

Intersectionality of Gender with Race, Class and Ethnicity and its Impact on Economic Development: A Complex and Multi-Layered Framework

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Abstract:

This research article examines the Intersectionality of gender with race, class, and ethnicity, offering a multidimensional perspective on how these social categories shape individual experiences. Using the intersectional framework initially developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, this article explores the compounding effects of overlapping identities and how they lead to varied forms of oppression and privilege. The discussion emphasizes that a singular focus on gender is insufficient in understanding the structural inequalities faced by marginalized groups. Instead, the complex interplay between race, class, ethnicity, and gender must be understood to address these disparities effectively. The study also focuses on the impact of such discriminations in the path of economic development of a nation.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Gender, Race, Class, Ethnicity, Oppression, Feminism, Social Justice

1. INTRODUCTION:

In contemporary feminist discourse, the concept of Intersectionality has emerged as a powerful framework to analyze the interconnectedness of various forms of social oppression. Initially coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, Intersectionality challenges the oversimplified view that societal structures of discrimination—such as sexism, racism, classism, and ethnocentrism—act independently of one another. Instead, Intersectionality posits that these systems overlap, creating distinct experiences of marginalization and privilege.

Historically, feminist movements in the Global North focused predominantly on gender inequalities, sidelining the importance of race, class, and ethnicity. The experiences of women of colour, working-class women, and immigrant women were often overlooked. By examining gender in conjunction with race, class, and ethnicity, this article aims to reveal the multifaceted nature of oppression and show that understanding gender alone is not enough to address the structural inequities embedded in society. Also tries to find out the impact of these inequalities in the development process.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

This research article aims to fulfill the following objectives. Those are -

- i. To perceive the complex nature of oppression.
- ii. To address the structural disparities and its impact inserted in the society.

iii. To find out the policy implications to reduce such injustice.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

There is ample literature about the inequalities among gender and class, gender and race, discrimination in marginalized groups. Gerry Veenstra (2011) analyses the Intersectionality principles of directionately, simultaneity, multiplicity and multiple jeopardy are applied to inequalities in self-rated health by race, gender, class and sexual orientation in a Canadian sample. Caroline Ntara and Emily Cummins (2023) explored that how inequalities arises in the form of race, class and gender in the society and also studied to the sociological impact of race, class and gender in the United States. Omar Aguilar, Pablo Perez, Ruben Anavias, Claudia Mora and Osvaldo Blanco. This study demonstrates that class and gender have a significant impact on job quality and people's subjective perceptions of job quality in the Chelian labour market. Study also suggests that both class and gender play a central role in the perpetuation of inequalities in the Chilean labour market. Bastos, Celeste, Faerstein and Barros (2010) reveals that discrimination is the process by which a member or members of a society defined group is or are treated differently because of his or her membership of that group or because of some characteristics that is perceived as undesirable according to the social norms (Link and Phelan,2001). Ved et al. (2019) discovered widespread gender disparities in education, health, and the labour market in India, highlighting the need to reform economic policies to promote gender equality. Choudhury and Kumar (2021) discovered that the biggest impediments to gender equality in North East India are culture and customary practices that prohibit women from full participation in society. Mishra and Bhardwaj (2021) discovered considerable economic disparity in India due to educational disparities between the rural and urban sectors. A more fair allocation of resources would aid in the reduction of economic disparity in a country. According to Atal and Foster (2021), impoverished urban Indian women are severely stressed due to social exclusion from economic resources. Datta and Sahu (2021) concluded that microfinance institutions actively created jobs and empowered women in rural India. The current study tries to analyze the Intersectionality of race, class and ethnicity along with gender and their effects on the growth rate of the economy.

4. METHODOLOGY:

The present study mainly examines the inter linkage between gender and race, class and ethnicity. It is completely based on qualitative research methods on the governmentofficials' documents. Secondary data are collected from various sources such as official reports, books, journals and government websites.

5. DISCUSSIONS & RESULTS:

5.1 The Origin and Evolution of Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw first introduced the concept of Intersectionality in her landmark paper, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* (1989), where she highlighted the unique forms of discrimination faced by Black women. Crenshaw argued that the legal system's failure to recognize multiple, intersecting identities resulted in the marginalization of Black women within both feminist and anti-racist movements. Feminism, she argued, often centered the experiences of white, middle-class women, while anti-racism efforts focused on Black men, leaving Black women at the margins.

Over time, the intersectional framework has expanded to include other categories of identity such as class, sexuality, ability, and religion. Intersectionality offers a more nuanced understanding of oppression by acknowledging that individuals do not experience discrimination based solely on one aspect of their identity but as a result of the confluence of several social categorizations.

5.2 Gender and Race: A Dual Lens of Oppression

5.2.1 Historical Context:

The intersections of gender and race have been central to feminist movements, particularly for women of colour. While white feminist movements historically fought for gender equality, women of colour were doubly oppressed—by their race and gender. Black feminists like Audre Lorde and bell hooks have long criticized mainstream feminist movements for ignoring the specific struggles faced by women of colour, highlighting that racial identity cannot be disentangled from gender oppression.

In the United States, the legacy of slavery and segregation has deeply influenced the experiences of Black women. Black feminists argue that gender inequality cannot be fully understood without addressing the systemic racism that shapes their lives. Black women, for instance, are often portrayed in dehumanizing stereotypes, such as the "angry Black woman" or the "mammy" figure, which influence how they are treated in both public and private spheres.

5.2.2 Contemporary Realities:

In modern contexts, the intersection of race and gender continues to affect access to resources, opportunities, and social mobility. Research consistently shows that women of colour face greater obstacles in the workplace compared to their white counterparts. They are often subject to racialized gender discrimination, which includes being paid less, receiving fewer promotions, and being perceived as less competent. For example, a 2020 study by the American Association of University Women found that Black women in the U.S. earn 63 cents for every dollar earned by a white man, compared to 82 cents for white women.

Moreover, women of colour face disproportionately high rates of police violence and incarceration, illustrating the intersection of racialized state violence with gendered oppression. The #The SayHerName campaign, launched by the African American Policy Forum, has drawn attention to the often-ignored cases of Black women killed by the police, showing that gendered racial violence is a critical issue that needs to be addressed.

5.3 Class and Gender: Economic Disparities and Social Stratification:

5.3.1 Gendered Class Inequalities:

The intersection of class and gender reveals how economic status amplifies gender-based oppression. Women, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, face unique challenges in accessing education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Feminist economists such as Nancy Folbre have argued that gendered labor divisions place women in undervalued and underpaid sectors, perpetuating economic inequality.

Working-class women often face a "triple burden" as they navigate paid work, unpaid domestic labour, and care giving responsibilities. This disproportionate burden is compounded by low wages, limited social safety nets, and precarious working conditions. For example, women in low-income communities often work in informal sectors without job security or benefits, making them more vulnerable to economic instability.

5.3.2 Class, Gender, and the Welfare State:

The welfare state plays a crucial role in addressing the intersection of gender and class. Social policies that provide access to affordable healthcare, childcare, and education are vital for reducing class-based gender inequalities. However, austerity measures and neoliberal policies have disproportionately impacted women, especially those in working-class or marginalized racial and ethnic communities. Cuts to social services often shift the burden of care onto women, exacerbating the intersectional effects of gender and class oppression.

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the intersectional inequalities faced by working-class women. Many were employed in essential yet low-paid sectors such as healthcare, retail, and care giving, exposing them to higher risks of illness while lacking adequate financial protection.

5.4 Ethnicity and Gender: Cultural Identity and Marginalization:

5.4.1 The Role of Ethnicity in Shaping Gender Norms:

Ethnicity plays a significant role in shaping gender norms and expectations within different cultural groups. For instance, many ethnic minorities face pressures to conform to traditional gender roles, which can reinforce patriarchal structures. Women from conservative ethnic communities may be expected to prioritize family obligations over personal ambitions, limiting their ability to pursue education or careers.

Moreover, ethnicity intersects with gender in complex ways when individuals migrate to new countries. Immigrant women often navigate dual pressures: the need to preserve cultural identity while adapting to the dominant culture's gender norms.

This creates unique challenges for women of ethnic minorities, who may experience cultural alienation, discrimination, and sexism simultaneously.

5.4.2 Ethnic Discrimination and Gender-Based Violence:

Ethnic minority women are often more vulnerable to gender-based violence, as they face compounded discrimination based on both their gender and ethnicity. In many societies, ethnic minority women are perceived as "outsiders," subject to cultural stereotypes and xenophobic attitudes. These intersecting oppressions make it more difficult for them to access legal and social support systems when experiencing violence.

Research has shown that women from ethnic minority groups are more likely to experience domestic violence, sexual harassment, and human trafficking. For example, in many Western countries, immigrant women are disproportionately represented among victims of trafficking and exploitation, as they often lack the legal protections afforded to citizens.

5.5 Intersectionality in Policy and Activism:

Intersectional feminism aims to address the limitations of traditional feminist approaches by incorporating the experiences of women from diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds. This approach calls for a more inclusive feminist movement that considers the multiple and intersecting forms of oppression faced by women worldwide.

5.5.1 Intersectional Feminism:

Activists and scholars argue that policies aimed at addressing gender inequality must also tackle issues of racial, class, and ethnic injustice. For example, labour rights for domestic workers—a predominantly female and immigrant workforce—must be framed not just as a gender issue but as an issue of race and class as well.

5.5.2 Intersectionality in Law and Human Rights:

The legal system plays a crucial role in addressing intersectional inequalities, although it often falls short in recognizing the complexity of these issues. Crenshaw's early work on Intersectionality highlighted the limitations of anti-discrimination laws, which typically focus on singular categories of identity (e.g., gender or race) without accounting for their intersections.

Legal scholars and activists continue to advocate for intersectional approaches to law and human rights. This involves creating policies that recognize the unique vulnerabilities of individuals who are marginalized along multiple dimensions, such as immigrant women, transgender people of colour, and working-class mothers.

5.6 Intersectionality of Gender in Indian Context:

India is one of the world's most populous and fastest growing economies, although it is ranked moderately and weakly in many global indices of advancement. According to UNICEF, gender inequality is severe in India. The healthcare system reacts ineffectively to reducing newborn and under five female mortality rates. As a result, females die at a higher rate than boys, and girls drop out of school at a higher rate than boys. Furthermore, adolescent boys have more freedom than girls, including the ability to get better health and education facilities and better occupations; they are also forced to early marriage, which contributes to widespread poverty and uneven economic resources.

In India, the concept of Intersectionality has deep roots. Historically, various forms of discrimination have overlapped, affecting people's lives in complex ways. For example, a dalit woman may face discrimination not just because of her gender but also due to her caste. This layered discrimination has been part of India's social fabric for centuries. Intersectionality helps to understand how different forms of disparities like caste, race, ethnicity, religion and class combined to affect gender equality and nation's development. The present study shows that gender issues can't be looked at alone for discrimination and exclusion but should be seen with other social, economic and political factors also. There are also several theoretical frameworks that help in understanding Intersectionality in India. These includes –

- Critical Race Theory: Focuses on how race and caste intersect with other social categories.
- Feminist Theory: This theory examines how gender discrimination interacts with other forms of inequality
- Post-Colonial Theory: It looks at how colonial history impacts current social structures and discriminations.

Understanding these frameworks is crucial for addressing the multiple forms of discrimination that people face in India like social, economic or political. These forms of disparities and exclusion are briefly explained as follows-

- **Social Disabilities:** In the social hierarchy, the lower castes are ascribed the lowest status. It is important to consider caste when talking about gender equality. Caste is a very big part of Indian society and affects many aspects of life, including gender equality. Dalit women, for example, often face more challenges because they are discriminated against both caste and gender. In India, religion is another social factor in case of gender inequality. For instance Muslim, Hindu and Christian women might face different kinds of discrimination based on their religion and gender. These experiences can vary widely within the same country.
- **Economic Inequalities:** Women are half of the population of India and they play a very crucial role in the nation's development, forming a welfare state and economic prosperity. Without this section of people a country is unable to reach its goal. But women in India often find themselves in the informal labour sector, such as domestic work, street vending and small-scale farming. These jobs are usually low-paying and lack job security. This economic vulnerability is compounded by gender discrimination, making it difficult for women to achieve financial independence. Access to financial resources is another significant challenge for women. Many women do not have bank accounts or access to credit, which limits their ability to start businesses or invest in education. Microfinance initiatives have made some progress, but the reach is still limited.
- **Political Disabilities:** The untouchables rarely participated in political matters. Earlier, lower castes people were not allowed to hold public positions. Political representation was denied to them. After independence, seats in the Parliament and State Legislatures were reserved for them. But they are yet to become a decisive force in Indian Politics. They are still excluded from the political power sharing.
- **Ethnicity and Gender: Marginalized Communities:** Ethnicity also hinders gender equality. Tribal women in India are also facing unique challenges due to their dual identity as both women and members of marginalized ethnic groups. They often lack access to basic amenities like healthcare and education, which further exacerbates their struggles. Additionally, traditional customs and societal norms can limit their opportunities for personal and economic growth.

5.7 Effects of Various Discriminations:

Discriminations based on gender along with caste, race and ethnicity badly affected human potential and their development as well as national unity. People become conscious of their own castes and prioritize their caste and class interests over national interests. It is against the democratic spirit. Caste system results in suppression of individual liberty and dignity. Lower castes people are not respected as they are denied basic human rights. It has also resulted in the monopoly of upper castes over knowledge, education and wisdom. This has created a wide gulf between the upper and the lower castes. It is again a hindrance to national development. Women are exploited both physically and mentally. They are forced to follow certain rituals against their wishes.

For the development of a nation, it is essential that all the sections of the society should contribute to the social welfare and national economy but the discriminating systems pictured those people as unequal's and deny a voice in national development and economic advancement. Thus, those people are given more importance in society as compared to their abilities and capabilities. Government should provide them better education and develop their skills and give job opportunities. So that they will build up with full potential.

Though various legislations have been passed by the Parliament and the State Legislatures yet such discrimination exists in India. Through different Socio-Economic and healthcare policies, the government continues to move towards significant women centered reforms to reduce gender disparity.

The following measures can be taken to eliminate these discriminations from Indian society:

- Policies should be designed and implemented that specifically aim to challenge the discrimination on the basis of gender with caste, race, class and ethnicity.
- Platforms should be built at the national as well as local levels that should specifically be used to build the capacity of the community who are victims of the caste based discrimination.
- All kinds of institutional discrimination should be tackled at every level.
- Good housing facilities with provision of basic services shall be built for the deprived section of the society.
- Spread a message of peace and harmony on the basis of democratic rights, equality and human dignity.

8. CONCLUSION:

The Intersectionality of gender with race, class, and ethnicity provides a critical lens through which to understand the diverse experiences of oppression faced by women worldwide. By acknowledging the multiplicity of identities that shape individuals' experiences, Intersectionality challenges simplistic understandings of inequality and offers a more comprehensive framework for social justice.

As this article has demonstrated, addressing gender inequality requires a broader analysis that includes race, class, and ethnicity. Policies and activism must take into account the intersecting forms of oppression that shape individuals' lives, ensuring that no one is left behind in the struggle for equality.

In conclusion, addressing gender equality in India requires a deep understanding of Intersectionality. This means recognizing how different forms of disparities like those based on caste, colour, religion and class overlap and affects people in unique ways. By looking at these intersections, we can better understand the challenges faced by marginalized groups.

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