

UNDERSTANDING GENDER GEOGRAPHY

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Introduction:

Geography is one of the leading disciplines which are classified under two categories.. Physical Geography and Human Geography. Social Geography, economic geography, political geography and cultural geography are important branches of human geography. Gender geography is the sub branch of Social geography. Gender relations are sought to be explained in the context of locality research. The same holds true in other subject like, economic geography, political geography and cultural geography. Cultural geography focuses on the cultural processes and social practices which connects people and places at a range of scales from the local to the global. Rapid economic restructuring through the processes of globalization appears to be opens 'new spaces' of political or social interaction for women of course such processors may not be always positive. The forces of globalization are equally, likely to result in re-making or reworking of existing gender relations. The subject geography is multidisciplinary in its nature. It always ties up with various aspects of socio-cultural, economic and political disciplines. Status of women is a subject matter of sociology. Through the social geography one can easily understand such status in space and place context. Social feminist geographers have been increasingly attentive to the ways in which gender relations differ from place to place and assumed that such differences not only reflect but partially determine local economic change. Such an orientation in study and belief, the factors for social transformation were influential in trying feminist geography movement towards locality research.

Keywords-

Historical Perspective:

Why should geographers be interested in gender? When feminist geographers first answered this question in the late 1970s, their response was to point out that much of the geography then being written came from a male perspective. In 1982, Monk and Hanson urged human geographers not to exclude 'the other half' in human geography. Writings in 2002, an answer to this question puts issues of gender even more centrally onto the geographical agenda. The study also shows or argues that an understanding of the gender relations between men and women in different parts of the world, or variations in ideas about masculinity or femininity in different places, is critical to how social, economic and political geographies, are constructed and contested.

Nowadays its important to recognize that ideas about gender intersect with other aspects of identity which include understandings of class, ethnicity, sexuality as well as disability or age. Indeed much of the early feminist writing has been criticized for failing to recognize the diversity of experiences of women.

Gender Geography:

A very simple way of thinking about gender is to define it in contrast to sex. While sex describes

biological differences-being male or female. Gender describes socially constructed characteristics-masculinity and femininity. Geographers have emphasized the diversity of gender relations in different places as well as the specificities of gender within macro processes of globalization or economic restructuring.(Laurie,1999).

Gender geography covers various aspects of male, female relationship such as their attitude, economic, social and political status of women. The geography of gender is in many ways not a sub-discipline in itself but it is central within different sub-disciplinary fields. The term gender refers to socially created distinctions between femininity and masculinity, while the term sex is used to refer to biological differences between men and women.

In brief the study of gender to broader social, economic and political processes and the ways in which spatial concepts are profoundly gendered. It is also important to pay attention to both to how men and women experiences different spaces and to the representations of space and place.

DIMENSIONS OF GENDER GEOGRAPHY:

1 Women empowerment :

Gender Empowerment is determined by the degree to which women and men participate actively in

economic, professional and political activity and take part in decision making.

Women's empowerment begins with their consciousnesses, perceptions about herself and her rights, her capacities and her potential awareness of her gender and socio-cultural, economic and political forces that affect her. Women's empowerment dashboard contains 13 woman-specific empowerment indicators that allow empowerment to be compared across three dimensions: reproductive health and family planning, violence against girls and women, and socioeconomic empowerment. The four indicators on reproductive health and family planning are coverage of at least one antenatal care visit, proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel, contraceptive prevalence (any method) and unmet need for family planning. The four indicators on violence against girls and women are women married by age 18, prevalence of female genital mutilation/ cutting among girls and women, violence against women ever experienced from an intimate partner and violence against women ever experienced from a no intimate partner. The five indicators on socioeconomic empowerment are female share of graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics programmes at tertiary level; share of graduates from science, technology, engineering and mathematics programmes in tertiary education who are female; female share of employment in senior and middle management; women with account at financial institution or with mobile money-service provider; and mandatory paid maternity leave.

Most countries have at least one indicator in each tercile, which implies that women's empowerment is unequal across indicators and across countries.

2 Gender and inequality

Gender inequality is now recognised as being the most pervasive inequality worldwide. There is no country in the world where women enjoy the same opportunities as men. The following extract in 1.4.1 outlines trends and progress in reducing gender inequalities around the world.

Trends and progress in gender inequalities

Since the First World Conference on Women in 1975 all the key indicators show progress towards greater sex equality in average terms: female illiteracy has declined, girls' enrolment in primary and secondary school has increased rapidly, women's health indicators and their use of contraception have improved and almost everywhere women's presence in public life has grown. However, progress has been slow and uneven: gender inequalities have often persisted, sometimes deepened or taken new forms.

In many developing countries the gender balance in education still favours boys. Gender segregation in labour markets means that although women's participation in paid work has increased they are frequently to be found in the low status jobs with low pay and insecure conditions. Women are disproportionately represented amongst the poor. Although the proportion of women in national assemblies doubled between 1995 and 2004, women still only account for 16% of representatives and their effective participation is limited by entrenched male hierarchies. Women are more likely to experience ill health than men and gender violence continues to be a very significant underlying cause.

Severe 'son preference' in some countries in Asia has been exacerbated by falling fertility levels and outweighs women's natural biological propensity to outlive men. Large numbers of women are 'missing' from the populations in China and India mainly as a result of infant and child deaths from differential access to health care and nutrition.

Although the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing represented a policy landmark, the Beijing Plus 10 Review in 2005 declared that the record on gender justice has been ambivalent.

Source: summarised from Molyneux and Razavi (2006) pp. 4-9.

These 'gender gaps' exist within and between nations. The Gender and Development Index (GDI) created by the UNDP in 1995 is a single measure that summarises the 'gender gaps' in the Human Development Index (HDI). This comprises three variables: life expectancy, literacy, and GDP *per capita*. It is a useful summary measure of gender inequality that can have a powerful effect on influencing policy decision-makers.

The nature of gender inequality means that the relevance of the indicators it incorporates varies more across different social contexts. For instance, gender disparities in literacy may be virtually eliminated whilst women's economic and political opportunities remain highly restricted. So at the same time, the UNDP introduced a companion index called the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) that reflects women's participation in political decision-making, their access to professional opportunities, and their earning power. Taken together the GDI and GEM provide a better summary picture of gender inequality and this can be compared across different countries (see 1.4.3). However, the GDI and the GEM are based on the HDI and focused on the 'gaps' between the genders in literacy, life expectancy and GDP *per capita*. Whilst the GEM measure encompasses political decision-making, access to professional opportunities and power over economic resources, both measures are somewhat limited in reflecting women's experiences. The GDI is not considered a measure of gender inequality, rather it is the HDI adjusted

for gender disparities. Both of these measures have been criticised for crudely disaggregating data and estimating incomes for countries with poor data resulting in inaccurate measures of inequality. In the 2010 Human Development Report, further problems of the GDI and GEM were identified as being dominated by income levels and the GEM indicators reflected a str

3. Comparing gender gaps between countries

Gender equality does not depend on the level of income in a society. Poorer countries do not necessarily experience larger gender gaps than wealthy ones. China with average *per capita* income of 5003 US\$ has a GDI of 0.754 whilst Saudi Arabia, where average *per capita* income is more than twice as much (at 12 266 US\$), has a slightly lower GDI (of 0.749). Even amongst poorer countries the extent of gender gaps can vary widely. Whilst *per capita* incomes in Vietnam and India are broadly comparable (at 2490 US\$ and 2812 US\$, respectively) the former fares significantly better on GDI (at 0.702 as compared with 0.586). It is not income that makes the difference for gender equality: political commitment and prevailing social and cultural institutions are what matters.

These factors are complex in their operation and even where gender gaps appear relatively small with respect to the key outcomes of life expectancy, literacy and income, there may be serious discrepancies between women and men in other highly significant areas. This is illustrated by the large differences that can occur between a country's performance with respect to GDI and its score on GEM. Japan, Saudi Arabia and Sri Lanka all perform relatively well with respect to GDI (0.937, 0.749, and 0.747 respectively) but all score relatively poorly with respect to GEM (0.534, 0.253, and 0.370 respectively). Despite good outcomes overall for women with respect to some fundamental dimensions of well-being, that there are serious inequalities in these societies with respect to women's power in society both politically and economically.

It is important to note in making these kinds of comparisons that GDI can fall as a result of worsening gender gaps but also as a result of worsening human development. This is well illustrated by Tanzania where average *per capita* income stands at a mere 621 US\$ making it the third poorest country for which the UNDP reports data. Its HDI ranks at 128th/140 countries for whom there is gender data and its GDI ranks at 127th/140 countries for which there is data. Although its GDI is relatively low at 0.414 it is in line with its overall level of human development, and both these indicators are relatively good considering Tanzania's extremely low GDP *per capita*. The GEM is not closely linked to human development or to income levels and it is interesting that

Tanzania's GEM stands at 0.538 which ranks 42nd/80 countries for which these data exist.

Source: data from UNDP (2005) Human Indicator Tables 1, 25 and 26.

The Gender Inequality Index (GII)

This index includes maternal mortality rates (from UNESCO) and women's parliamentary representation. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) attempts to deal with some of these limitations by adding three new dimensions which reflect women's reproductive health status, empowerment and labour market participation in comparison to men's. It also excludes income which is seen to be less relevant in developing countries. The desegregation of data ensures that high achievement in one dimension does not compensate for low achievement in another dimension. The GII value increases as gender inequalities increase. One of the major advantages of the index is seen to be the ability for it to capture the linkages across different dimensions for example schooling and access to work. The GII does not however capture other relevant dimensions such as time-use, access to assets, domestic violence, and local-level empowerment (UNDP 2010 p. 90).

Global Gender Gap Index:

The Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks gender parity across four key dimensions or sub-indices economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. It measures scores on a 0 to 100 scale, which can be interpreted as the distance covered towards parity or the percentage of the gender gap that has been closed.

The report notes that India's score of 0.629 was its seventh-highest score in the last 16 years. India also "recovered" ground since 2021 in economic participation and opportunity though the report goes on to add that the labour force participation shrunk for both men (by -9.5 percentage points) and women (-3 percentage points). The gender parity score for estimated earned income improved because even though the values for both men and women diminished, the decline was more for men. India recorded a declining score on political empowerment due to the diminishing share of years women have served as head of state for the past 50 years, says the report.

Facts of Gender Parity Country:

Although no country achieved full gender parity, the top 10 economies closed at least 80% of their gender gaps, with Iceland (90.8%) leading the global ranking. Iceland was the only economy to have closed more than 90% of its gender gap. Other Scandinavian countries such as Finland (86%, 2nd), Norway (84.5%, 3rd) and Sweden (82.2%, 5th) are

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in the top five, with other European countries such as Ireland (80.4%) and Germany (80.1%) in ninth and tenth positions, respectively. Sub-Saharan African countries Rwanda (81.1%, 6th) and Namibia (80.7%, 8th), along with one Latin American country, Nicaragua (81%, 7th), and one country from east Asia and the Pacific, New Zealand (84.1%, 4th), also take positions in the top 10.

India's Performance:

India ranks 135 among a total of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2022 and is the worst performer in the world in the "health and survival" sub-index where it is ranked 146.

The Global Gender Report 2022, which includes the Gender Gap Index, says it will now take 132 years to reach gender parity, with the gap reducing only by four years since 2021 and the gender gap closed by 68.1%. But this does not compensate for the generational loss between 2020 and 2021 as the trends leading up to 2020 showed that the gender gap was set to close within 100 years. South Asia will take the longest to reach gender parity, which is estimated to be likely in 197 years.

Conclusion:

"India is the third-worst performer in the region, having closed 62.5 per cent of its gap. Because of its large population, India's performance has a substantial impact on the region's overall performance. Now in its 15th year, the report benchmarks the evolution of gender-based gaps in four areas: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. It also examines the drivers of gender gaps and outlines the policies and practices needed for a gender-inclusive recovery. For the 12th time, Iceland is the most gender-equal country in the world. The top 10 most gender-equal countries include Finland, Norway, New Zealand, Rwanda, Sweden, Ireland and Switzerland.

Way forward:

Those who are interested to undertake research project and Ph.D topics or even writing research papers must consider the gender issues in our society and highlights the causes of gender effect and how to overcome these social problems .ex. Status of Women Panchayat Members