

CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL SCIENCES

PEER REVIEWED, INDEXED & REFEREED QUARTERLY INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

ISSN 0302-9298

<https://www.jndmeerut.org>

[Vol. 35, No. 2 (April-June), 2026]

<https://doi.org/10.62047/CSS.2026.06.30.147>

Some Aspects of Gender Inequality in India

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Abstract

Gender inequality is deeply entrenched in all spheres of life in Indian society. It is a socio-cultural phenomenon rooted primarily in the patriarchal social structure that has historically shaped social institutions, norms, and practices. Gender inequality denies women equal rights and opportunities in terms of social status, education, healthcare, property ownership, employment, decision-making, and access to resources. Due to persistent gender stereotypes, discriminatory customs, and the absence of equal economic and social freedoms, women are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination and violence throughout their life cycle, from birth to old age. These include practices such as sex-selective abortion, child marriage, domestic violence, workplace discrimination, and unequal participation in political and public life. Gender inequality not only undermines the dignity, well-being, and empowerment of women but also adversely affects economic growth, social justice, and sustainable development. The persistence of gender disparities hampers the effective utilization of human resources and weakens the overall progress of society. This paper examines the major dimensions, causes, consequences, and challenges of gender inequality in India and highlights the need for collective efforts to achieve gender equality and inclusive development.

Keywords

Gender inequality, Culture, Patriarchy, Economy, Education, Health.

Research Foundation International, New Delhi
(Affiliated to UNO)

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1. Introduction

Gender inequality is prevalent in Indian society irrespective of region, social class, religion, etc. It is a social process which relegates women to inferior positions in society. This age-old problem has its roots in socio-cultural norms and is essentially a feature of patriarchal social structure. Gender equality is a fundamental human right and crucial for peace, prosperity and development of society. Gender inequality manifests itself in various forms such as disparities in education, employment, health and violence against women. Addressing this issue is important as it impacts not only the well-being of women but also has bearings on the social and economic development of the society at large. This research paper discusses the current scenario of gender inequality and analyses some key issues that are important for tackling gender inequality.

Gender inequality is a global concern and addressing this issue is imperative for peace, prosperity, and sustainable growth across the world. In September 2015, the UN adopted the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', with 17 SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) at its core, wherein the SDG 5 promotes gender equality and women's empowerment. The United Nations report on gender equality observes: "Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. There has been progress over the last decades, but the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030."

2. Dimensions of Gender Inequality in India

Gender inequality is an issue of immense concern for Indian society. This persistent problem has roots in systemic as well as social factors. While disparities in the status of education, economic participation and poverty are characteristics of systemic indicators, regressive gender norms and violence against women are the attributes of social factors. Several research studies as well as reports by multilateral organisations; have demonstrated many dimensions of gender inequality in India. The Global Gender Gap Report prepared by the World Economic Forum is an annual index designed to measure gender equality. It measures gender-based gaps in four areas, namely, economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. The Global Gender Gap Report 2024, ranks India at 129 out of 146 countries. In South

Asia, India is ranked fifth after Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan, while Pakistan's rank is 145. This report shows a considerable gender gap in India.

Table-1: India's Rank in Global Gender Gap Report, 2024

Performance by Subindex	Rank
Economic participation and Opportunity	142
Educational Attainment	112
Health and Survival	142
Political Empowerment	65
Overall	129

India ranks 131 out of 148 countries globally in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2025. With a parity score of just 64.1%, India is among the lowest-ranked countries in South Asia. India ranked at 108 out of 193 countries on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) with a score of 0.437, as per the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report (HDI) 2023-24. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) measures gender-based disadvantage in three dimensions-reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. It reflects the gap in human development potential due to inequality between female and male achievements in these areas. A low GII value indicates low inequality between women and men, and vice-versa.

Table-2: Gender Inequality Profile of India

Subindex of Gender Inequality Profile	India 2022
HDI Rank	134
Gender Inequality Index	108
Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 1,00,000 live births)	103
Adolescent Birth Rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19)	16.3
Seat in National Parliament (in %)	15.1
Population with at least secondary Education (Female) (in %)	26.6
Population with at least secondary Education (Male) (in %)	52.7
Female Labour Force Participation Rate (in %)	28.3
Male Labour Force Participation Rate (in %)	76.1
HDI Value	0.644

India demonstrated progress in reducing gender inequality. The country's GII value of 0.437 is better than the global and South Asian averages, according to the report. The country's GII value of 0.437 is better than the global average of 0.462 and the South Asian average of 0.478, "the report said. India's adolescent birth rate in 2022 was 16.3 (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19), an improvement from 17.1 in 2021," it said.

3. Main Dimensions of Gender Inequality in India

3.1 Gender Inequality in Education

Education is the basic right to anyone. Education creates various avenues for girls to make them aware of the vast professional opportunities to build better futures for themselves and their family, join the workforce, take care of the families financially.

There has been improvement and changes happened in the literacy rate of women since independence but still there is gender gap in education. There are several reasons behind it. Such as Poor financial conditions of families, Social and cultural norms that prefer boys' education than boys, there is lack of infrastructure in Government schools which do not have adequate classrooms, furniture and basic amenities like toilet and drinking water. Lack of safe and reliable transport facilities etc

Over the past decade, notable progress has been achieved through targeted government initiatives such as *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*, *Samagra Shiksha*, and digital learning schemes, which have significantly improved girls' access to education. Girls' Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in secondary education has risen from 77.1% to 81.4%, accompanied by a reduction in dropout rates from 17.8% to 12.3%. Female literacy levels and the proportion of women attaining 10 or more years of schooling have also shown consistent growth, reflecting narrowing gender gaps in educational attainment.

Table-3: Gender Inequality Gap in Education

Year	TLRI	FLR	MLR	Literacy gap
2001	64.83%	53.67%	75.26%	21.59%
2011	74.04%	65.46%	82.14%	16.3%
2017-18	77.7%	70.3%	84.7%	14.4%
2023-24	80.9%	74.6%	87.2%	12.6%

3.2 Gender Inequality in the Economic Field

Gender inequality persists in various aspects of society, including education, employment, leadership, and economic disparities. Gender inequality in the economic field refers to disparities between men and women in labour force participation, pay gap, accumulation of wealth,

property right and rights in decision making process. Despite several kinds of advancements, legislations and constitutional interferences, still gender disparity exists in the occupational arena. It is clearly evident from female labour force participation rate as shown in the following table:

Table-3: Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in 2025

Indicator	Male	Female
Labour Force Participation Rate (15+ years)	79.1%	40.0%
Worker Population Ratio (15+ years)	76.6%	38.8%

This means that the labour force participation rate of women remains significantly lower than that of men. Only about 4 out of every 10 women aged 15 years and above are either working or seeking work, compared to nearly 8 out of 10 men. We must remember that the women's labour force participation has improved considerably – from about 23.3% in 2017–18 to 41.7% in 2023–24, still the gender gap remains substantial. Much of the increase has occurred in self-employment, informal work, and unpaid family labour rather than secure salaried jobs.

3.3 Gender Stereotypes and Career Choices

Gender stereotypes and biases often influence career choices and opportunities for individuals. Women are often steered towards traditionally female-dominated fields such as caregiving and hospitality, while men are encouraged to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. This perpetuates the gender wage gap and limits the potential for individuals to pursue their desired career paths.

3.4 Inequality in the Workplace

Gender inequality in the workplace is manifested in various forms, like unequal pay, limited career advancement opportunities, and workplace discrimination. Studies indicate that a significant portion of women are generally paid less than men for the same work resulting in significant wage gap. This wage gap not only impacts individuals' financial security but also perpetuates economic disparities between genders. Also, women get fewer representation in leadership positions and decision-making roles within organizations, which further perpetuates the cycle of inequality. One recent analysis found that discrimination in the workplace accounts for about 94% of the observed gender wage gap in India. Another recent survey in Telangana, conducted by Telangana labour department, has found that nearly 90% of companies had failed to fully comply with legal requirements for internal committees addressing workplace sexual harassment (*The Times of India*, May 13, 2026). Moreover, research continues to find significant earnings gaps between socially advantaged and

disadvantaged caste groups in the labour market. Interpreting the caste-based earning gaps in the Indian labour market, studies suggest that differences in education, occupation, and historical disadvantages contribute to persistent workplace inequalities.

3.5 Gender Wage Gap and its Consequences

Gender wage gap refers to the disparity in earnings between men and women, with women earning less than men for the same work. This wage gap is influenced by various factors, including gender discrimination, occupational segregation, and caregiving responsibilities. Majority of the women continue to earn less than men across occupations. Women earn approximately ₹76 for every ₹100 earned by men on average. In higher-skilled jobs, men earn about ₹150 per hour, while women earn around ₹112 per hour. Even women spend far more time on unpaid household and caregiving activities than men. It has been shown that the women spend about 305 minutes per day on unpaid domestic work as compared to men, who spend about 86 minutes per day on the same activities. Despite its massive economic contribution, domestic work remains invisible in labour statistics, undervaluing women's time and restricting their participation in paid employment. This unequal distribution of household responsibilities limits women's participation in paid employment. The Economic Survey 2022-23 estimated the value of women's unpaid care work at Rs 22.7 lakh crore, roughly 7.5% of India's GDP.

The gender wage gap deeply affects women. It adversely impacts financial security, economic stability, and overall well-being of women. Women face several disadvantages in accessing economic resources and opportunities, which negatively impacts their financial security and ability to invest in their future.

There are many economic benefits of gender equality. Researches show that gender equality is positively correlated with economic performance, innovation, and overall well-being within societies. When women are given equal access to education, employment opportunities, and leadership positions, societies benefit from a more diverse talent pool and a broader range of perspectives that drive innovation and success.

- **Economic Participation:** Female labour force participation increased from 23.3% (2017-18) to 41.7% (2023-24). Schemes like Stand-Up India and Mahila e-Haat, promote women entrepreneurship.
- **Shifting Social Norms:** Changing societal attitudes and gender-neutral portrayals in media have enabled greater acceptance of women in leadership and non-traditional roles.

There have been attempts to reduce socio-economic inequality through policy interventions since the first plan, still there are evidences of social and economic discrimination.

3.6 Gender Inequality in Leadership and Decision-making Positions

Gender inequality is particularly pronounced in leadership and decision-making positions within organizations and society at large. Women are significantly underrepresented in leadership roles, including corporate boards, government positions, and other decision-making bodies. Studies have shown that Women constitute only 33% of entry-level employees in the formal sector. Their representation drops to 24% at the managerial level, illustrating the “leadership pipeline” problem. Among top executives (Key Managerial Personnel), women account for only 12.4%, and nearly two-thirds of companies have no female executive in such positions. This lack of representation has significant consequences for policy-making, resource allocation, and organizational culture.

When women are not given an equal voice in shaping policies and practices, the needs and perspectives of half the population are not adequately represented. This perpetuates the cycle of inequality and limits the potential for creating inclusive and equitable societies. Furthermore, the lack of gender diversity in leadership positions has consequences for organizational performance and innovation.

The participation of women in decision-making is crucial for a country's development and standardization. When women are more involved in decision-making, it leads to positive transformations in societies, including changes in laws, policies, services, institutions, and social norms. Ensuring that women have a voice in decisions that affect their lives, their families, and the broader community is essential for improving their quality of life across all layers of society. These decisions impact women as much as they do men, highlighting the importance of women's inclusion in decision-making processes, with equal power and representation alongside men. Society bears the responsibility of ensuring that women have equal opportunities to participate in decision-making at all levels, and that decision-making bodies represent a diverse range of people and communities

3.7 Gender Health Inequality Gap

The gender health gap refers to long-term differences in how healthcare is provided to and experienced by women compared to men. It's caused by a historical underrepresentation of women in medical research and bias in healthcare. As a result, women face poorer health outcomes, less access to appropriate care, and lower-quality medical treatment.

Though India's Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) declined from 254 deaths per 100,000 live births (2004–06) to 88 deaths per 100,000 live births (2021–23), still it has been stressed that health risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth continued unabated in India. The World Bank estimates about 80 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2023. Around 57% of women aged 15–49 years are anaemic, compared with a much lower prevalence among men. Anaemia affects women's productivity, pregnancy outcomes, and overall health (The Times of India, August 25, 2025).

"Disparities are seen in a number of health conditions such as pain management, heart disease and mental health", says Dr. Rageshri Dhairyawan, the author of *UNHEARD: The Medical Practice of Silencing*. "There is also a lack of knowledge and services for conditions that affect mostly women such as endometriosis and menopause." Gender health gap affects women's health and quality of life

According to Dr Rageshri Dhairyawan the women's health gap has a severe impact on physical and mental health and overall quality of life. "These gaps may also affect economic status if found unable to work due to illness", she says. "Your close relationships - especially with family - may too be impacted." Dhairyawan adds that while women may live longer than men, they spend a greater portion of their lives in poor health.

4. Conclusion

This paper discusses various aspects and forms of gender inequalities prevalent in our society. Our constitution gives equal rights to men and women. But legal and administrative measures alone cannot guarantee gender equality in any society. Various factors like social, cultural, economic and political pose great hindrance towards our goal of achieving gender equality in India. We should work towards eliminating gender inequality starting from our homes. India can develop only when women are able to contribute to their full potential in every sphere of social and economic life of our country.

To reduce gender inequality in India, policymakers should adopt a multi-dimensional approach that promotes equal access to quality education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and political participation for women. Effective implementation of gender-sensitive laws, strict enforcement of equal pay provisions, expansion of skill development programmes, provision of affordable childcare facilities, and awareness campaigns to challenge patriarchal norms are essential. Furthermore, increasing women's representation in decision-making institutions and strengthening social protection measures can help create an inclusive environment where women can fully realize their potential and contribute to sustainable national development.

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