

# GENDER EQUALITY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyses Gender Equality in India. 'Gender' is a socio-cultural term referring socially defined roles and behaviors assigned to 'males' and 'females' in a given society; whereas, the term 'sex' is a biological and physiological phenomenon which defines man and woman. In its social, historical and cultural aspects, gender is a function of power relationship between men and women by which men are considered superior to women. Therefore, gender may be understood as a man-made concept, while 'sex' is natural or biological characteristics of human beings. Forty-two years have passed since the United Nations first decided to commemorate March 8<sup>th</sup> as International Women's Day, marking a historical transition in the feminist movement. Gender remains a critically important and largely ignored lens to view development issues across the world. Gender Inequality, in simple words, may be defined as discrimination against women based on their sex. Women are traditionally considered by the society as weaker sex. She has been accorded a subordinate position to men. She is exploited, degraded, violated and discriminated both in homes and the world outside. This peculiar type of discrimination against women is prevalent everywhere in the world and more so in the Indian society.

**Keywords:** Gender Equality, Poverty, Lack of Education, Women Empowerment, Domestic Violence.



## INTRODUCTION

The World Economic Forum publishes a Global Gender Gap Index score for each nation every year. The index focuses not on empowerment of women, but on the relative gap between men and women in four fundamental categories – economic participation, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. It includes measures such as estimated sex selective abortion, number of years the nation had a female head of state, female to male literacy rate, estimated income ratio of female to male in the nation, and several other relative gender statistic measures. It does not include factors such as crime rates against women versus men, domestic violence, honor killings or such factors. Where data is unavailable or difficult to collect,

World Economic Forum uses old data or makes a best estimate to calculate the nation's Global Gap Index (GGI).

## **GENDER EQUALITY: WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

### **THE CHALLENGE**

Women in India represent 29 percent of the labour force, down from 35 percent in 2004. More than half of the work done by women in India is unpaid, and almost all of it is informal and unprotected. Women are not well represented in most sectors, including business leadership. Though they comprise almost 40 percent of agricultural labour, they control only 9 percent of land in India. Women are also shut out of the formal financial system. Nearly half of India's women do not have a bank or savings accounts for their own use and 60 percent of women have no valuable assets in their name. It is unsurprising then that at 17 percent, India has a lower share of women's contribution to the GDP than the global average of 37 percent. In addition, women face great physical insecurity. The rate of crimes against women in India stands at 53.9 percent in India. In Delhi, the capital city, 92 percent of women reported having experienced sexual or physical violence in public spaces.

### **POTENTIAL AREAS TO FOCUS**

The private sector and business community will be crucial in helping bridge the gap between skills and jobs and enable access to decent work for women. Vocational and technical training, life skills and financial literacy programmes for women to help them develop marketable skills and better decision-making abilities cannot be undertaken in a meaningful way without the involvement of industry. Companies can also invest in women entrepreneurs through microfinance, and bring their goods and services into supply chains. Enhancing women's access to the internet and ICT can create a merging market of connected women who can be linked to business opportunities. In addition, as employers, the private sector can invest in women's security against violence at home and in public spaces, and take steps to ensure their mobility through inclusive transport.

### **PROPERTY RIGHTS**

Women have equal rights under the law to own property and receive equal inheritance rights, but in practice, women are at a disadvantage. This is evidenced in the fact that 70% of rural land is owned by men. Laws, such as the Married Women Property Rights Act of 1974 protect women, but few seek legal redress. Although the Hindu Succession Act of 2005 provides equal inheritance rights to ancestral and jointly owned property, the law is weakly enforced, especially in Northern India.

## **MILITARY SERVICE**

Women are not allowed to have combat roles in the armed forces. According to a study carried out on this issue, a recommendation was made that female officers be excluded from induction in close combat arms. The study also held that a permanent commission could not be granted to female officers since they have neither been trained for command nor have they been given the responsibility so far. Although changes are appearing and women are playing important roles in army and the defense minister is also a female.

## **POVERTY AND LACK OF EDUCATION**

The unfortunate part of gender inequality in our society is that the women too, through, continued socio-cultural conditioning, have accepted their subordinate position to men. And they are also part and parcel of same patriarchal system.

Extreme poverty and lack of education are also some of the reasons for women's low status in society. Poverty and lack of education derives countless women to work in low paying domestic service, organized prostitution or as migrant laborers. Women are not only getting unequal pay for equal or more work but also they are being offered only low skill jobs for which lower wages are paid. This has become a major form of inequality on the basis of gender.

Educating a girl child is still seen as a bad investment because she is bound to get married and leave her paternal home one day. Thus, without having good education women are found lacking in present day's demanding job skills; whereas, each year's High School and 10+2 standard results show that girls are always doing better than boys. This shows that parents are not spending much after 10+2 standard on girl child and that's why they are found smaller in number in the job market.



## **THE ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIA**

Gender inequality subsists in Indian economy and prevails in all sectors of life like health, education, economics and politics. Men have always had the upper hand in these fields, depicting how deeply patriarchy is entrenched in India. Even though gender equality soars to great heights in post-independence era, many steps have been taken in various sectors of life to bridge the gap between men and women and to bring them up to the same level.

Women have been actively involved in economic activities and labor force in contemporary times. In the agriculture sector for instance, 74% of the labor force consists of

women. Yet, the wage gap between men and women across the Indian economy despite the active involvement of reformists and feminists who have been fighting for equal pay.

Women are also discriminated in matters of credit lending and property ownership. This situation can be again drawn back to the patriarchal system prevalent in the Indian economy: women have always been disbarred from share in the properties as it is believed that men are the ones who actually carry their generation forward and earn bread and butter for the family, while women would just sustain upon the money earned by men.

Women also lag behind in the corporate and government sectors. Various government programs and schemes have been launched in an attempt to provide equal opportunities for men and women. Reservations have helped to raise the number of jobs of women in government sector. This growing trend also leads to changes in the corporate sector. Earlier, not a single woman was to be seen in the top tier of the corporate world. Today, there has been escalation in the number of woman in these top sectors. Even though there have been reforms and number of women have increased in jobs but still they lag behind in the total percentage of jobs.

These issues are very debatable why women still lag behind men despite the increase in the number of opportunities and affirmative action programs. These debates in my opinion would always lead to the issue of patriarchy. Patriarchy, according to me is so entrenched in the Indian society that even though one may try their hardest to uplift women to the level of men, patriarchy would pull them down. I believe until and unless patriarchy is removed, nothing can bring equality among men and women.

## CONCLUSION

In India, cultural influences favour the preference for sons for reasons related to kinship, lineage, inheritance, identity, status, and economic security. This preference cuts across class and caste lines, and it discriminates against girls. In extreme cases, the discrimination takes the form of honour killings where families kill daughters or daughters-in-law who fail to conform to gender expectations about marriage and sexuality. When a woman does not conform to expected gender norms she is shamed and humiliated because it impacts both her and her family's honor, and perhaps her ability to marry. The causes of gender inequalities are complex, but a number of cultural factors in India can explain how preference for sons, a key driving force of a daughter's neglect, which is very prevalent.

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