

GENDER EQUALITY IN INDIA – EMPOWERING WOMEN, EMPOWERING INDIA

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Abstract

We proud Indians of 21 century rejoice in celebrations when a boy is born, and if it is a girl, a muted or no celebrations is the norm. Love for a male child is so much so that from the times immemorial we are killing our daughters at birth or before birth, and if, fortunately, she is not killed we find various ways to discriminate against her throughout her life. Though our religious beliefs make women a goddess but we fail to recognize her as a human being first; we worship goddesses but we exploit girls. We are a society of people with double-standards as far as our attitude towards women is concerned; our thoughts and preaching are different than our actions. Let's try to understand the phenomenon of gender inequality and search for some solutions.

In India Gender inequality found among every state, Social class and this inequality have an impact on growth of Indian economy from improving the lives of Indian people. Gender inequality in India is exists in every arena such as education, employment opportunities, income, health, cultural issues, social issues, economic issues and many more. In this paper we try to find out factors which are responsible for gender in equality in India. What are the consequences of gender inequality in economic, social, cultural and legal environment and to key challenge for policy-makers to establish proper Gender equality in India? With the help of review also put forward few relevant tactics to overcome gender inequality and to endorse the dignified position for Indian women.

Keywords: *Gender Equality, Economic, Empowering Women.*

JEL Classification Code: E24, E26, J16, J71, O15

Introduction:

Gender equality in India is the most desired state of form, which our Nation is craving to have for since long. Gender equality is no more a moral pressure or social issue but also a social, economic challenge. Gender Equality leads to human development and the overall development of the Nation. India being a Nation full of achievement, still lacks few appreciations in the case of Gender Equality in India. Some NGO, is committed to supporting gender equality in health, education, social protection, and labor. NGO's social strategies and programs in these sectors aim to reduce disparities between men and women and across population groups. To achieve this, the NGO's assistance in these sectors includes expanding access to family planning and

reproductive health services, promoting gender parity in education, providing social safety nets and insurance and aiding people to acquire needed resources and skills.

In India, discriminatory attitudes towards males or females have existed for generations and affect both lives. Although the Indian constitution has granted both men and women equal rights, gender disparities continue to live and rule. Indian society has always been the hub of this discrimination, making women its victim. In the land where women are Goddess's, the same Nation leaves a blot of atrocities and inequality. It is a sad truth of society.

Recent research reveals gender discrimination mostly in favor of men in many realms, including the workplace. Discrimination between men and women affects many aspects of women's lives, from career development and progress to mental health disorders. While Indian laws on rape, dowry, and adultery have women's safety at heart, many highly discriminatory practices are still occurring at an alarming rate. Gender Equality in India is the most desired state of the form to achieve other goals for its development.

About Gender Equality:

Gender is the term that mainly refers to the economic, social, and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. In most communities, being a male or a female is not merely a matter of different biological or physical characteristics—males and females face different expectations about how they should dress up, behave, or work. Whether in the family, workplace, or the public sphere, the relations between men or women also reflect the understandings of the talents, characteristics, & behavior appropriate to women and men. Gender thus differs from sex, that it is social and cultural rather than biological.

Gender equality in India is the desired state of equal ease of access to ample resources & opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision-making, and valuing different behaviors, aspirations, and needs equally, regardless of gender. Gender Equality in India is all about equal footing in all walks of life. Gender equality in India is a fundamental human right and a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous & sustainable world.

Gender equality in India is the goal, while gender neutrality and gender equities are the practices and ways of thinking that help achieve the goal. Gender parity is used to measure gender balance in a given situation that can help achieve gender equality but is not the aim. As per UNICEF, gender equality means that “women and men, girls and boys, should enjoy the same rights and liberties, resources, opportunities, and protections. It is, however, not important that girls and boys, or women and men, be the same, or that they be treated exactly alike.

Review of Literature:

- **Jayachandran, S. (2014)**, has presented the main cause of gender inequality in developing countries. This paper also discussed the several tools that helps in reduce the gap of women & men inequality.
- **Dve, D. (1990)**, has focused on the situation of women of weaker sections of people and to safeguard the interest of these people. Paper focus on the scheduled caste and tribe women's status in Indian society and also suggested that socio- economic development plays an important role to reduce the disadvantage of scheduled group women.
- **Raju. (2014)**, has examined the gender perception in India on the basis of demographic, social, economic and political context. The paper has broadly discussed the issue of gender inequality, women empowerment & reproductive health among women of India.
- **Rustagi, (2015)**, this paper focus that if the participation of women increase in different sector it would eliminating gender inequalities in income & wages, only through the changing attitudes towards women's role & contribution that are protected by different negotiators within the labor market.
- **Sharma, R.E. (2015)**, this paper highlights the inequality among the different states of India in today modern era. It has presented gender inequality with the help of some evidences & statistics and signifying the inequality practiced in India & its comparison with other Asian & Western countries.

Objective of the Study:

1. To find out the gender inequality factors.
2. To find out the problems in Gender inequality.
3. To suggests how to reduce gender inequality.

Research Methodology:

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It is based on secondary data which is collected from published data in many website and other research papers, journals, books, newspapers etc.

Difference between Gender Equity, Gender Equality, and Women's Empowerment?

Gender equality in India can be understood with the basic understanding of the terms associated with it. Gender equity is the phenomena of being fair to women and men. Strategies & measures must be available to compensate for women's traditional and social disadvantages. Equity leads to equality. Gender equality mostly requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources, and rewards. Where gender inequality exists, women are generally excluded or disadvantaged in decision-making and easy access to economic/social resources. Hence, a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is women's empowerment, focusing on redressing imbalances and giving women more power to manage their lives and

society. Gender equality does not mean that men and women should be the same, but equal access to opportunities and life changes. Women deserved the autonomy that is neither dependent on nor constrained by any gender biases. Achieving gender equality requires women's empowerment to ensure that decision-making at personal and public levels and access to resources is not only in men's favour. Both women and men can fully participate as equal partners in a productive life.

Why is it Essential?

Gender equality in India is linked to sustainable development and vital to realizing human rights. The primary objective of gender equality is a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, fairness, and obligations in all phases of life. Equality between men & women exists when they can share equally in the distribution of power and influence. They are equal if they possess equal opportunities, financial independence, and equal access to education, job, and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions, interests, and talents. Within Nation and development strategies, gender equality is critical because it enables women to make decisions that impact their overall health and their spouses and families. Gender equality in India is the need of the hour to develop from all perspectives.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that where gender inequality exists, women are generally excluded or disadvantaged in decision-making and access to economic and social resources. The Nation that has witnessed gender equality has also seen a developed Nation. To have a prosperous Nation, Gender equality in India is a much-required component. Therefore, promoting gender equality in India is a critical aspect of women's empowerment.

Gender Equality in India a Concern for Men:

The achievement of gender equality in India implies changes for both men and women. It is crucial not to overlook gender as an aspect of men's social identity. This fact is ignored because the tendency is to consider male characteristics and attributes as the norm.

But the lives of men are as strongly influenced by gender as those of women. Societal norms and conceptions of masculinity and men's expectations as leaders, husbands, or sons create pressure on men and shape their behavior. Men are expected to concentrate on their families' material needs rather than on the nurturing and caring roles assigned to women. Socialization in the family and later in jobs promotes risk-taking behavior among young men. So the lifestyles that men's roles demand often result in more exposure to more significant morbidity and mortality risks than women. These risks include ones relating to accidents, ignorance, violence, and alcohol consumption.

Men also have the equal right to assume a more nurturing role, and opportunities promoted for them. However, men have responsibilities regarding child health and their own and their partners' health. Addressing these rights

and responsibilities entails recognizing men's specific health problems, as well as their needs and the conditions that shape them. Adopting a gender perspective is an essential first step; it reveals that there are disadvantages and costs to men accruing from patterns of gender difference. It also underscores that gender equality is concerned with the roles, responsibilities, and needs of women and men and their interrelationships.

Status in India:

India has the highest levels of sex discrimination at birth. According to the 2017 analysis of demographic data, India shall continue to have the worst sex ratio in South Asia, even in 2050. The heart wrenching 918 girls for 1,000 boys ratio as per 2011 has urged the Indian government to take action in the movement of the '**Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao**' program to ensure survival, safety, & education to the girl child. The **Beti Bachao** program fights bias and offers benefits to fight female foeticide.

To '*Educate the Girl Child and Save the Girl Child*' believes that massive awareness, large-scale female welfare services across districts shall ensure Gender Equality in India. 'Gender inequality' is the oppression of girls and women of society in all stages and spheres of their lives. While the concept of Gender Inequality is prevalent among the lower strata of society, it is also seen in the upper-middle class. Gender inequality is so deeply rooted in an Indian culture that it has become normalized.

Women face gender inequality in almost every stage of life. In India, sex discrimination begins with the womb. Women in India are getting better prenatal care when expecting male babies. Women pregnant with boys attend prenatal care appointments, take prescribed medicines, and opt for institutional delivery. But the case is not the same if she is giving birth to a girl child.

Gender Equality in India:

The status of Gender Equality in India has been progressing over the last decades. More girls are going to school, and very few girls are forced into early marriage. Women are serving in parliament and leadership positions, and reformation of law is initiated to advance gender equality. Despite these benefits, challenges continue to remain: discriminatory laws and social norms remain pervasive, women continue to underrate at all levels of political leadership, and one in five women and girls between the ages of 15-49 report experiencing physical or sexual abuse by their partners.

India has recently been ranked 112th among 153 countries in the annual Global Gender Gap Index for 2020, as per the publications of the World Economic Forum (WEF). India has slipped to the 112th spot from its 108th position in the previous times; India was ranked relatively higher at 98th place in the 2006 Report. India has been rated below countries like China (106th), Sri Lanka (102nd), Nepal (101st), Brazil (92nd), Indonesia (85th), and Bangladesh (50th).

Status of Gender Equality in India amidst COVID-19:

The effects of the pandemic, Covid-19, reversed the progress made in gender equality in India. The coronavirus outbreak intensifies existing inequalities for women or girls across every sphere, starting from health and the economy to security & social security. Women play a very disproportionate role in responding to the coronavirus, including frontline healthcare workers and caretakers at home. Women's unpaid care work has increased significantly due to school closures and aged people's advanced needs.

Women are equally harder hit by the economic impacts of COVID-19, as they disproportionately work in insecure platforms and markets. Approximately 60 percent of women work in the informal economy, which puts them at greater risk of falling into poverty.

The pandemic has also led to a sudden increase in domestic violence against girls and women. With lockdown measures in place, many women are trapped at home with their abusers, struggling to access services that suffer from cuts and restrictions. Emerging data shows that, since the pandemic outbreak, violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence – has intensified. The temporary shutdown of the economic activities to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has come with high costs on multiple fronts. For a country that has more than 600 million women, the impacts could be ever-lasting. Without some corrective measures to protect female workers, women's food security, and reproductive health, the pandemic will further stretch existing gender inequality.

Even before the pandemic period, India had some of the worst gender gap and statistics in the developing phase. The female labor force participation rate is 25 percent. And among India's working women, 90 percent got engaged in the informal sector, mostly unpaid or irregular work in the formal and informal sectors. The hardest-hit traditional sectors during the pandemic include small-businesses, hospitality, & the service industry, which employ mostly women. Many female workers in these sectors are at risk of a permanent exit from the labor market or forced into more vulnerable jobs.

Gender Inequality Statistics:

Gender inequality manifests in varied ways. And as far as India is concerned the major indicators are as follows:

1. Female Foeticide
2. Female Infanticide
3. **Child (0 to 6 age group) Sex Ratio:** 919
4. **Sex Ratio:** 943
5. **Female literacy:** 46%
6. **Maternal Mortality Rate:** 178 deaths per 100000 live births.

These above mentioned indicators are some of the important indices which show the status of women in our country.

Causes of Gender Inequality:

Attaining gender equality in India is not an easy task. Since time immemorial, a girl child is considered an unwanted entity and a family burden. Discrimination against women begins even before they are born. The heinous crimes of female feticide and infanticide prove how brutal the world could be to women.

Though our Indian constitution provides equal rights and privileges to men and women and makes similar provisions to improve their status in society, the majority of women are still struggling to enjoy the rights and opportunities meant for them.

The traditional system, illiteracy, household responsibilities, lack of awareness, low mobility, lack of confidence, and male stereotypes are factors responsible for creating gender disparity.

Benefits of Gender Equality in India:

It is high time to raise a clarion call to accelerate positive change in the way women are looked at in India regarding their health and well-being. As the adage carries, a woman is the 'architect of a family, a nation, and the whole world.' Thereby, the growing conversation about the acute need for gender equality in India makes imminent sense. Moreover, the realization is mounting that equality is no more a women-centric issue but an economic one. It's only in an equal society that organizations and nations will realize their fullest potential and prosper.

A McKinsey Global Institute recently points out that *improving women's status and initiating gender equality in India could add \$12 trillion to global growth. Increasing women's labor force participation by ten percentage points could add \$700 billion to India's GDP by 2025.* There is ample proof that valuing females is essential towards making a prosperous society and Nation and making communities more prosperous.

Also, empowering them economically does lead to poverty reduction, as women tend to invest more in their households and communities. The government is doing its best with progressive programs such as the Skill India Mission.

Challenges:

Every girl of our Nation and across deserves to reach her full potential, but the gender disparity hinders reality. Wherever they live in India, girls witness gender inequality in their home and communities almost every day in textbooks, movies, the media, etc. In India, gender inequality results in unequal opportunities, and while it impacts the lives of both genders, statistically, it is mostly the disadvantaged girls.

Around the globe, girls have higher survival rates at birth, are more likely to be developmentally on track. Still, India is the only country where more girls die than boys. Girls are more likely to drop out of school. In India, girls and boys encounter adolescence differently. Whereas boys tend to experience greater freedom, girls tend to face extensive restrictions on their ability to move freely and make decisions affecting their work, education, marriage, and social relationships.

As girls and boys age, gender barriers continue to expand and continue into adulthood, where we see only a quarter of women working in the formal workplace. Some Indian women are global leaders and influential voices in diverse fields. Still, most Indian women do not fully enjoy many of their rights due to deeply entrenched patriarchal ideologies, norms, traditions, & structures. India cannot fully prosper unless both girls and boys are equally supported to reach their full potential.

There are risks, violations, and vulnerabilities; girls in our society face because of their gender. With the prevalence of gender unfairness and social norms and practices, girls are exposed to the possibility of child marriage, early pregnancy, domestic work, poor education and health, sexual abuse, exploitation, and violence. Many of these signs will not change unless girls are valued more.

Solutions to Encourage Gender Equality in India:

It is critical to enhancing girls' value by investing and empowering them with education, skills, sports, and many more. By realizing the value of girls, we can collectively contribute to the achievement of specific results, some short-term (increasing access to education), others medium-term (ending child marriage), and others long-term (eliminating gender-biased sex selection). *Changing the perspective towards girls should include men, women, & boys. It has to mobilize multiple sectors in society. Only when society's perception changes will affect all the girls' rights and gender equality in India.*

Empowering girls of our Nation requires planned investment and collaboration. Providing girls with the services and safety, education, and other skills they need in daily life can reduce the risks they encounter and enable them to develop and contribute to India's growth. Girls have an incredibly tricky time accessing life-saving resources, information, and social networks in their daily life. Access to programs specifically tailored to girls' needs – with an eye on education & developing life skills, mitigating violence, and incorporating girls' needs and contributions from vulnerable sections, including those with disabilities, can strengthen girls' resilience. Long-term solutions designed for girls can further enhance the strength and be a roadmap of girls' transformational & lifelong opportunities.

Conclusion:

Society should look for gender equality in India and burn their old school thought that women are commodities. It's the only way to usher the Nation on the track of prosperity and accomplishments. We all know that gender

equality in India can immensely contribute to its progress in all the departments. Various stats and figures related to countries in which a significant section of empowered women resides indicate that countries with a higher percentage of gender equality are rapidly rising every day on all the fronts at the global level.

Many NGOs, is wholeheartedly dedicated to supports women's aspiration to transform their lives and their communities. It further provides them with the ample opportunity to embark on an empowerment journey to gain the confidence, knowledge, experience, and skills they require to reach their full potential as agents of sustainable change. It further supports their entrepreneurial aspirations and dreams.

Gender equality in India is a term more than equal representation in society. It is strongly associated with women's rights and often requires policy changes. Gender Equality in India is the secret for all upheld success that our Nation deserves in the long run. Gender equality in India is the secret mantra for achieving the desired state of the Nation.

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