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RESEARCH ARTICLE

BEYOND EMPLOYMENT: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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Abstract

A study of the evolution of development and the empowerment of women in India is provided. In contemporary culture, addressing this issue is crucial for the advancement and empowerment of women. Looking back at previous conversations and arguments on empowerment and growth, we can see many recurring tendencies. Globally, many women organised and campaigned for their rights, according to this development research. They viewed feminism as unimportant to progress since it was seen as a luxury enjoyed only by women in wealthier countries. Conventional development ideas have led to concepts like "basic human needs," "satisfying the poorest," and "growing with equality." Previously, development was seen as an administrative issue that could be remedied only by delivering enormous amounts of money and technology to underdeveloped nations. To make amends, women were involved in the design. Rural women were often excluded from development due to lack of education and reliance on manual labour to survive. Women's studies have inspired them to consider sexual development. Concerns raised include childcare, reproductive rights, abuse against women, and family planning. Their work has also transformed our perspective on development. Economic expansion tends to exacerbate existing social and intersocietal inequities by merely increasing output. Self-determination requires a holistic approach embracing economic, social, and cultural issues.

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Introduction:-

Gender inequality remains a major social and developmental challenge. Despite progress in women's education, health, employment and political participation, women continue to face unequal access to resources, decent work, decision-making, mobility and social power. Gender inequality extends beyond differences in income or employment to social norms, division of labour, control over resources, unpaid care work, discrimination and violence. Women's empowerment should be seen as a multifaceted process including resources, agency, opportunity, and the capacity to make smart decisions. Kabeer (1999) conceptualises empowerment through three

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closely related dimensions: resources, agency and achievements; which provide a useful framework for understanding women's ability to exercise meaningful choices.

UN Women similarly defines women's empowerment in terms of gaining power and control over one's life, including access to resources and opportunities and the agency to make strategic decisions. Empowerment cannot be brought about only through giving out welfare benefits; it must be through restructuring the very system that maintains the cycle of gender inequality.

The role of women in development too has undergone a change of perceptions. In earlier approaches, women were looked upon as beneficiaries of welfare schemes. But in later approaches, more emphasis has been put on development, participation and empowerment of women. The present day approach looks at women as active economic and social players and not just passive beneficiaries of development. This aspect of development is significant because policies and programs don't necessarily imply equality for women.

India is distinguished by its case of development as well as disparity. There are various constitutional provisions, legislations, developmental schemes, and policies for women that have been implemented in order to empower women in the institutional context. The patriarchal mindset, domestic disparities in household work, mobility restrictions, discrimination, and violence against women are the factors that hinder women's empowerment.

This economic dimension is highly important as the involvement of women in the workforce can lead to the development of economic autonomy, better bargaining power, and ability to make decisions. However, the participation of women in the workforce is restrained by poor skills and assets, low mobility, domestic work without payment, discrimination, and social norms. They are pointed out as important barriers in the participation of women in the economic activity, and it is noted that women participating in the workforce are involved in unstable and poorly paid jobs. The percentage of employed women in India increased from 22.9% in 2018 to 35.3% in 2025.

Even the national indicators are now signaling improvement in the area of gender equality. As noted by NITI Aayog, "India's SDG 5 score has gone up from 36 in 2018 to 49 for 2023-24." Additionally, "the ratio between the remuneration of women to men in wage and salary employment has gone up from 0.74 in 2018-19 to 0.76 in 2022-23 and the ratio between labor force participation of women to men has also increased from 0.33 to 0.48." In addition to that, "88.7% of married women had participated in the stated decisions related to the household" and "53.9% women aged 15-59 years had used their mobile.

However, employment by itself is not an empowering factor. Other important factors include the type of employment, the wages earned, the job security, the working conditions, and control over income. Women put in a disproportionate number of hours on unpaid work at home, which cuts down the time available for them to be employed and learn new skills. The World Bank has discovered that throughout the world, women invest more hours in unpaid care work than men do.

Secondly, education plays an important part in empowerment because it has the capability of empowering people through improved skill and employment. However, gender disparity at the household level as well as the gender disparity in terms of the availability of opportunities may pose disadvantage to the girls. In a similar way, gender-based violence limits the freedom and participation of women. Hence, to empower women, economic opportunities and nondiscrimination and violence are required.

Equally important is the issue of decision-making, where the woman may be earning money, but may not have much control over the utilization of this money. This applies also in the case of working, where she may lack decision-making power at home. Empowerment therefore entails having agency concerning one's decisions and resources. In addition to this, the concept of digital inclusion becomes even more significant in the sense that use of mobile phones provides her additional room economically and socially.

In other words, gender equality is an aspect of development and not just of social justice. According to the World Bank, increased participation by women has the potential to increase economic productivity and reduce poverty levels as well as increase social cohesion and wellbeing for many generations to come. Gender inequality in this study is therefore considered to be a multi-dimensional concept, while women's empowerment is the increase of women's resources and capabilities.

Women in India have seen great success when it comes to education, employment, participation in politics and advocacy in policies. However, there are major disparities as far as access to resources, decent employment, income, mobility, authority and security is concerned. The question here basically revolves around the disparity between gender equality and women empowerment. Gender disparity can be seen not only within the family but even outside it because of the above mentioned reasons.

This study question is not only about how the condition of women has been transformed, but also about how the transformation in education, employment, economic participation, and policy support has caused empowerment and decreased gender inequalities. A multidimensional assessment is therefore necessary to understand the actual position of women and the structural barriers that continue to limit their choices and opportunities. The study aims to examine the nature, dimensions and determinants of gender disparity and the empowerment of women.

The specific objectives are:-

1. To assess the linkage between public expenditure and women empowerment.
2. To examine the relationship between women's attitude towards girl child and equality constraints.

The study is confronted with the following research questions:-

1. What are the major dimensions of gender inequality experienced by women?
2. What is the level of women's economic, social and decision-making empowerment?
3. How does employment and income generation influence women's empowerment?

The study is significant because it examines gender inequality and women's empowerment as interconnected and multidimensional issues rather than through a single indicator such as employment or literacy. It contributes academically by applying the resource–agencyachievement perspective to women's empowerment. For economic policy, the study can distinguish between employment and meaningful economic empowerment by examining income, employment quality, control over resources and decisionmaking. This is important because women continue to face barriers related to skills, assets, mobility, care responsibilities and discrimination.

For social policy, the findings can identify why gender inequalities persist despite improvements in national indicators and the existence of gender-focused programmes. For education policy, the study can assess whether educational attainment is translating into greater autonomy and agency. For household and community empowerment, it can examine women's participation in important decisions. For gender-based violence, it recognises that empowerment cannot be complete without safety and freedom from violence. The study is also relevant to SDG 5, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The development made by India towards SDG 5 indicators demonstrate not only improvement but also the need for more intervention. Finally, the study can support future research on women's labour-force participation, gender wage gaps, education, digital inclusion, decision-making and economic autonomy.

In this case, women empowerment may be defined as the process whereby women get access to resources, capability, and accomplishments; nevertheless, gender inequalities occur owing to the disparity in access to rights and resources.

Education + Employment + Income + Resources + Decision-making + Social Participation + Safety + Digital Access → Greater Agency and Empowerment → Reduction in Gender Inequality. This relationship can be affected by factors such as patriarchy, society's values, caring labor, discrimination, violence, and institutions. Empowerment is, thus, an ongoing process rather than a one-time activity.

Literature Review:-

Studies in gender disparity have been moved away from an emphasis on the welfare of women to a much broader perspective that considers the agency, resource, capability, and constraint aspects. This popular framework for empowerment, which was developed by Kabeer, explains empowerment through the three interrelated factors of resource, agency, and achievement and states that resources do not automatically result in empowerment, as there should be decisionmakingautonomy for women. This framework is important since it distinguishes the development of women from their empowerment process.

From the findings of Duflo (2012), it is noted that the empowerment of women and economic development share a mutually reinforcing relationship. Economic development contributes to solving gender inequalities, whereas empowerment of women assists in enhancing economic development. But from the findings of Duflo, it is noted that

economic development may not necessarily help in solving gender inequality. Jayachandran (2015) It makes for a better analysis of structure since inequality based on gender in developing countries is due to not just underdevelopment, but also culture of the society. In case of India, son preference, patrilocality and cultural norms related to the conduct of women can help explain gender inequality in areas such as sex ratio, freedom of women and participation of women in the work force. It is thus essential that such social structures be incorporated in development theories.

Empowerment at the household level has been highlighted by Anderson and Eswaran (2009). According to Anderson and Eswaran, empowerment of women depends on the economic and social dimensions of the household, and not just on the level of income earned. The significance of this finding lies in the fact that the traditional labor market statistics may ignore the autonomy of women with respect to their income earning.

More examples of how social institutions may hinder economic opportunities can be seen in India. Field, Jayachandran and Pande (2010) have demonstrated through an experiment conducted in India that social institutions can limit women's ability to engage in entrepreneurship activities even though they are provided training on how to conduct business. This is because the social limitations imposed on the mobility of women would hinder their economic opportunities.

Furthermore, there is scientific evidence that gender inequality is associated not only with certain consequences but also with the process of economic development. In particular, Klasen (2018) found out that gender differences can result in poor economic performance; however, particularly persuasive evidence was found about the relationship between narrowing of gender gaps in education and economic performance. However, at the same time, it should be noted that there is the risk of exaggerating the consequences of closing the gap in terms of employment.

Similarly, the literature on the Indian labour market underlines the persistence of structural discrimination despite the gains made economically and educationally. The UN Women study of the Indian labour market has drawn attention to gender differentials in labour market outcomes, and it is necessary to examine the employment situation of women in terms of a gender-based labour market analysis rather than an aggregate one. All in all, it would appear that women are yet to have equal opportunities at work despite the advances made in education and economics.

Research Gap:-

The literature underscores the fact that gender inequality emerges as a consequence of interaction between several economic, cultural, domestic bargaining, employment, and institutional variables. There exist, nonetheless, three main gaps in the existing literature.

To begin with, the empirical literature mostly focuses on one dimension of inequality such as labor market participation, entrepreneurship, education, freedom, and household bargaining without taking into account the combination of these dimensions to analyze women empowerment. Second, the literature provides strong theoretical and cross-country evidence, but context-specific empirical evidence on how multiple dimensions jointly shape women's empowerment remains comparatively limited, particularly at the sub-national and ground level. Third, economic participation is often treated as a proxy for empowerment, although existing evidence demonstrates that employment or income does not necessarily translate into control over resources, decision-making power or freedom from restrictive social norms.

This study will fill the gap in literature by utilizing a multidimensional approach in dealing with gender disparity and women empowerment through education, employment, income, resource ownership, decision-making, participation, discrimination, violence, and agency. The study does not assume the basic economic activity will automatically empower women; rather, it will examine how these dimensions' influence women's autonomy and empowerment. In this regard, the research goes beyond the description of the gender discrepancies quantitatively but rather proposes an integrated way of examining the mechanisms behind the women empowerment process. Through this method, the main gap existing in the literature is filled in because it considers the fact that empowerment of women cannot be understood through a single economic or demographic measurement.

Methodology:-

This study will use descriptive and analytic methods of research in order to examine the essence of gender inequality and women empowerment. Since empowerment is multidimensional, the study will examine women's position across economic, educational, social, household and decision-making dimensions rather than relying on a single

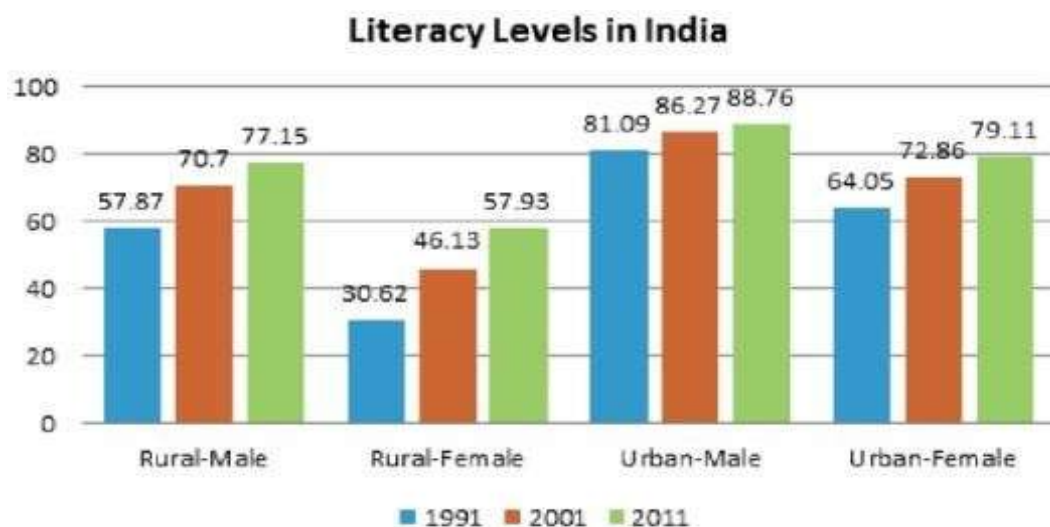
indicator. The theoretical framework will be informed by Kabeer's (1999) resources–agency–achievements model of women's empowerment.

Relevant secondary data are obtained from authentic sources such as the Census of India, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), National Family Health Survey (NFHS), National Statistical Office (NSO), NITI Aayog, Ministry of Women and Child Development and other official Government of India publications. Secondary evidence will be used primarily for contextualising the findings and examining broader gender trends.

Analysis:-

As a result of anticipated growth, expenditures on women and children have consistently increased over the last sixty years. The Ninth Five Year Plan allocated Rs. 4 crore, but the Tenth Five Year Plan expended Rs. 7,810.42 crore, escalating to Rs. 13,780 crore thereafter. The First Five Year Plan shifted the focus from philanthropy to the advancement and "empowerment" of women. The Central Social Welfare Board established several humanitarian initiatives with the assistance of volunteers. Women's programmes were part of the Community Development Blocks of the National Extension Service Programs. As part of the Second Five-Year Plan (1956-1961), women's clubs were formed to better administer welfare programmes. Some middle-range plans prioritised female education, particularly in the 3rd-6th grades (1961-1974). More nutrition for children and pregnant women was supplied to promote maternal and child health. This plan focused on women's health, education, and employment from 1980 to 1985. The Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-1990) sought to enhance the economic and social standing of women by maintaining developmental initiatives for them. This required identifying and promoting beneficiary-oriented programmes that directly benefited women.

The Eighth Five-Year Plan saw a shift from growth to empowerment (1992-1997). There were some unusual projects. Education, health, and employment benefits of gender equality are highly valued by feminists. Females could not hold political office, but they might engage as equal partners in the country's growth. During the 8th Plan, the National Commission for Women and Rashtriya Mahila Kosh provided microcredit to poor and assetless women. Over the following five years, women and socially marginalized groups, including scheduled castes, tribes, other backward classes, and minorities, would be essential in socioeconomic development (1997-2002). In this effort, Panchayathi Raj and other cooperatives have been formed. Women will have equitable access to resources and services under this policy. It was included in the 11th five-year plan to help women and achieve gender parity (2007-2012) when the gender budget and gender mainstreaming are coupled, the advantages provided by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.



Source: Census, Government of India.

Hence, we can see that, in terms of policy decisions, women do not lack initiative. Nevertheless, in reality, the situation is quite different, and we have yet to witness true female emancipation, with women still bearing the weight of patriarchy. Several obstacles stand in the way of India's progress toward gender equality. Family values and social norms.(Shettar, 2015).

Attitude towards the Girl Child:-

In Indian society, males are respected and daughters are feared. The girl is discriminated against from before birth. Our statistics show an increase in female foetus abortions. The female/male ratio is falling. Unwell girls are hesitant to see doctors. Girls nurse for less time than boys and can be taken out of school to care for younger siblings. Women have never enjoyed the same social status as men, regardless of familial wealth (Pande, 2010). A woman's life is only worth living if she bears a son. A girl is born, and tradition and scripture tell us that she will be awarded a brother "somewhere." Prenatal sex determination testing have increased female feticides, reinforcing societal biases against females. Education, exposure to other cultures, and income have all helped parents choose a child's sex. Parents always select the boy child. Despite its strictness, patients and doctors still manage to get around it. As a result, the female to male ratio has (Table 1).

Table1 Female-male sex ratio.

“YEAR	FEMALE/1000MALES
1901	972
1911	964
1921	955
1931	950
1941	945
1951	946
1961	941
1971	930
1981	933
1991	945
2001	927
2011	914”

Source: Census, Government of India.

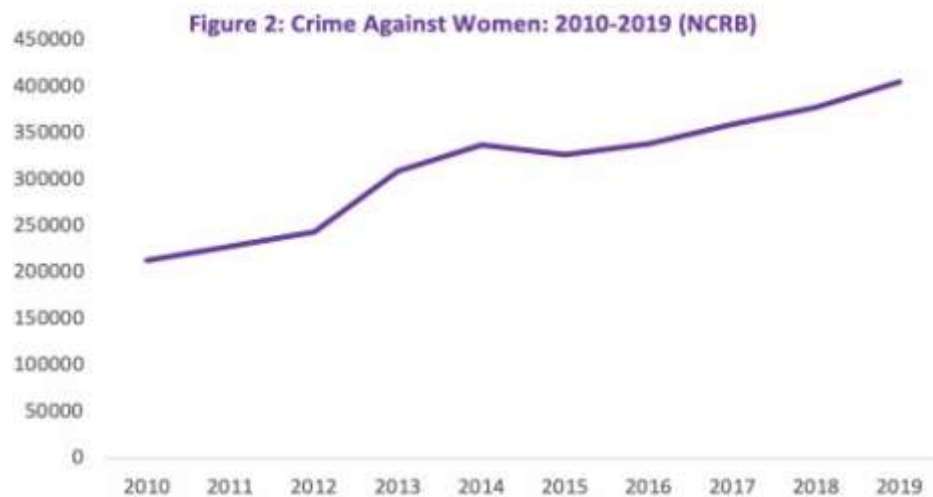
Until recently, doctors publicly promoted sex selection tests for male heirs in their professional journals. DrAniruddhaMalpani's clinic in posh Colaba has made him a celebrity. Her website advertised pre-selection of embryos for gender. As one of the few people who could promise a son, Pre-implantation diagnostic procedures like FISH were used in the Malpani instance. Dr. Aniruddha believes that pre-implantation technology should be restricted to the wealthy in a democracy (India Today, 2003).

Girls in this country do not attend school at all, and those who do attend drop out at alarming rates. When both parents work, girls are responsible for the home and children. Female dropout rates were 80% in grades I-V. Women make up 42% of the class V population. Only 19 out of 100 Scheduled Castes and Tribes ladies reach class V, the lowest educational level. Many of these women labour in unorganised sectors like beedi and agarbatti. Unorganised employees are disproportionately female, child labourers, and self-employed. In the unorganised sector, women and girls make beedi and agarbatti at home and sew clothing. These jobs aren't for boys. Despite the girl child's efforts, most of them go unnoticed (Pande, 2008).

Gender-Based Violence: Gender violence hinders female empowerment. Gendered violence against women and children exists. For now, we can only see this as a development and human rights issue. Affects of violence on economy, society, and It occurs when one feels entitled to manage another's interactions or ties. Power relations generate gender violence (Kelkar, 1991). Even when assaulted, most Indian working-class women are denied.

Protesting middle-class women endure significantly more repression. For privacy reasons, middle-class women avoid discussing humiliation or abuse. Limiting women's rights reinforces patriarchy (Pande et al. 2008). Violent relationships are more likely to occur among adult survivors of domestic violence. The concepts of indulgence or acquired helplessness may elucidate (Agnes, 1980; Ahuja, 1987; Mahajan, 1990). Wife compromises often lead to a happy marriage.

Increased exploitation of women and children. The modern day slave trade includes women and children. Trade now outpaces weaponry and drugs. The commercial sexual exploitation of children via trafficking serves as one example. Women of low-income are at risk. Its future and ladies deserve protection. So we must educate and act. It impacts the whole community. Basic human rights violations affect both men and women. In the dark world of humans, law enforcement difficulties occur. It's the worst crime because it treats people like commodities. Both buyers and traffickers exploit people.



Source (NCRB).

Due to the nature of this work, a single woman or girl can sexually exploit entire villages. Human trafficking happens at many levels, including municipal, district, state, and international. Prostitution is estimated to involve 8 million women and children globally. Approximately 2 million youngsters live in the country. Worse, child trafficking is on the rise, and the victims are younger. Women's trafficking has surpassed violence against women as the most urgent issue facing women (Pande, 2016).

Women and Economic Participation:-

Most developing-world economies are moving away from state-directed policy towards free markets and liberalisation. After the debt crisis of 1991, India implemented the IMF and World Bank's structural adjustment policy. In principle, this would help India solve its foreign exchange problems, draw foreign investment, and enhance its balance of payments. During the financial crisis, the World Bank helped people by lending them money. Globalisation of trade and business was included. But, despite the reforms' commercial and industrial focus, agriculture was expected to benefit from a market-determined currency rate regime and the elimination of agricultural export prohibitions. The new multilateral trade framework was intended to boost Indian agriculture and agro-based exports.

While women contribute significantly to the end result in fields ranging from agriculture to animal domestication, fisheries, and garment production, their work is viewed as second-class and primarily domestic by the general public. Having two jobs puts these women at risk of being exploited. Regardless of caste, class, or economic activity, all employees in this region face deprivation and hostility. Lack of job opportunities, low pay, and abusive working circumstances all contribute to casualization. Their social security is non-existent, and they lack access to modern resources like technology, skills, and information (Shramshakti, 1988). Human growth must be prioritised and treated from a human perspective. Less severe malnutrition and safe drinking water should be among the top priorities. Structural change must publicly address women's issues in its goals, substance,

monitoring, and external support. In addition to their function in agriculture, women's needs in economic production must be considered. Humans must be regarded as individuals, not only as tools. A dignified life is a human right. As a result, the whole outlook must change. Development and empowerment will be futile if we do not address gender violence and globalisation.

Conclusion:-

Prejudice and patriarchy have produced a harsh environment for women. History had many powerful and influential female figures, but they were not the norm. Women couldn't engage in society, politics, or business. We've gone a long way. Women had no rights 10,000 years ago. Educate, elect, and profit more women. But injustice reigns. Women are less literate and less employed than men. Abortion remains sexist. So much so that the female-to-male sex ratio in India fell from 972 in 1901 to 914 in 2011. Between 2010 and 2019, more women were harmed. That more women are reporting harassment and other offences may be a sign of progress. It's still alarming because it illustrates how hazardous our culture is for women. Women's empowerment requires equitable pay and political participation. Women's economic empowerment empowers more women financially. A larger female presence in politics would increase female voice. First, public areas, especially schools, must be safe and welcoming to women.

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