



Recent trends of inequality in India: Sociological discourse

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Abstract

India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world and it is also a fact that it is also one of the most unequal countries. On the basis of statistics, it can be said that inequality has been increasing rapidly here for the last three decades. The rich are getting richer at a very fast pace, while the poor are still struggling to get minimum wage, access quality education and healthcare. This economic gap and growing inequalities affect women and children the most. The 'Time to Care' report released ahead of the 50th annual meeting of the World Economic Organization (WEF) reveals that 1% of India's population has four times more wealth than nearly 950 million (i.e., 70%) people. If seen, the number of billionaires in the world has doubled during a decade. And this increasing inequality has created many challenges and problems. It has also been revealed in this report that women in India are discriminated against at levels like political empowerment, economic participation and opportunities and health. It is also clear from a report that in terms of gender inequality, India was ranked 108th in the list of 153 countries in the year 2019, 112th in the year 2020 and 140th in the year 2021. Growing inequality in India, especially gender inequality, is a matter of deep concern, so an attempt has been made to present the sociological discussion on this subject in two parts in this article.

Keywords: Thomas Piketty, Peter Saunders, world economic organization, gender inequality, Amartya Sen, marc Galanter

Introduction

The processes of globalization and liberalization created an import-oriented nature of economy in Indian society due to which urban poverty came into existence on the one hand and the self-sustaining economic system of the village was fragmented without any suitable alternative on the other. Therefore it can be said that the policies of development in India could only partially contribute to the eradication of poverty. As a result, poverty and inequality became an integral part of the lifestyle of Indian society, which was legitimized by the values of religion, caste, region, karma and rebirth. Marc Galanter therefore argues that the failure of the state to effectively implement the value of social justice has made poverty a necessary part of the lives of Dalits, minorities and rural masses.

French economist Thomas Piketty, while presenting the concept of participatory socialism in his book 'Capital and Ideology', said that everyone has the power to participate in the economy. He also argues that workers should be able to participate more in the running of their companies whether or not they have a share in the capital. But we live in a world where the bottom 50% of the population does not inherit any wealth while some of the population inherits wealth worth millions or billions. History has shown that investing in education and reducing inequalities are important steps for economic prosperity. In any country/society where there is unequal distribution of wealth, resources and power, radical changes are needed to eradicate institutional inequality. And it becomes even more complicated in a country like India where caste, religion, language, gender, regional inequality is already prevalent.

The recently released World Inequality Report in December 2021 states that India is a poor and unequal country. It has also been claimed in this report that the global income of the country has also reached a very low level. On one hand, the top 10% of the population in India has 57% of the national

income, the bottom 50% has only 13% and the 40% of the population or the middle class has 29.5% of the total income. Moreover, the income of 1% of the rich alone is equal to 22% of the total income of the country. It becomes clear after considering that such high economic inequality is capable of creating many social, cultural and political problems in the society. Because unless the model of development focuses on education, health and redistribution of resources, it is impossible to eliminate or reduce inequality.

The report also indicated that gender inequality in India is very high with the share of female workers earning only 18 per cent. It is a fact that any country can be made prosperous only by investing in the fields of equality, education and health, and not the concentration of economic power in the hands of one person or 10 persons, prosperity and overall development in a country. Could Economist Thomas Piketty, who played a key role in preparing this report, argues that greater use of private property and market forces can be helpful in driving growth patterns and enriching the economy. He claims that it is not enough for India to give tax exemption to the industry, but to deal with the economic crisis caused by the corona virus epidemic, income guarantees have to be given to poor families. Along with this, the government will also have to invest in public infrastructure. It cannot be denied that man cannot play an active role in the development of society or country without fulfilling his basic needs. While every citizen has the potential to contribute to development, then why not utilize his potential. If we can do this, we can be successful in our endeavour to remove India from the list of most unequal countries in the world.

The question is, is this disparity nature-given or man-made? Why and for what this inequality? If inequality is necessary for development, then the countries facing inequality for many decades should have been included in the list of

developed countries by now, but this did not happen. Because it is a fact that inequality can never be a precondition for development. As a human being is born with both body and mind, it is the law of nature for both to develop together. If any part of the two is less or more developed, it is put in the category of abnormal personality. That is, the body has developed but not the mind or the mind has developed but the body remains the same, even then the society sees them as underdeveloped/abnormal. Similarly the overall development of the society or the country depends on the equal opportunities available to each and every citizen. Be it education, politics, health, resources, economic prosperity or anything else. If this was not the case and the development of the country depended only on the prosperity or development of a few people, then our position in the World Inequality Report or the Human Development Index would not have been so low. The development index would have been fixed keeping in mind only 10 per cent of the rich. That is, it is clear that the persistence of inequality hinders the path of development. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the increase in inequality is also responsible for the increase in many social problems, such as poverty, unemployment, crime, family tension, etc. Therefore, there is a need to take positive steps in this direction.

Social scientist Peter Saunders is of the opinion that no society can ever be completely socialist, but every society can develop some such systems that all groups get some benefits. Saunders discusses three types of similarities from this point of view. The first formal or legal equality means that every member of the society should be guided by the same type of law. Secondly, equality of opportunities means that every person should get equal opportunities, he can compete with others, and he can be successful. Third, equality of results means if everyone gets equal opportunity to prove himself, then later on, its results will start coming in the same way in the society. One can agree with his argument that by doing so, an egalitarian society can be established to some extent.

He also argues that a large section of the ruling class came into existence on the basis of private ownership of capital. Along with this, there has been a rapid increase in the number of white collar workers. An important reason for the inequality of wealth in any society is the power of the ruling class. And this class is found in any society from 5 to 10 percent. On the other hand it is also true that many members of the ruling class transfer their wealth to their relatives or friends and thus this wealth becomes the monopoly of a particular group. While in the subordinate class we can include the population who receive wages and salaries. A large group also emerged in the form of the middle class which tries to derive market benefits by investing a large part of their salary in the market. Thus this vicious cycle of inequality of wealth and power is perpetuated. Also, the possibility of degradation of democratic values cannot be ruled out. And when democracy is challenged, then what kind of society emerges, it can be understood by looking at today's perspective.

There will be only discussion and writing on gender inequality that has been going on for centuries or will the society ever take steps towards its end. In the recently released Global Gender Gap Report 2021, India has come down 28 places i.e. 140th place while in the year 2020 India was at 112th place among 153 countries. This is so when the

aspect of gender equality is also included in the preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties and policy directive principles of the Indian Constitution. Imagine if this had not happened then what would have been the situation of gender gap. The publication of the Gender Gap Report was started in the year 2006 by the World Economic Forum. In this report, 156 countries of the world evaluate the progress made towards gender equality on 4 grounds such as economic participation and opportunity, educational opportunity, health and survival and political empowerment. In this report, the condition of other countries of South Asia like Bangladesh (65th), Nepal (106th), Pakistan (153rd), Afghanistan (156th), Bhutan (130th) and Sri Lanka (116th) is also not very good with small differences. The situation of gender gap in entire South Asia is appalling. Talking about the political participation of women in India, there has been a decline of 13.5% in the political empowerment index. The number of women ministers was 23.1% in the year 2019 which has come down to 9.1% in the year 2021. The share of women in professional and technical roles has declined to 29.2%. Women also account for 14.6% of senior and managerial positions and only 8.9% of firms in the country have female managers at the top. The estimated income of women in India is only 1/5 of that of men. The number of girls missing annually due to prenatal sex determination tests is around 1.5 million, of which 90-95% is in India and China alone.

We think that coming from the era of bullock-carts to the era of airplanes is development, instead of working with hands, working with modern machines is development, increasing the importance of robots or artificial intelligence in place of humans, then what kind of development is this? Today's society is a victim of pessimism despite being prosperous. First, man enslaved man and now machine is enslaving him. It is true that we are still unfamiliar with the true meaning of development. As Amartya Sen says, people do not know that freedom, development, openness and liberalism are the sets that make the capabilities of the individual and the group infinite. If this is not happening, then development, freedom, openness has not become a part of our life in true sense. This is the reason why the gender discrimination that has been going on for centuries is still deeply entrenched in people's thinking, the living proof of which is this report. Along with the development in the society, all kinds of discrimination should have ended, but it is increasing. Increasing discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, gender puts a question mark on evolutionary thinking because if this is development then what would be called backwardness.

It cannot be denied that in reality, men present themselves as elite in the context of gender relations in India, who seem to legitimize inequality between men and women at every level through their arguments. Despite this, however, the interference of women in the field of political leadership and intellectual direction has been a reality. Even today women have an important role in many political parties. In fact, if compared, the contribution of women in the Indian freedom struggle has been more important than in the revolutions of Russia and China. Then why the contribution and role of women is neglected. This inequality is not only at the level of India but exists at the global level. The number of women in all the parliaments of the world is only 25%. There are only 4 countries where the number of women in the parliament is more than 50%. According to the figures

published in the newspapers, there are 788 members in both houses of the Indian Parliament, of which only 103 are women (13%). What kind of democracy is this where a woman can be worshiped as a goddess and can be exploited and despised as a witch but is not given equal status as a human being? It can be a vote bank but cannot take decisions independently. She can make a house a home but still she has no home of her own and lives in fear of ever being thrown out of any house. Why is this difference continuing in society? It cannot be denied that two factors are directly responsible for women's exploitation, firstly private property and secondly ownership of means of production. Because he neither has any private property nor does he own or control any means of production. And these two factors institutionalize women's exploitation.

According to the National Family Health Survey, about 70% of women in 11 states and union territories in the country never tell about the atrocities on themselves and never ask for help from anyone. Boys have more opportunities to attend school than girls. This inequality found in schools produces many far-reaching consequences. Similarly, in many countries the reality of unequal facilities exists in the field of politics and commerce. The field of women is only the field of social participation in traditional family life. It is also seen that many basic facilities are not provided to women. For example, lack of bathrooms and toilets for women in public places is seen in every country and the absence of these facilities blocks the mobility of women and they gradually stop entering many areas. In fact, the man becomes the judge of every act of the woman and on the basis of this he also tries to ensure what facilities should be given or not given to him. Even his voice is reduced. Speaking loudly does not suit women, showing any part of the body gives her a sense of embarrassment in front of men, from her lack of rights on property like house and land makes women completely private property of men in which she is a slave and man is her master. This position represents the most disgusting/abominable form of ownership.

Most of the labor of the woman is her family responsibility, even in various functions, she feels happy by doing housework or is seen as an object of entertainment. Beating her in the family, harassing her and even having sex by her husband against her will is a cruel and abominable act that makes a woman a part of deprivation in every field. She is physically assaulted so that she accepts the logic that only man gives security that is, she can always be depended on man. This can happen only when he makes the proper culture of fear, violence and deprivation a part of his personality and because of this, he accepts father, brother, husband and even son's beating or rebuke as his cultural destiny. And in fact the same has been happening which is continuing even today.

Perhaps that is why Mahatma Gandhi used to say that 'the day a woman would walk freely on the streets at night, on that day we can say that India has achieved independence'. Another point to be noted is that statistics represent quantitative results, not qualitative analysis. That is, figures are given on an average basis and the correct picture of any type of development cannot be obtained on the basis of average. Because policies are made on the basis of statistics for the welfare of the citizens, but if the statistics are misleading, then it becomes natural to question the success of the policies. Therefore, there is a need that the state,

economists and the intellectual class should take some concrete steps towards reducing the growing inequality in the society, which can really embody a just and equal society.

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