

Addressing Educational and Professional Inequalities through Capability Approach

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The study aims to analyze educational and professional inequalities using the capability approach. Using the capability approach with distinct secondary datasets, it attempts to comprehend inequalities in understanding the interplay of various attributes leading to disparities at various levels. Using specific exemplifications, the study shows gender disparity even with labor force participation representing varied professional roles, representing social oppression at both the education and professional fronts. The study manifests the intricacies of societal, economic, and political factors for understanding functionalities and capabilities. With a rigorous review of the literature, the study observes the significance of the theoretical perspective in understanding the interplay of inequalities at the micro level that transform into social oppression using the capability approach.

Keywords: Gender equality, Capability Approach, Professional and Educational Identities

Evaluating Gender Using Capability Approach

The capability approach draws upon various fields, such as philosophy, economics, and applied disciplines, and has emerged as an interdisciplinary framework for examining individual, environmental, and institutional inequalities. This approach enables the analysis of people's capabilities and the lives they can lead, thereby facilitating evaluations of well-being (Sen, 1999; Sen, 2011; Robeyns, 2017; Chiappero Martinetti, Osmani, & Qizilbash, 2021; Comim, Qizilbash, and Alkire, 2008; Crocker, 2009; Nussbaum, 2011; Robeyns, 2017; Prah Ruger, 2018).

Academic literature pertaining to the assessment of gender justice, which utilizes the capability approach, explores the utilization of capabilities to establish an evaluative framework that not only portrays but also facilitates transformative processes (Robeyns, 2003; Peppin Vaughan, 2007; Loots and Walker, 2016; Wilson-Strydom and Okkolin, 2016; Robeyns, 2017;

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DeJaeghere, 2020). Scholarly research pertaining to the capacity approach, gender, and education has produced intricate analyses of both individual and interpersonal disparities. The aforementioned methodology has also influenced the development of many metrics used at a national level. These metrics include the Human Development Index (HDI), the Gender Inequality Index (GII), the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), and the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI). The collection of literature is unified by its utilization of the capacity approach; certain challenges identified in the preceding section pertaining to the quantification of disparities remain unresolved.

The task of documenting the intricate connections among the individual, the institutional, and the national levels while also considering the presence of intersecting inequities continues to pose a difficulty in numerous indicator systems. The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) primarily focuses on analyzing poverty data at the household level rather than providing specific insights into the poverty experiences of individual male and female members. The SIGI framework focuses on the examination of norms and institutions, taking into account certain aspects of

intersecting inequalities. However, it has not yet explored the realm of education as a distinct domain (Ferrant et al., 2020). However, by utilizing the comprehensive range of resources offered by the capacity approach, it is possible to establish a path towards addressing these challenges. This approach also allows for a critical examination of the obstacles to constructing a framework and metrics for assessing advancements in gender equality within the landscape of education. However, freedoms and opportunities can be shaped, limited, or enhanced by various factors, such as institutions, norms, and the relationships and ideas that shape national education systems. Incorporating both functions and capabilities into an indicator framework provides a more comprehensive and informative foundation.

The Interplay of Professional and Educational Identities of Women

In modern times, economic sustainability is considered the most crucial part of existence. Although international trends in labor force participation largely voice out concern over economic stability since the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), little concern is focused on the ground realities of making professional participation equal in society. The meaning of professional participation is originally derived from labor force participation, defined as the percentage of males and females from the age group of 16 to 60 involved in active work (OECD, 2020). As the participants in the global labor force are both males and females, gender becomes an integral part of the study for the development of an egalitarian society. The high persistence of gender inequality worldwide has compelled the World Economic Forum (WEF) to rank the countries on the Gender Gap Index (GGI) in 2014 on the parameters of education, health, economy, and participation (Sumanjeet, 2016). It was the finding of the WEF that a wide gender disparity existed in every field. Hence, to bridge the gap between genders, the 5th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) was designed to meet the global commitment to achieving an equitable society in all countries (Grown et al., 2005).

As labor force participation is closely related to the jobs available in the market, education becomes the key mechanism to achieve the ability to participate in professional labor (Psacharopoulos, 1994; Kennedy & Hedley, 2003). While countries like France, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Japan have seen growth in

women's participation in labor markets along with educational achievement in girls, the United States as an outlier appeared to continue with rising educational achievements of females but a drastic fall in female participation from 61% in 2000 to 57.2% in 2016 (Lovenduski & Hills, 2018; Black et al., 2017).

Women encounter multifaceted contextual circumstances, encompassing inadequate literacy rates, discriminatory societal norms and practices, restricted time availability for training and employment, as well as limited exposure and unfamiliarity with emerging technologies. In addition to this, there is a prevailing devaluation of girls' education within society, whereby girls are regarded as secondary earners, and hence, less emphasis is placed on providing them with adequate training for career opportunities. According to Malhotra, Schulte, Patel, and Petesch (2009), one essential approach to promoting women's empowerment and achieving gender equality involves the integration of policy and institutions at the grassroots level. There exists a pressing imperative to advance the development of a training policy that incorporates a gender perspective while also taking into consideration the nuances of local customs and traditions. Additionally, it suggests a prioritization of enhancing girls' access to education and training, which may involve the implementation of various support systems such as transportation, accommodations, scholarships, and other incentives aimed at encouraging female enrolment in educational and training programs.

Theoretical Perspectives Comprehending Inequalities

Beyond education, there are various inequalities that exist in the socio-cultural context of Indian society. The Oxfam Inequalities Report indicates that violence in the form of physical, sexual, or mental harassment is the most normatively practiced inequality (Ahmed et al., 2022). The perception of violence as inequality is considerable here because the right to freedom of life is a fundamental right that equally empowers every citizen of our country to live without external oppression. However, the prevalent social norms have regressively privileged the exhibition of masculinity by curbing freedom rights and increasing the dependency on women. The biggest reason for the existing disparity between males and females is the continued presence of oppression of women in different forms in Indian society. Womanism theorizes female oppression not just in terms of gender and sex but also in terms of

gender identity, sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, and abilities that are individually experienced every day (Maparyan, 2012). It was spearheaded by Alice Walker, who described the essence of womanism as feminism: “Womanism resembles feminism just as purple is to lavender”. It indicates the presence of a very thin line of difference between feminism and womanism. It is seldom skeptical to accept womanish theory to be more hyped than others, but the real importance lies in the amount of sociological significance it carries.

Feminist theories have been foundationally supportive of reflexivity, i.e., the influence of an individual’s social position in comprehending the world, but the womanist perspective has been instrumental in extending the phenomena of reflexivity to create multiple identities i.e. combination of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age and abilities. Therefore, the significance of the womanist perspective lies in the fact that it covers oppression as a socially distorted phenomenon originating from global experiences all over the world, irrespective of the colour and social position to which women belong. However, for ease of understanding in this paper, we have tried to comprehend only Indian females of Rajasthan with the diversity of social position, rural/ urban settlement, class, ethnicity, age and abilities. Drawing on this perspective, it becomes easy to understand that social institutions like marriage and family are perceived as tools of oppression in an already existing patriarchal society in Rajasthan. The womanist perspective sees the oppression of women worldwide in reaching out to education as quite a common and frequent phenomenon. Studies in this context show that approximately 65 percent of females aged under 24 years are married before turning 18, and 46 percent of females are married before turning 15 years old (Dubey, 2016). Other studies have related early marriages to drop-outs in secondary schooling by 15 percent of 15- to 17-year-old girls in rural areas (Dubey, 2016).

A deep social analysis is followed through various levels, namely micro-level, meso-level, macro-level, and global level, for understanding the identities of women. At the micro level, unique, individual experiences are focused upon, such as daily social interactions in class or social gatherings. At the meso-level, experiences from various groups, communities, and organizational interactions are focused. At the macro level, interactions between national power bodies

in the form of government policies and cultural ideas in the form of media and educational ideologies are focused on. At the global level, transnational trade, production, and migration are focused on. The massiveness of reflexivity and multiple identities tend to grow with the levels.

Another reason for favoring womanism here is its significant process of encompassing socially-lived theorizing, which pertains to shaping feminist theories and related knowledge out of the daily experiences of traditionally marginalized groups like women, people of color, immigrants, indigenous people, gay, lesbian, queer, and trans people, poor and working-class people, and the disabled. Thus, the significance of womanism truly lies in the most initial and crude level of individual experiences, proving that any problem or oppression at this level would only tend to grow through the other social levels in the hierarchy, irrespective of the country that the oppressed population belongs to.

When examining gender inequalities in education through the lens of capabilities, it is crucial to consider the intricate dynamics of the physical, political, and social context, as well as the allocation of resources. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the variations in how these factors can influence an individual’s access to education, personal freedoms, and opportunities. Gender exerts influence on various aspects, including the intricacies, allocations, and transformations, in multiple ways. It manifests as a characteristic of the societal, economic, and political milieu, as well as through the mechanisms of resource distribution. Gender also plays a role in discussions pertaining to liberties and opportunities, and it shapes individual values and interests, which can be influenced by societal factors.

In order to comprehend gender inequalities in education through the lens of the capability approach, it is imperative to direct attention towards the concept of freedoms and how they are restricted by gender and other forms of inequalities. This approach emphasizes the need to move beyond a narrow focus solely on gender disparities as a component of educational results. Figure 1 illustrates the interrelated layers of analysis that necessitate a measurement framework to consider the individual freedoms and agency associated with gender and intersectional equality within the realms of education, social relationships, and institutional structures that influence these opportunities. Additionally, it highlights the

significance of the ideas that are used to describe and shape these processes.

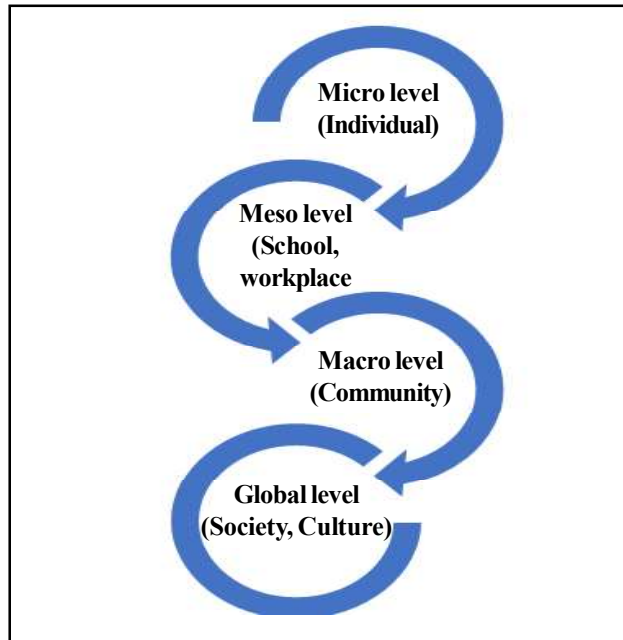


Fig.1: Representing inequalities at distinct levels

The diagram reflects how the womanist perspective helps to perceive the effects of any form of inequality at the deepest socio-cultural level. Its significance can be understood through the interplay of patriarchal oppression and the *Theory of Cultural Hegemony* by Antonio Gramsci (Mkhize & Njawala, 2016). Apart from the function of segregating gender roles in terms of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’, its prime focus is on creating a normative perception of the domesticity of women in household work and caring and nurturing work. The notion of domesticity is so deeply engraved in the individual at the micro-level that females willingly drop out of secondary education, perceiving it as ‘normative’ in the process of child-rearing and family maintenance. Recent studies of females prove that the majority of women willingly opt out of secondary education and labor force participation because of the sole load of household chores on their shoulders (Orgad, 2019; Kalpraj, 2019). This is directly related to the propagation of unequal professional roles and, hence, huge payment disparities because homes are the sources of inculcating inequalities at the micro-level right from the beginning. The heteronormativity of relating productivity to childbearing is so high that parents hegemonically teach young females to pursue education and professions, largely to secure the possibility of a decent marriage (Ahmed et al., 2022).

The difference lies at the meso-level, where the hegemonical professional difference lies parallelly with the undue burden of both housework duties and professional duties. Considering such, it is evident that at the macro level, it is far more difficult to inculcate the mindset of neutrality in issuing roles of nurturing and child-rearing to the males as well.

When seeing this heteronormative inequality at the global level, the stark difference is noted in terms of unpaid care work, which remains unnoticed because of its inability to bring financial value. Recently, a report from the International Labour Organization (ILO) revealed that females work for 312 minutes and 219 per day in urban and rural sectors, compared to 29 minutes and 32 minutes per day for males in urban and rural sectors.

The interplay of these socio-cultural inequalities in perceiving the productivity of work differently for males and females violates the basic fundamental right of equal opportunity, resulting in gender violence. In a joint study on intimate partner violence (IPV) conducted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) in various districts of Rajasthan, it was found that 60% of male-perpetrated violence existed in some emotional, economic, physical, and sexual format among females (Nanda et al., 2015). These studies suggest that, at a macro-level, the socio-cultural context influences the mindset of the oppressed population not just through individual relationships but also through global environmental relationships. These socio-cultural contexts transform developmental social institutions like marriage, motherhood, and so forth into a regressive patriarchal norm wherein every component of development satisfies the norms of domesticity at large.

Educational and Professional Inequalities

Educational Inequalities

The significance of the new format of measurement is that it weighs the quality of life achieved by a person rather than the materialistic resources gained. Arguably, the Gender Parity Index measures not only the resources provided to exhibit equality but also the burden of unpaid work and consequential violence that lower the feeling of security at the individual level for women.

An overview of the most relevant definition of gender reflects that, contrary to notions of just role or display, gender seems to be a relatively broad identity based on social performances (West & Zimmermann,

1987). Consequently, various studies have tried to perceive gender as a social performance in labor participation, social and legal changes, health issues, and educational productivity (Ferrant et al., 2014; Ridgeway, 2006; Vlassoff & Moreno, 2002; Ringrose, 2007). In alignment with these studies, the World Bank has emphasized the new measurement indices of the Human Capital Index (HDI) that focus on the need to invest in education with greater vigor in order to increase the resource potential of both males and females worldwide (Basel et al., 2020; Kraay, 2019).

The hourly wage indicators for males and females have been observed to be equal. In other terms, educational achievements are significantly related to an escalation in wage pay, irrespective of gender. However, the data from GGI indicates that India is ranked 134 on the dimension of economic participation, with the difference in the male-to-female participation ratio being 0.36 (Sumanjeet, 2016). Studies like these have prompted India to specially invest in gender equality for maximum labor force participation. Additionally, organizations like UNESCO have introduced the concept of gender audit, which largely focuses on identifying the gender-related gaps in such areas as enrolment, retention, achievements, academic and non-academic facilities, staffing and personnel, and opportunities for progression, including academic, managerial, and administrative positions (UNESCO, 2015). Since education largely contributes to the process of transforming humans into ‘potential resources’, many countries, along with India, have strongly adopted the idea of inclusion of females through equity and accessibility of resources for escalating their participation in economic developments.

Professional Inequalities

The Indian education system realises its worth in contributing to the economic, social, and political growth. Amidst the prevalent age-old practices of patriarchy, which is the most dominant hurdle in the equity and accessibility of education for females in Indian society, the Indian Constitution has invested in many initiatives for gender equality in the field of education, the most prominent being the Right to Education Act, 2009 (Dongre, 2018). The Act reflects on education as a fundamental right for universalization of education for children aged 6–14 years, irrespective of gender. Drawing from this act, the importance of formal learning from institutions like schools becomes a matter of importance. Thus, the government has been

focused on equity by expanding school resources across India.

Recent data from the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) in India has demonstrated its largest school system, with over 1.5 million schools, during 2020–21 (UDISE+ 2021-22). Initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) have thereby steered the accessibility of universalization of elementary education at the district level by bringing children of all genders to equitable public schools since 2000–01 by the achievement of a gross enrollment ratio (GER) of 106.3 in 2012–13 (DISE 2013; Govinda & Bandhopadhyay, 2010; NIEPA, 2002). As per the UDISE+ 2021-22 report, the GER of primary education is 103.3 percent, upper-primary is 92.2 percent, secondary level is 79.8 percent, and higher secondary level is 53.8 percent.

Despite the enrolment of approximately 2 million children in the 6–14 age group in both public and private school systems, a recent report implies that approximately 40 percent of females aged 15–18 years are devoid of any sort of schooling (Bandhopadhyay & Chugh, 2020). Additionally, various research studies on the implementation of governmental initiatives like “Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao”, have stated the sad reality of the gender gaps in terms of education in various states of India. Reports (2012) identify Tripura (14%), Bihar (15%), Rajasthan (16%), Madhya Pradesh (20%), and Uttar Pradesh (21%), as poorly performing states in terms of secondary education attainment among females (World Development Report, 2012). This grows to be of concern because secondary education is the most important determinant of future life outcomes (Saunders et al., 2004).

When the situation is analyzed in terms of the demand for the work participation of educated employees, it becomes quite grave. The unequal distribution of learning in different parts of India has always been portrayed through the discrepancies in female work participation compared to the prior census (Sumanjeet, 2016). Among the states with the lowest literacy, Rajasthan has gained ample limelight for its existing gender disparity in education and professional participation across the region (Sumanjeet, 2016).

Taking the state of Rajasthan as an example, Rajasthan’s literacy rate is 66 percent, while the national average literacy rate is 74 percent (Census of India, 2011). Table 1 shows the gender disparity in literacy rates in the state of Rajasthan. It is evident from the

table that the male literacy rate has grown from 70% in 2001 to 79% in 2011, while the female literacy rate could only register a growth of 4% in 2011 from 40% in 2001 (Dubey, 2017). According to Census 2011, the labor force participation percentage in Rajasthan is 43.6%, with 51.5% of participation in males and 35.1% of participation in females (State Policy for Women in Rajasthan, 2016). The disparity in the obtained data has remained stagnant despite many efforts from the central and state governments.

Conclusion

Policy-making centered on egalitarian opportunity building for females emphasizes the expansion of resources such that the socio-cultural impact of a “normative patriarchal” mindset remains invisible from the view. Even if womanist approaches gain popularity worldwide, the gender disparity clearly indicates that they are not audible in the far-reaching rural parts of some of the biggest and most impactful states of India. Early drop-out from schooling not only restricts professional value but also confines the boundaries of the human potential to housework and child-rearing domains. Since this patriarchal mindset of oppression makes the advantages of education, profession, and

holding social identity difficult for these females, the social, economic, and legal participation of women in India still remains a far-reaching dream. Female education needs an immediate, broader, and sociologically impactful approach that can help in better shaping governmental policies and in the building of a broader social mindset to instill greater positivity in accepting strongly identified females in society, irrespective of the professional roles they perform. The capability approach analyzes a crucial reality that makes a distinction between functioning and capabilities. The discussion vividly expresses the accomplishment of acquiring education towards well-being and capabilities. On the other hand, it indicates the genuine prospects for individual desired functioning. The criticism centers around gender parity due to its limited scope in capturing functional aspects such as enrollment rates, examinations, performance, etc. The approach underlines functional aspects and their effect on distinct demographic characteristics. There is a gender imbalance towards educational pursuits. The approach provides a comprehensive framework to encompass functionings and capabilities towards freedom for the attainment of the desired attributes.

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Received: 21 September 2023

Revision Received : 22 September 2023

Accepted : 23 September 2023

