

THE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS 5: INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

Sustainable development is primarily about people, their well-being, and equity in their interpersonal relationships all around the world where nature-society imbalances threaten the economic and social stability. Feminism is a recognition and identification of all forms of Discrimination, Exploitation and Oppression (DEO) of women and a commitment to work against it. Feminism focuses on larger structures that oppress women. To understand how patriarchy and socio-economic systems perpetuate DEO, the feminist perspective is required to be understood. The present paper discusses the Feminist Perspective on Sustainable Development Goal 5, one of the 17 SDGs adopted by UN in 2015, to formulate futuristic inclusive policies and strategies for women to increase their involvement in social development process. The broader framework will relate to women as an agent of social change. The paper postulates that less DEO means more gender equality and women empowerment.

Keywords

Feminist Perspective, SDG 5, Gender Equality, Sustainable Development, Social Change.

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Introduction

One of the most debatable and relevant issues of sustainable development in the contemporary times is becoming the need of the hour. The sustainable development process meets the needs of current generations without endangering the needs of future generations. Sustainable development teaches us how to use our resources wisely. It has main 3 areas - namely, environmental sustainability, social sustainability and economic sustainability. To achieve the balance in these pillars of sustainability, The UN had created a roadmap in 2015 to promote sustainable development with a commitment to social progress, environmental balance and economic growth by approving global 2030 Agenda. To meet the targets of SDGs, it is crucial to harmonize the core elements of economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected and are crucial for the wellbeing of individuals and societies. In widely used but in narrow sense, SD has been understood in terms of environment protection only. The present paper focuses on the feminist perspective on social inclusion of women through SDG 5 to bring them at par with men to end the DEO against them.

The Sustainable Development Goals and SDG 5

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and is the Goal 5 among the 17 SDGs adopted by UN in 2015. Achieving this right gives us the best chance of addressing some of our time's most challenging challenges, such as the economic crisis and a lack of health care, as well as climate change, violence against women, and escalating conflicts. Women are not only affected by these issues, but they also have the ideas and leadership to address them. Gender discrimination continues to hold back too many women, and thus our world. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs represent a road map for long-term progress that leaves no one behind. Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential to each of the 17 goals. (Dwaikat, & Ali :2014). By ensuring the rights of women and girls across all the goals we will attain justice and inclusion; economies that work for all, and sustaining our shared environment now and for future generations.

Gender inequality has existed in societies since prehistoric times. Primitive humans gendered their labor, with men going out to hunt and women stayed at home to run the family and raise the children. Women are still oppressed and are the victims of patriarchal society, despite societal evolution that has resulted in more fluidity among gender roles. SDG 5 aims to achieve gender equality in all spheres of life by providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in economic and political decision-making processes.

Objectives of the Study

The present study broadly aims at:

- 1) To study the SDG 5 for women-gender equality
- 2) To discuss the relevance of feminist perspective on sustainable development
- 3) To explore the feminist strategies for the inclusion of women to achieve sustainable development goals which further aim social change

Concepts Used and Operationalized

Mainly, five concepts have been used and operationalized in the present study viz. 'Feminism', 'Inclusiveness', 'Gender Equality', 'sustainable development', and 'Social Change'.

Feminism

The term 'feminism' is derived from the Latin word 'femina,' which means 'woman,' and was first applied to issues of equality and the Women's Rights Movement. The Oxford English Dictionary defines feminism as a feminine or womanly state. The term 'feminism' is defined by Webster's Dictionary as the belief that women should have equal political rights to men. 'The words 'feminist' or 'feminism' are political labels indicating support for the aims of the new Woman's Movement that emerged in the late 1960s,' says Toril Moi. [Frontczak, et.al :2012). Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir (1989) claims that the terms masculine and feminine are only used symmetrically on legal documents as a matter of form.

These are the main feminist perspectives - Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism and Marxist and Socialist Feminism. Liberal Feminists believe that women's oppression is caused by their unequal access to social, economic, legal and political institutions. Radical Feminists see the sexuality as the main root cause of women's oppression. They argue that women's bodies are controlled by the means of objectification, violence, and social institutions. Marxist Feminists claims that women are exploited within the family, society and work place due to capitalism which produced patriarchy. Socialist Feminists do not see a connection between patriarchy and capitalism to perpetuate women's oppression. They ask for a transformation in the relations within the family and changes in the access to education, economic opportunities, health care facilities and political power.

Inclusiveness

The Oxford Dictionary defines inclusiveness as 'the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those having physical or intellectual disabilities or belonging to other minority group.' It can further be described as quality of

including many different types of people and treating them all fairly and equally. Gender Inclusion refers to a state where people mainly women have right or opportunities regardless of their gender. It aims not to discriminate anybody and does not perpetuate gender stereotypes. Women inclusions are needed because they are far from enjoying equal opportunities, equal rights and equal participation and leadership along with men.

Gender Equality

Gender Equality, otherwise known as equality of the sexes, is the state of easy access of resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision making: and the state of valuing different behaviours, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender (Wikipedia).

By denying equal rights to women, we deny half the population to live a dignified life. Gender equality is core requirement for social development of any country. It is imperative for the removal of gender inequalities of gender diverse people like– women, men, transgender, indigenous groups, children and families.

Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development appeared for the first time in the year 1987 with the publication of the Brundtland Report, warning of the negative environmental consequences of economic growth and globalization which tried to find possible solutions to the problems caused by industrialization and population growth. It is defined as ‘a development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. It calls for collective efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and our planet. People, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership are 5 components of sustainable development.

Social Change

The term ‘Social Change’ refers to the modifications or alterations in the social organizations of a society in any of its social institutions or patterns of social roles. It’s a process and it only implies that there is some difference through time in the object under study. It can be a change in social behavior, social structure and social and cultural values.

Social Change as a process can be referred to the changes that occur in the structure and functioning of social system. It is the alterations in the material and non-material culture of any society; changes in the statuses and roles of groups and individuals; changes in the values, norms, social institutions; changes in the social relations, patterns of social interactions; social functioning; etc. Here, the concept

has been used with reference to the change in the status of women and subsequent changes in the society.

These concepts have been used and operationalized in the present work to study the changes in the pace of gender equality through the inclusiveness aimed by SDG 5.

Theoretical Framework

In this context, the broad framework should relate gender with social change (transformation). This type of theoretical framework has to be derived from a concept of social system organised around the structural principle of gender itself. The structure and the relationship of genders which define the status of both the genders within the family, workplace and larger society has foundation in socialisation process which encourages stereotyping of sex- roles everywhere.

This institutionalization of inequality between the sexes and their organization into a social system of gender relationships circumscribes the major condition which enables discrimination of one sex by the other. It is on account of this that exploitation of the weaker sex is facilitated (less importance of woman's work as housewives, lesser pay in comparison to men for similar work, domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, etc.). To sustain and maintain this institutionalized asymmetry normatively sanctioned institutions of oppression in the form of traditional customs, traditional practices, exist. Therefore, social change should be interpreted in terms of qualitative and quantitative changes taking place within the structure of gender relationships. While formal – legal interventions have been made to 'correct' this asymmetry, the actual transformation of these relationships is an ongoing process (Sahoo :2008).

Research Methodology of the Study

The present study is descriptive in nature and is based on secondary data gathered from a variety of sources such as Encyclopedia, books, journals, scholarly articles, Government documents, and printed and online reference materials.

Discussions and Proposed Strategiesfor Inclusiveness

Feminism is a broad range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements with the common goal of defining, establishing, and achieving political, economic, personal and social equality of the sexes. The central premise of feminism is to seek women's equality and justice in all aspects of life, as well as to provide opportunities for women to have equal access to resources that are otherwise freely available to men. Since then, feminism has covered a wide range of topics, including the history of women's oppression and possible ways to overcome 'anxiety of

authorship' by creating their own literary canon. Because there are numerous psychosocial and cultural constructs of femininity, feminism is a serious attempt to analyze, comprehend, and clarify them (Guggemos& Horvath :2006).

Feminism is significant for people of all sexes, genders, castes, creeds, and backgrounds. It empowers individuals and society as a whole and seeks gender equality rather than female superiority. Feminism attempts to deconstruct the gender roles that have existed for many years. This enables people to live freely and empower their lives without being restricted by traditional constraints. In other words, it benefits both men and women. (Manna & Banerjee: 2019). Looking back in time, it is what gave women the right to vote. Furthermore, when we look at modern feminism, we can see how it is involved in life-changing campaigns that advocate for abortion and reproductive rights, for example, giving women the freedom to choose. Furthermore, feminism constantly challenges patriarchy and strives to abolish gender roles. It further allows men to be whoever they want without fear of being judged. Men are no longer forbidden from crying because they must be allowed to express themselves freely (Beauvoir:op.cit).

Why we need Feminist Perspective on Sustainability?

One wonders why sustainability has become a catchword of the environment movement only in the recent years and ignored the vital questions like 'what is to be sustained' and 'for whom and for how long?' 'To sustain' means to endure for a long period. In the first instance, feminist perspective on sustainable development looks irrelevant since discussions on sustainability look to end up value-laden and totalizing visions of how the world should be while feminists concerns for diversity and context-dependency.

To support the development of feminist perspective on sustainability, the following aspects ought to be taken care of. Firstly, there is a need to broaden the concept of sustainability from narrow focus on ecological boundaries to the broader issues of social justice, gender and inter- and intra- generational equity, ideology and political practices. Secondly, feminist epistemology believes in the analysis of patriarchy, gender inequality and women's DEO as the base of all the feminist theories. A feminist analysis is required to search the sustainable alternatives. Thirdly, the ecological crisis of unsustainability has changed the terms and goals of the debate on sustainable development. In the process of struggles in a global environment context, it seems imperative to engage in inclusive and deeper discussion about other perspectives on sustainability for planetary survival like to find ways to collaborate with some social movement groups-as suggested by some feminists. (MacGregor: 2005).

Historically speaking, global development paradigm saw the role of women in development in 1950s onwards. Their involvement in development was seen as the part of the evolution of many programmes and projects based on the Moser's (1989) elaborate classification of 5 approaches namely, 1) The welfare Approach, 2) The Equity Approach, 3) The Anti-poverty Approach, 4) The Efficiency Approach, and 5) The Empowerment Approach. (Yoshiko: 1995). The concept of sustainable development came late and was further emphasized by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) by adopting 17 global SDGS in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, hunger, AIDS, and discrimination against women and girls, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030 all people in the world enjoy peace and prosperity.

SDG 5 - 2030 AGENDA

The 2030 Agenda focuses on the following 9 targets to be achieved by the 193 UN member countries by the year 2030:-

Target 5.1- End all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere.

Target 5.2 - End all violence against and exploitation of women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

Target 5.3- Eliminate all forms of harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriages and genital mutilation.

Target 5.4—Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and promotion of shared responsibilities within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

Target-5.5 - Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all level of decision making in political, economic and public life.

Target 5.6 – Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.

Target 5.7 - Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with natural laws.

Target 5.8 – Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communication technology, to promote the empowerment of women.

Target 5.9 - Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels. (www.globalgoals>goals)

In the light of the above discussion on SDG 5 to achieve Gender Equality, the feminist perspective on sustainable development goals needs to be embraced to include women in and as agent of social change. The Feminist Scholars and Leadership can play a vital role by adopting the following inclusive strategies to achieve SDG 5 i.e, Gender Equality:

- * Shaping more realistic feminist goals and principles
- * Encouraging shared vision based individual and collective orientation (learning/unlearning) of the old aged cultural practices
- * Empowering and educating other women to act upon
- * Calling out gender inequality at all the levels everywhere
- * Challenging patriarchy and DEO norms and ill-practices prevalent in the society
- * Making full use of social media to spread awareness about women's issues
- * Supporting NGOS working for women welfare
- * Rallying the implementation of various Governmental Policies, Schemes and Acts made for women
- * Involving men too in their journey towards gender equality
- * Mentoring and mobilizing girls to lift their educational, economic aspirations and participation.

Conclusion

Less DEO means more Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

The paper argues that nearly half of the population of the world is women. They can play vital role in the overall development of any society worldwide, if included in the development process. They experience Discrimination, Exploitation and Oppression (DEO); face social exclusion and are victim of gender injustice. With the adoption of SDG 5 by UN for future sustainable society, the increasing empowerment of women will bring the qualitative and quantitative changes in the social system of gender relations within the families, work place and broader society.

‘Gender Equality’ is a fundamental right and is the 5th Goal among the 17 global SDGs adopted by UN in 2015. Despite many legal-formal interventions,

policies, schemes adopted and implemented by the respective National Governments to correct the 'asymmetry' by facilitating women empowerment, the march towards gender equality and women empowerment has been slow. In the present era of globalization, the world is going through a transitional phase, so the SDGs were brought into action to combat the disparities and discrepancies for better sustainable society in future.

Feminist perspectives is a type of feminist thinking and practice that believe in moving from the 'margins to the center', eliminating socio- institutional boundaries and forming and spreading knowledge, boundaries that define who can know and what can be known. By adopting inclusive strategies, the feminists Scholars and Leaders can create an atmosphere to bring women forward in the process of social development which will generate sustainable economics and sustainable societies. The SDG 5 to achieve gender equality aims to empower women and girls to play pivotal role in social change.

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