphere subjects' women to significantly more social demands and constraints than men. These constraints and pressures lead children to perceive social expectations regarding their attire, speech, demeanour, and interactions. Furthermore, the societal pressure that women encounter is not exclusively from men. The constraints and limits in question originate from society, hence possessing a social character. This study seeks to examine the correlation between individuals' demographic characteristics, particularly gender, and the social pressures experienced regarding gender roles and marital status, utilising logistic regression models based on the micro dataset from the Turkish Statistical Institute's 2019 Life Satisfaction Research. The data reveals that women experience societal pressure at a far greater rate than men about their gender, marital status, and clothing choices. This circumstance serves as a manifestation of gender imbalance between men and women.

Azcona, G. & Bhatt, A. (2020). This article examines advancements in research, theory, and measurement of feminist progress; it reflects on the commitments established at the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and enquires whether the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their dedication to gender mainstreaming can provide the measurement framework that the BPfA lacked. This section provides an overview of the progression of feminist thought in the realm of development. We subsequently evaluate the extent to which pivotal global frameworks, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Leave No One Behind principle, have incorporated feminist methodologies in measuring development. We subsequently introduce an intersectional methodology for assessing progress that acknowledges the impact of inequalities not only between women and men but also within groups of women and girls, and across other dimensions of sustainable development. This comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach is termed Inequality, Gender, and Sustainable Development (IGSD).

Jenkins, K. et al. (2019). To guarantee that international development promotes women's rights and gender equality, it is imperative that feminist principles permeate and underpin all facets of research. Feminist principles in research can be interpreted in multiple ways. The primary objective is to establish environments and chances that expose the lived experiences of power disparities and differences, while supplying evidence that may be utilised to combat these entrenched injustices. Feminist principles are frequently utilised to contest the ongoing

marginalisation of impoverished women and girls from decision-making, resources, and opportunities across various contexts. Feminist principles and an emphasis on 'gender' enable discourse on the range of sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as the power dynamics between individuals and organisations based on gender. The foundation of the workshop that inspired this journal issue is the premise that the research process must include feminist principles, thereby empowering all participants.

Law, H. & Sikora, J. (2018). In contrast to Anglophone sociology, the sociological examination of gender disparities in East Central Europe has not yet attained recognition as a significant area within stratification study. To tackle the principal social concerns of this century in East-Central Europe, we contend that the region requires significant advances in gender stratification research and greater use of quantitative approaches. This improvement would enhance both stratification research and feminist sociology in East-Central Europe. It would also promote the dissemination of professional expertise in stratification and feminist studies to the public. Utilising Weber's traditional notion of ideal types, we contend that gender stratification research, through its engagement in scholarly and public discourse, has the capacity to illuminate disparities in opportunity between males and females and to mitigate such inequalities.

FEMINISM AND GENDER STRATIFICATION

1. Understanding Gender Stratification

Gender stratification is a system that assigns roles, responsibilities, and privileges based on gender. It is deeply embedded in social institutions such as family, education, religion, and the economy.

Key Features:

- Unequal access to resources
- Gender-based division of labour
- Patriarchal social structures
- Institutional discrimination

Examples:

- Wage gaps between men and women
- Underrepresentation of women in leadership
- Gender stereotypes in education and media

2. Historical Development of Feminism

Feminism is a broad social, political, and intellectual movement that advocates gender equality, with a particular focus on improving women's rights and status.

At its core, feminism is about:

- Equal rights and opportunities for all genders
- Challenging discrimination and inequality
- Addressing issues like pay gaps, education access, safety, and representation

3. Feminism has evolved through different “waves,” each addressing specific issues:

First Wave (19th–early 20th century):

Focused on legal rights such as suffrage and property ownership.

Second Wave (1960s–1980s):

Addressed workplace inequality, reproductive rights, and social roles.

Third Wave (1990s–early 2000s):

Challenged universal definitions of womanhood and embraced diversity.

Fourth Wave (21st century):

Emphasizes digital activism, intersectionality, and issues like sexual harassment.

Major Feminist Theories

Liberal Feminism

Focuses on achieving gender equality through legal reforms and equal opportunities.

Key ideas:

- Equal access to education and employment
- Anti-discrimination laws
- Individual empowerment

Radical Feminism

Argues that patriarchy is the root cause of gender inequality and must be dismantled.

Key ideas:

- Critique of traditional family structures
- Opposition to gender-based violence
- Emphasis on systemic change

Socialist/Marxist Feminism

Links gender inequality with class inequality and capitalism.

Key ideas:

- Economic exploitation of women
- Unpaid domestic labour
- Capitalist structures reinforcing patriarchy

Intersectional Feminism

Recognises that gender inequality intersects with race, class, caste, sexuality, and other identities.

Key ideas:

- Multiple layers of oppression
- Inclusive approach to feminism
- Focus on marginalized groups

4. Gender Stratification in Key Social Institutions

Family

- Traditional gender roles assign caregiving to women
- Domestic labour is often unpaid and undervalued

Education

- Gender stereotypes influence subject choices
- Girls may face barriers in STEM fields

Economy

- Wage gap persists globally
- Women are overrepresented in informal and low-paying jobs

Politics

- Underrepresentation of women in leadership positions
- Gender bias in political participation

FEMINISM IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

Feminism in India is a diverse, evolving movement focused on achieving gender equality, deeply intertwined with colonial history, national development, and social justice. Unlike the often-individualistic Western feminism, Indian feminism is collective, tackling patriarchal norms, caste-based oppression, and issues like dowry, violence against women, and property rights.

Key Aspects of Feminism in the Indian Context Include:

Historical Phases: The movement began in the 19th century, with male reformers addressing issues such as Sati and child marriage, and was led by pioneers like Savitribai Phule, who established early schools for girls. The second phase coincided with the independence movement, where women's rights were integrated into the national agenda. Post-independence, the focus shifted to legal reforms (e.g., Dowry Prohibition Act 1961)

Intersectionality and Diversity: Indian feminism is not a singular ideology. It encompasses various perspectives, including feminist activism against caste-based discrimination, known as Dalit feminism, which critiques mainstream feminism for focusing primarily on upper-caste women.

Key Issues: Key issues include tackling violent patriarchy, land ownership rights, sex-selective abortions, and the protection of women within the workforce and at home.

The Influence of Globalization: Modern Indian feminism operates in the context of globalization, which has introduced new challenges and opportunities for women's autonomy and economic independence.

Indian feminism continuously challenges the patriarchal structures within the family, community, and society, demanding a more equitable society, especially for women from marginalized sections.

III. CONCLUSION

Feminism, as both a social movement and a theoretical framework, has played a crucial role in exposing and challenging gender stratification—the structured inequalities between individuals based on gender. From a sociological perspective, gender stratification is deeply embedded in social institutions such as family, education, religion, economy, and politics, reinforcing unequal access to power, resources, and opportunities. Feminist theories—including liberal, radical, Marxist, and intersectional feminism—have collectively highlighted that gender inequality is not merely a personal issue but a systemic one. These perspectives reveal how patriarchal

norms and values are reproduced through cultural practices, socialization, and institutional arrangements, thereby sustaining male dominance and marginalizing women and other gender identities. Importantly, feminism has not only critiqued inequality but also contributed to significant social transformations. Legal reforms, increased political participation, access to education, and workforce inclusion are outcomes of sustained feminist advocacy. However, despite these advancements, gender stratification persists in both overt and subtle forms—such as wage gaps, occupational segregation, gender-based violence, and underrepresentation in leadership roles. Contemporary feminist discourse, particularly intersectionality, emphasizes that gender inequality intersects with other axes of stratification like class, race, caste, and sexuality. This broadens understanding of oppression and calls for more inclusive, nuanced approaches to social justice.

In conclusion, while feminism has made substantial progress in addressing gender stratification, the persistence of inequalities underscores the need for continued critical analysis and collective action. A more equitable society requires not only structural changes but also a transformation of cultural attitudes and everyday practices that perpetuate gender hierarchies.

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