



WOMEN AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: ANALYZING GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES IN INDIA

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Abstract

Constitutional mandates, governmental initiatives, and grassroots action have all played a role in shaping the larger struggle for social justice in India, and at the centre of this effort has been the fight for gender equality. The purpose of this article is to examine the development of gender equality policies in India, especially with regard to the influence these policies have had on women's education, employment, political representation, and protection against gender-based violence. The Hindu Marriage Act, the Equal Remuneration Act, and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act are just few of the legislation that have made great progress in addressing gender inequality. However, structural disadvantages continue to exist, which prevents women from fully participating in society. However, despite the fact that programs such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and political reservations for women in Panchayati Raj institutions have contributed to development, gender gaps continue to be a significant issue in higher political positions and economic prospects. A further challenge to patriarchal standards and an intensification of calls for structural change have been brought about by the emergence of internet activism, which is illustrated by movements like as #MeToo. The purpose of this research is to highlight the successes and failures of gender equality programs in India. It also emphasises the necessity of greater implementation, intersectional methods, and cultural reforms in order to build a society that is really just and equitable for women.

Keywords: Gender equality, women, society, Domestic Violence

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of gender equality in India has been an essential component of the larger social justice movement. This movement has been moulded by historical conflicts, constitutional demands, and shifting policy frameworks. Through the early reform campaigns against societal ills such as Sati and child marriage to the modern initiatives campaigning for equal pay, political representation, and protection against gender-based violence, women's rights in India have experienced substantial alterations. These transitions have occurred over the course of several decades. In the Indian Constitution, gender equality was codified as a basic right, which paved the way for progressive laws such as the Hindu Marriage Act, the Equal Remuneration Act, and the Maternity Benefit Act. This was accomplished under the influence of social reformers and leaders such as B.R. Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru. In spite of the fact that there are legal safeguards in place, women in

India continue to confront major socio-economic and cultural hurdles that prevent them from fully participating in society.

A number of policies and programs have been implemented over the course of several decades in order to alleviate gender inequities in the areas of education, employment, and health. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao is one of the programs that aims to fight the gender gap in education and the falling female literacy rates. On the other hand, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has been working to increase economic prospects for women who are employed in the informal sector. Women currently control more than forty percent of the elected posts in Panchayati Raj institutions, which is a result of the reservation of seats for women in such institutions. This has led to advances in political representation. The participation of women, on the other hand, continues to be restricted at higher levels of government, with their representation in Parliament and state legislatures remaining much lower than the averages for the rest of the world. Furthermore, gender-based violence continues to be a major issue, as seen by the increasing number of occurrences of domestic abuse, harassment in the workplace, and crimes such as rape that have been registered by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). Legal safeguards have been reinforced as a result of the adoption of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, which were issued in response to the Nirbhaya case; nonetheless, difficulties in enforcing these laws continue to exist. Amplification of voices against systematic gender discrimination has been achieved by the modern feminist movement in India, which has been fuelled by digital activism through campaigns such as #MeToo and #WomenInWorkforce. This movement has also pushed for more inclusive legislation and an overall transformation in society. Despite the fact that tremendous progress has been made, achieving real gender equality continues to be a never-ending fight that calls for continued governmental measures, grassroots mobilisation, and a cultural shift towards a society that is more inclusive and fair.

Social Justice for Women in India

Legal rights, economic empowerment, political representation, and social equality are all aspects of social justice for women in India, which is a multifaceted problem that spans anything from these to more. Despite the fact that constitutional provisions such as Articles 14, 15, and 16 ban discrimination based on sex and guarantee gender equality, the lived experiences of Indian women continue to demonstrate disparities that are deeply rooted. Legislative measures such as the Hindu Succession Act (1956), the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), the Equal Remuneration Act (1976), and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) have been enacted over the course of several decades with the intention of bridging the gender gap and providing women with increased social and economic stability. On the other hand, despite the existence of these legislative frameworks, important difficulties continuing to exist include gender-based violence, salary disparities, and under-representation in leadership posts. There is a significant gap between legislation and execution, as evidenced by the fact that the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) frequently records high occurrences of crimes against women. These crimes include sexual harassment, domestic abuse, and human trafficking. The presence of socio-cultural hurdles, particularly in rural regions, continues to impede women's access to education and work opportunities. As a result, the percentage of women who participate in the labour force is still much lower than that of males.

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and the MUDRA program are two examples of economic efforts that have helped women achieve greater financial independence. These initiatives have done this by offering loan facilities and possibilities for women to start their own businesses. Women continue to encounter structural impediments, such as uneven pay, a lack of job stability, and gendered occupational segregation, particularly in the informal sector. These barriers are particularly prevalent in the informal sector. Despite the fact that women's involvement in state and national legislatures continues to be low, there has been an increase in political representation as a result of the Panchayati Raj institutions guaranteeing a reservation of 33 percent for women. The recent approval of the Women's Reservation Bill (2023), which intends to reserve 33 percent of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women, is a significant step towards greater political participation. The bill was passed in 2023. Specifically through movements such as #MeToo and #WomenInWorkforce, digital activism has played a significant role in bringing to light instances of discrimination in the workplace and campaigning for more robust legislative safeguards. In spite of the fact that significant progress has been made, achieving complete social justice for women in India calls for an all-encompassing strategy that integrates legal reforms, economic opportunities, educational opportunities, and cultural transformation. This strategy is necessary in order to guarantee equal rights and opportunities for all women, regardless of their caste, class, or geographic location.

Objectives

1. To research being conducted on the social realities and gender equality in India From the Indian point of view.
2. To study on the Factors Affecting Inequality of Gender

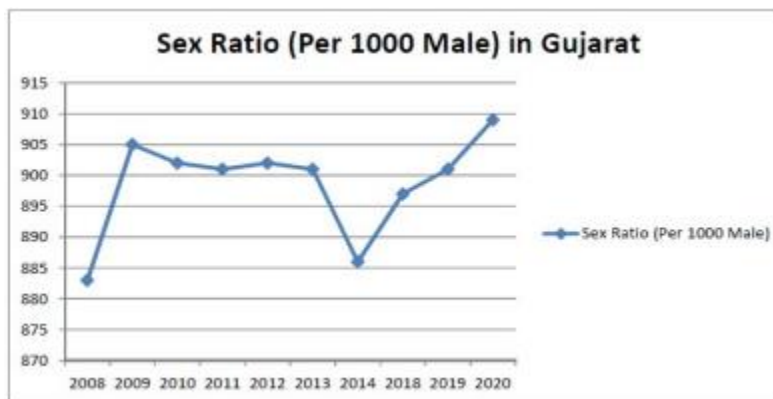
Research Methodology

The data of sustainable development goals and national sample survey data for the years 2008 to 2020 are being used in this research project for the purpose of conducting a descriptive study of various variables. These variables include historical and cultural factors, socioeconomic factors, gender-based violence and discrimination, and implications for sustainable development. To determine the consequences that gender disparity has had over the course of the previous several years:

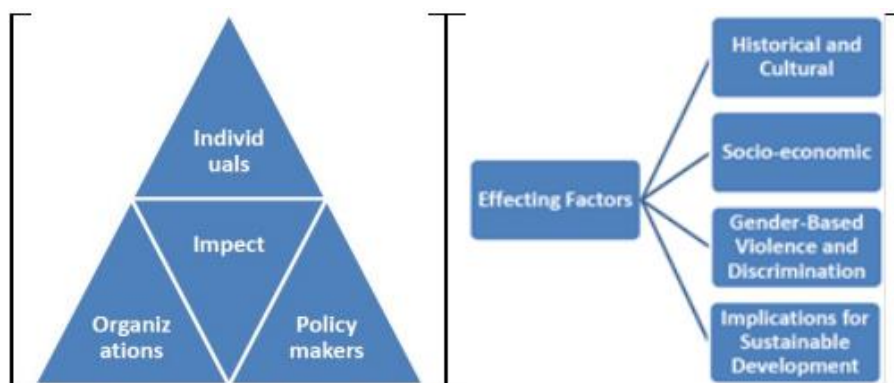
Years	Sex Ratio (Per 1000 Male) in Gujarat
2008	883
2009	905
2010	902
2001	901
2002	902
2013	901
2014	886
2018	897

2019	901
2020	909

(National Sample Survey Office (NSSO)) (National Sample Survey Office, 2020)



According to the data collected by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) office in 2008, the ratio of males to females in the population of 1000 was 883. Only the year 2014 is an exception to this trend, which is generally in an upward direction. Despite the passage of time, the ratio continues to demonstrate the inequity. A number of factors that are not disclosed on the website are the reasons why the data for the years 2015 to 2017 is not available. Despite the fact that the ratio is in the process of improving, the sustainable development targets are still a long way off from being accomplished at current snail's pace. When we examine the ratio of Gujarat, we can claim that equality has not yet been realised despite the massive amount of effort that the government has put up.



Factors Affecting Inequality of Gender

Understanding the structure and overview of gender inequality as a worldwide concern highlights the gravity of the issue as well as the necessity of doing research on it within the context of India. After this, there are parts that go into the historical and cultural elements, socioeconomic features, gender-based violence and discrimination, and health inequalities that contribute to gender inequality in India. These sections are followed by one another. The consequences of gender disparity for sustainable development are then discussed in the paper, with an emphasis placed on the significance of resolving this matter. In addition, it

provides ideas for advancing gender equality in India, as well as a discussion of the many efforts and interventions that are currently in place.

Historical and Cultural Factor

In India, gender inequality has deep roots that may be traced back to the country's historical and cultural environment. In order to have a complete understanding of the issues that women and girls in our nation confront, it is essential to have a firm grasp on these elements. The historical and cultural backdrop of gender disparity in India is illuminated by the characteristics that are discussed in the following important components:

1. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes: The perpetuation of gender disparity in India may be attributed, in large part, to the traditional gender roles and stereotypes that have been associated with it. Women have traditionally been expected to take on tasks related to domestic and caregiving responsibilities, while males have been expected to be the principal breadwinners in their households. In addition to limiting women's access to education and economic possibilities, these deeply established norms and expectations also restrict their ability to make decisions.

2. Caste-based discrimination and its impact on gender inequality: When caste-based discrimination, which is pervasive in Indian society, meets with gender inequality, the impact of this intersection is amplified on populations who are already marginalised. In many cases, women who belong to lower castes are subjected to several types of discrimination and exclusion, which further restricts their access to educational opportunities, societal resources, and work opportunities.

3. Influence of patriarchal social structures and norms: A significant amount of impact on gender dynamics in India is exerted by patriarchal societal institutions and norms. The existence of these systems gives precedence to male authority and serves to promote male domination and control over the lives of women. Practices such as dowry, female isolation, and limits on women's movement and decision-making autonomy are examples of patriarchal norms that are mirrored in society. These conventions contribute to the perpetuation of uneven power relations and restrict the chances available to women for career progression and empowerment.

The persistent discriminatory practices, restricted opportunities, and unequal power dynamics in India may be attributed, in part, to the historical and cultural backdrop of gender inequality in the country. Challenging and transforming these deeply embedded structures and norms is essential for achieving gender equality in the country. Through the promotion of gender-sensitive education, the breaking of stereotypes, and the empowerment of women to fight patriarchal conventions, it is possible to bring about a society that is more representative of all people and more inclusive.

Socio-Economic Factors

The socioeconomic climate in India is one of the most significant factors that contributes to the persistent gender gap that exists in the country. A number of factors, including access to resources, political representation, career prospects, and educational chances, are factors that contribute to the existing inequalities in these situations. Focussing on the following primary variables, this article will highlight the socioeconomic ramifications of gender imbalance in the country by highlighting the following important aspects:

1. Education disparity and limited access to quality education for girls: Despite the progress that has been made in recent years, the education gap in India remains a significant problem that needs to be addressed. There are a number of challenges that females face while attempting to obtain an education. Some of these challenges include cultural norms, insufficient infrastructure, and prejudices based on gender. As a result of the restricted access they have to proper education, their personal development, economic opportunities, and overall empowerment are all hampered.

2. Employment and wage gaps: In India, there is still a persistent gender gap in terms of employment and pay. As a result of the fact that they are more likely to be working in the informal sector, women frequently encounter difficulties in gaining access to quality employment possibilities, as well as prejudice in the recruiting and promotion processes. A further factor that contributes to economic inequality is the fact that women get lower earnings than their male colleagues for performing works that are equivalent.

3. Unequal representation in political and decision-making processes: The percentage of women who hold positions of power and influence in India's political and decision-making sectors continues to be relatively low. Women's voices are more difficult to include into the policy-making and decision-making processes when they are not adequately represented in political positions. When it comes to attaining gender equality and supporting inclusive government, it is very necessary to increase the number of women who participate in politics and leadership roles.

4. Women's limited access to land, property, and resources: Women in India often face barriers to accessing and owning land, property, and other productive resources. Cultural norms, inheritance laws, and biased practices often result in women being excluded from property ownership. This limits their economic independence and ability to accumulate wealth, perpetuating gender disparities.

Ensuring that these socioeconomic concerns are addressed is absolutely necessary in order to advance gender equality in India. Efforts should be focused on ensuring that girls have equitable access to excellent education, supporting employment regulations that are gender-responsive, increasing the number of women who are politically represented, and fighting discriminatory practices around land and property ownership. When these inequalities are addressed, women have the potential to achieve equitable opportunity, economic empowerment, and a more powerful voice in the process of creating the future of the country.

Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination

Gender-based violence and discrimination pose significant challenges to gender equality in India. These forms of violence and discrimination are deeply entrenched in societal norms, cultural practices, and power imbalances. The following key aspects highlight the issues related to gender-based violence and discrimination in India:

1. High prevalence of violence against women: India faces a high prevalence of violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual assault, rape, dowry-related violence, and honor killings. These acts of violence have severe physical, psychological, and social consequences for women, limiting their freedom, safety, and overall well-being.
2. Child marriage and female infanticide: Child marriage is a harmful practice that persists in some parts of India. It deprives girls of their childhood, education, and opportunities for personal development. Additionally, female infanticide, though illegal, is still practiced in certain regions, leading to a skewed sex ratio and gender imbalance.
3. Son preference and its implications for gender imbalance: Son preference is deeply rooted in Indian society, leading to a preference for male children. This preference contributes to gender imbalance, as it can result in the neglect, abandonment, or termination of female pregnancies. The skewed sex ratio exacerbates gender disparities and impacts social dynamics.
4. Sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination in the workplace: Sexual harassment and genderbased discrimination persist in various workplaces across India. Women often face unequal treatment, limited career advancement opportunities, and hostile work environments. Lack of safe and inclusive workplaces hinders women's economic participation and professional growth.

There is an absolute necessity for the implementation of measures such as strong legislative frameworks, awareness campaigns, gender-sensitive education, and support services for survivors. In addition, the elimination of harmful practices such as child marriage and the promotion of gender equality in social and cultural arenas are essential steps towards the realisation of a society that is free from violence and prejudice. For the purpose of empowering women and encouraging their full participation in the workforce, it is of the utmost importance to establish workplaces that are both safe and welcoming, and that also preserve gender equality.

Implications for Sustainable Development

The unequal treatment of women in India has significant repercussions for the country's efforts to achieve sustainable development, which encompasses economic, social, and environmental aspects. Some of the most important issues that emphasise the significance of gender disparity for sustainable development are found below:

1. Economic costs of gender inequality: Gender inequality imposes significant economic costs on society. When women are denied equal opportunities in education, employment, and entrepreneurship, it hampers

overall economic growth and productivity. Gender gaps in the labor market and wage disparities limit the country's potential for inclusive and sustainable development.

2. Impact on human development indicators: Gender inequality has a direct impact on various human development indicators. Limited access to education for girls, lower healthcare utilization, and higher maternal mortality rates are some of the consequences of gender disparities. Gender-based violence and discrimination also have detrimental effects on women's mental health and overall well-being.

3. Sustainable Development Goals and gender equality in India: Gender equality is a critical component of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Achieving gender equality in India is essential for realizing multiple SDGs, including those related to poverty eradication, quality education, decent work, reduced inequalities, and gender empowerment. Failing to address gender inequality hinders progress toward sustainable development targets.

For India to achieve sustainable development, it is essential to address the issue of gender disparity. In order to do this, comprehensive measures are required, with the primary goals being the empowerment of women, the elimination of discriminatory behaviours, and the promotion of equal opportunities in education, employment, and management. Key measures towards attaining gender equality and furthering sustainable development goals in India include making investments in women's education and healthcare, guaranteeing their involvement in economic and political arenas, and cultivating an atmosphere that is safe and welcoming to everyone. (2018) According to Nair 2016. Jha (Jha)

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that India has achieved tremendous progress in advancing gender equality via the implementation of legislative reforms, governmental interventions, and grassroots activity, there are still enormous obstacles to overcome before social justice can be completely realised for women. The persisting gender disparity in education, employment, and political representation, in conjunction with the high incidence of violence based on gender, highlights the necessity of more stringent implementation of current laws and policy frameworks that are more inclusive. The emergence of internet activism and feminist movements has been an important factor in confronting patriarchal conventions and calling for systemic change. However, in order to achieve genuine gender justice, a holistic strategy that encompasses changes in the areas of law, economics, and society is required. Moving forward, it is vital to make consistent efforts in the areas of education, economic empowerment, political engagement, and social awareness in order to dismantle structural disparities and ensure that all women, regardless of caste, class, or location, are able to fully enjoy their rights. The only way for India to make progress towards a society that is more just, equitable, and inclusive for women is to take an approach that is both holistic and intersectional.

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