

Gender Equality in India: A Delusion of Intellect or Reality

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Abstract

Gender inequality is pervasive in Indian society. Although it is a global phenomenon, its tentacles have grown widely in patriarchal Indian society. Female feticide is a sort of discrimination against women that occurs before birth, while female infanticide is widespread after delivery. Gender disparities in therapy can be detected as early as childhood. Girls are regarded as a liability. Despite economic growth, gender equality has not been attained. Secondary sources were used to acquire data. The patriarchy system in Indian society is the primary cause of gender disparity. Social law has progressed, but gender disparity has not been eliminated, and the child-sex ratio has worsened. Educated persons should raise national awareness of the benefits of gender equality. The changes in attitudes towards women are required. Human civilization will benefit the greatest if women are treated equally and are not denied their rights.

Keywords: Gender inequality, gender parity, discrimination

INTRODUCTION

“The right to be protected from sexual harassment and sexual assault is, therefore, guaranteed by the Constitution, and is one of the pillars on which the very construct of gender justice stands.”

—Justice Verma Committee

What is Gender?

Socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions, and identities are observed among individuals of various gender identities, including girls, women, boys, men, and those who identify with multiple genders. The presence of a gender hierarchy further amplifies existing social and economic inequalities.

The confluence of gender-based discrimination and other types of prejudice includes, but is not limited to, ethnicity, socioeconomic position, disability, age, location of residence, gender identity, and sexual orientation. This is what the word “intersectionality” refers to. Gender interacts with, but is not the same as, sex, which refers to biological and physiological differences between men, females, and intersex persons, such as chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive organs. Gender and sex are

connected, but not the same as gender identity. Gender identity refers to an individual’s strongly felt, internal, and personal sense of gender, which may or may not correlate to the individual’s physiology or birth sex. Gender influences people’s experiences and access to health care. Access to health care information, support, and services, as well as the outcomes of such interactions, can be affected by how health services are structured and provided. All individuals should be able to afford, obtain, and accept health care that is also of high quality, equitable, and dignified [1].

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What is Gender Equality?

In India, gender equality means that everyone has equal access to the country's wealth of resources and opportunities regardless of their gender, socioeconomic status, or role in making decisions. It also means that everyone is equally recognized for their unique behaviors, aspirations, and needs. The desired state is gender equality. Gender equality in India refers to placing men and women on an equal footing in all aspects of life. Gender effects people's experiences with and access to health care.

The organization and delivery of health services can either restrict or enhance an individual's ability to access health care information, support, and services, along with the outcomes resulting from those interactions. It is crucial for health care to be accessible, affordable, and culturally appropriate for everyone, while also ensuring high-quality standards. Gender inequalities are hierarchical and connect with other social and economic inequities. Gender discrimination connects with various forms of prejudice, including race, socioeconomic position, handicap, age, geographic location, gender identity, and sexual orientation. This is known as intersectionality. Gender prejudice is an intrinsic feature of patriarchal societies. Currently, patriarchy underpins most of the world's societies. Since time immemorial, a girl child has been regarded as an undesired presence and a burden that parents would prefer to be rid of. Gender discrimination is any denial of equality, gender, or opportunity based on gender. The male-dominated society of India makes prejudice against women a habit. Because of this, most women are unaware of their own rights and freedoms. Gender equality is also required for increased development and poverty eradication: empowered women improve the health and productivity of entire families and communities, as well as the prospects of their children. Nonetheless, despite overwhelming evidence indicating the importance of women's empowerment in realizing human rights, alleviating poverty, fostering development, and tackling the world's most pressing crises, gender equality remains an unfulfilled promise. UNFPA has advocated for women and girls for over 30 years, championing legal and policy reforms and gender-sensitive data collection, as well as supporting projects that improve women's and girls' health and broaden their life options [2].

The health and well-being of women and girls are put at risk by gender inequality and discrimination. Health information and services are more difficult to get for women and girls than for men and boys. Mobility restrictions, a lack of decision-making power, lower literacy rates, discriminatory attitudes of communities and healthcare professionals, and a lack of training and awareness among health care professionals and health systems of the particular health needs and challenges of women and girls are some of these barriers. Rigid gender standards also damage people with different gender identities, who are frequently victims of assault, stigma, and prejudice as a result, particularly in medical settings. As a result, people are more likely to catch HIV and develop mental health problems, such as suicide ideation [3].

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: ASPIRE AND ACHIEVE

"Women's empowerment" is a topic that is frequently debated in India these days. A constitutional guarantee stipulates that the Indian Constitution forbids any type of discrimination against a person based on gender under any circumstances. The irony is that, while the Indian Constitution includes several legislative safeguards to ensure women's safety and empowerment, nearly half of the population is unaware of their legal rights. The United Nations has made significant advancements in gender equality since its founding 70 years ago, starting with the creation of the Commission on the Status of Women, the primary international organization solely devoted to the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, and continuing with the adoption of important agreements like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration. Ending discrimination against women and girls, empowering women, and achieving gender equality as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action, and peace and security are all goals of UN Women [4].

Since the beginning of society, women, and men, as well as transgender people, have been treated unequally. The purpose of gender justice is to eliminate this disparity and bring about a more equitable

society for all members of society. This disparity was initially created and maintained within the household, and as time progressed, it subsequently spread to the neighborhood, the business world, and ultimately the government. Because of the shifting nature of the world and considering the dynamics that are present today, the definition of the word gender has been enlarged to include transgender people. Therefore, the idea of gender justice no longer refers exclusively to the equality of men and women; rather, it now also includes transgender individuals. It is undeniable that women have been victims of cruelty and violence in its many guises, whether it takes the form of physical, mental, or psychological abuse. However, it is equally impossible to deny that males and members of the third gender have been victims of the same types of violence and abuse. The double load of “productive and reproductive activities” [5].

GENDER INEQUALITY

Rationale of Gender Inequality

Gender inequality, according to the Polity, Social Science, and Humanities Glossary, is the “difference in status, power, and prestige that women and men have.” There are numerous causes of gender disparity, some of which are more prevalent in some households than others. Parents in more traditional families are particularly proud of their name’s reputation. As a result, they will not forsake the social prestige they achieve when the wife conceives a boy-child. “Women account for two-thirds of all work done in the world.” Despite this, they earn only one-tenth of global income and possess less than 1% of global property. They are among the world’s poorest population. According to the UNDP’s human development report, 70% of all individuals living on less than one dollar per day are women. This is due to the rising disparity between men and women in many areas of life [6].

Economy

Women have a much more difficult time advancing in the market. Because of the double load of “productive and reproductive activities,” a woman’s labor is frequently unseen, and her contribution to the family’s existence is frequently unrecognized, because their salaries frequently go to their spouse and his family, or are viewed as family revenue. Another issue is that women are often excluded from the cash economy. This vicious spiral of low salaries, isolation from the cash economy, and unemployment eventually results in the “Feminization of Poverty” problem. Most of the richest individuals on earth are males. They are more likely to be at the top of the economic ladder and control over 86% of all businesses globally, as noted in Public Good or Private Wealth. Internationally, women have 50% less wealth and earn 23% less than males. Because women are more likely than men to be poor, it is commonly claimed that implementing poverty-reduction programs will suffice to remedy gender inequity because women will benefit more [7].

Education

There are around 65,00,000 primary schools in India, but only approximately 15,000 of these are girls’ schools. Furthermore, boys had a net enrolment of 97%, while girls had a net enrolment of 94%, and males had a net attendance of 85%, while females had an attendance of 81%. These disparities in registration numbers are caused by poverty, which causes parents to be unable or unwilling to pay the fees. Furthermore, elder girls who must care for their siblings are not permitted to attend school since their parents frequently believe that the subject matter is superfluous for the girls to learn because they are expected to marry and leave the family. Another cause for the disparity in school enrolment is a shortage of female teachers, girl schools, facilities such as separate restrooms for boys and girls, and transportation to and from school. What we must remember is that what occurs in schools is only an extension of what occurs at these girls’ homes and in society. In the Global Gender Gap Index 2022 by the World Economic Forum, India secured the highest position in terms of primary school enrollment.

Health and Survival

“In India, approximately 1.72 million children die before reaching their first birthday each year.” Every year, 9.7 million children die, with India accounting for one-third of them. The most obvious

causes for those figures in India could be poverty, diseases, or a lack of access to health care. Every year, over 1 million fetuses are aborted in India, a situation known as female feticide. Due to gender inequality, social norms, and practices, girls are at risk for child marriage, teenage pregnancy, child labor, low education, poor health, sexual abuse, exploitation, and violence. Many of these phrases will continue to be used unless girls are given more respect. By elevating the value of girls, we may collectively help achieve a variety of goals, some short-term (improving access to education, reducing anemia), some medium-term (preventing child marriage), and some long-term (eliminating gender-biased sex selection). Changing the value of girls requires the participation of men, women, and boys. Many societal segments must be mobilized. Only when society's perception changes will all of India's girls' and boys' rights be realized [8].

Fewer Employment Opportunities for Women

As of 2020, less than one-quarter (20.3%) of girls aged 15 years and older are employed. According to The Financial Express, "unpaid care work continues to be a woman's responsibility," with women devoting an average of 5 hours per day to domestic duties as opposed to 30 minutes for men. In India, it has been difficult to generate work possibilities that are favorable to women, in contrast to Sri Lanka, where the manufacturing sector has seen a higher proportion of women participating in the labor force. If their husbands earn well, married women in India are supposed to stay at home. Women become more reliant on their husbands socially and financially as pressure to work and earn money increases for males. This gives males a sense of pride in being the sole ones in the family to make decisions [9].

STATISTICS OF GENDER EQUALITY

India is ranked 112th out of 153 nations in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020. This is because our society faces gender-based obstacles such as the high sex ratio, educational attainment, fall in political empowerment, gender gap in economic participation, and discrimination against women, which positions India as the third-worst performance in South Asia. The already existing gender imbalance was exacerbated during the COVID-19 scenario, when the epidemic drove individuals to stay at home, contributing to the country's high incidence of domestic abuse incidents. Domestic Violence is a complex problem that impacts both men and women. Domestic violence is one of gender inequality's most important side effects. The bulk (30.9%) of the 4.05 lakh cases of crimes against women that were reported in 2019, as reported by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), were prosecuted under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), a statistic that is anticipated to increase in 2020 due to the epidemic. Male domination and a socially separated misogynistic culture anticipate a woman to be viewed as weak and inferior, which leads to violence [10].

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

India treats women like second-class people, and things are becoming worse. The country has appalling gender equality. India's ranking for gender parity among 145 nations dropped from 130th to 134th in 2018, according to a World Economic Forum (WEF) report. Without a question, this should serve as a wake-up call for everyone. Gender discrimination must be checked at every stage so that no person should be denied a chance to learn and grow. To help women overcome discrimination, we must all work together. We need to promote knowledge about the legal rights of Indian women.

Care India is an NGO dedicated to advancing the cause of women's rights and fostering equality. We must instill the concept of women's empowerment in everyone. We have put in place a plan to improve and increase women's social, political, and economic standing. In the end, would like to conclude with, "It is time that we all see gender as a spectrum instead of three sets of opposing ideals." We must concentrate our main important issues such as: [11]

- Allow women equal access to education as males.
- Allow women to rise to positions of power and achieve economic success.
- Stop using violence and sexual assault on women.
- Put an end to child marriages.
- Women in India who are aware of their rights as women

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