

## GENDER EQUALITY: ESSENTIAL FOR OVERALL GROWTH

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### **Abstract**

*Gender equality in India is a goal that our nation has been craving to achieve for quite some time. Gender equality is no longer merely a moral imperative or a social dilemma, but a social, and economic concern as well. In this article, we discuss factors that contribute to gender disparity, such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, religious beliefs, and anti-female attitudes. In order to enhance girls' value, education, skills, sports, and a variety of other opportunities are crucial. By recognizing the value of girls, we can collectively contribute to achieving specific results, some short-term (increasing access to education), others long-term (ending child marriage), and others both (eliminating gender-biased sex selection). In order to change society's perception of girls, it must mobilize men, women, and boys. Only when society's perception changes will girls' rights and gender equality be affected in India. Girls need a variety of essential services and education, as well as safety, so they can function properly in everyday life. This will reduce their risks and allow them to develop and contribute to India's growth.*

### **Keywords**

*Gender, Gender equality.*

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Gender equality in India is a goal that our nation has been craving to achieve for quite some time. Gender equality is no longer merely a moral imperative or a social dilemma, but a social, and economic concern as well. Human development and the overall development of a nation are enhanced by Gender Equality. Although India boasts of numerous achievements, its Gender Equality still lacks the recognition and appreciation it deserves.

In India, gender discrimination has been pervasive for generations, and gender disparities continue to exist despite the constitution providing equality for men and women. This discrimination has always been a part of Indian society, making women its victims. In a land dominated by Goddesses, the same Nation leaves a blot of inequity and atrocities. It is the painful truth of life in India. The research results of recent studies suggest that gender discrimination mostly favors men in a variety of areas, including the workplace. This discrimination affects many aspects of women's lives, such as career progress and mental health. 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.

Here are some terms we should be aware of when discussing Gender Equality in India:

### **Gender**

The term "gender" refers to the economic, social, and cultural characteristics and opportunities that are associated with being a male or female. It is not simply about biological or physical characteristics to define someone as male or female - men and women are often expected to dress differently, act differently, or work differently. As a matter of fact, whether in the family, work, or public sphere, the relationship between men & women also reflects an understanding of the talents, characteristics, and behavior that are relevant to women and men. As such, gender is a social and cultural subject, not a biological concept.

### **Gender Equality**

In India, gender equality means equal access to opportunities, resources, and economic participation for every member of the population, as well as the equal respect for different beliefs, abilities, motivations, and behaviors, regardless of gender. In India, gender equality means everyone has an equal footing in all walks of life, which is a human right and a necessary foundation to promote prosperity, peace and sustainability.

As far as gender equality in India is concerned, gender neutrality and gender equity are practices and ways of thinking that enable the achievement of the goal.

Gender parity is applied to gauge gender balance in any given situation, but this is not the goal.

UNICEF defines gender equality as “same rights and liberties, resources, opportunities, and protections for men, women, and girls. It is not important that boys and girls are alike or that they all enjoy the same protections”, however.

### **Gender Equality is Essential**

In India, gender equality is vital for the realization of human rights and sustainable development. Gender equality aims to create a society where both men and women are given equal opportunities, the same level of fairness, and the same responsibilities. Equal status for men and women is achieved when they are able to share equally in the distribution and influence of power and authority. This requires equal access to opportunities, education and employment, as well as the ability to develop personal interests and ambitions. For the development of India from all perspectives, gender equality is the need of the hour because it facilitates women’s ability to make fully informed decisions that have enormous effects on their health and the health of their families. (Arora, Rashmi Umesh, 2012).

Even so, it is imperative to acknowledge that women are commonly excluded or disadvantaged in decision-making and in accessing economic and social resources in cases of gender inequality. In a Nation of gender equality, there has also been a developed nation. Gender equality in India is a key component of a prosperous nation. Therefore, women’s empowerment in India requires promoting gender equality.

### **Indian Scenario for Gender Equality**

India has the highest rates of discrimination against women at birth, according to a 2017 analysis of demographic statistics. This means that India will continue to have the lowest sex ratio in South Asia well past 2050. As of 2011, there were 918 girls for every 1,000 boys, urging the government to take action regarding the ‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’ initiative to ensure the safety, survival, & education of girls. The ‘Beti Bachao’ aims to reduce female foeticide by fighting bias.

“To Educate the Girl Child and Save the Girl Child’ believes that massive awareness, and a large number of female welfare services implemented throughout districts will lead to gender equality in India. As a concept of social injustice, gender inequality refers to the oppression of girls and women by society in all stages and parts of their lives. Although it is most prevalent among lower strata of society, gender inequality is also evident among the upper-middle class. Gender inequality is so deeply rooted in an Indian culture that it has become normalized. (Brahmapurkar, Kishor Parasharmaji, 2017).

There is gender discrimination in India at every stage of life, including the womb. Women who are expecting male children are getting better prenatal care in India. Pregnant women with boys routinely attend prenatal care appointments, take prescribed medications, and give birth in a hospital. But this is not true when they are expecting a girl. (Raju, E.2014).

### **Progress in Achieving the Goal of the Gender Equality in India**

There has been progress in gender equality in India over the last few decades. More girls are attending school, and fewer girls are forced into early marriage. Women hold parliament and leadership positions, and legislation is being formulated to advance equality. However, despite these benefits, discriminatory laws and social norms still exist, women remain underrated at all levels of leadership, and women and girls ages 15-49 are more likely to report being physically or sexually abused.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) published its annual Global Gender Gap Index for 2021, which ranked India 140th out of 153 countries. From its previous ranking of 112th place, India slipped to 140th in this recent Report. In 2006, India ranked relatively higher.

### **Here are Some Reasons why we Haven't Achieved Our Goal**

The task of achieving gender equality in India is not an easy one. Since time immemorial, a girl child has been viewed as an unwanted burden on the family. Discrimination against women begins even before they are born. Female feticide and infanticide are heinous crimes that exhibit how cruel the world is to women. Women in India still struggle to enjoy the rights and opportunities guaranteed by our constitution, despite our constitution giving equal rights and privileges to men and women. Similar provisions are also made to improve their position in society.

Factors contributing to gender disparity include traditional systems, illiteracy, household duties, low mobility, a lack of confidence, and cultural stereotypes.

In this article, we discuss factors that contribute to gender disparity, such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, religious beliefs, and anti-female attitudes:

#### **Women's Illiteracy**

Literacy is an essential indicator of a nation's human capital. In the latest data, India has an adult literacy rate of 73.2 percent. The illiteracy rate in our nation has improved significantly over the years, yet it continues to house more than 313 million illiterate people, 59 percent of whom are female.

There are many social, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to the illiteracy rate among Indian women, which leads to underinvestment in women's education. Furthermore, social limitations on women's mobility keep any educated

woman from entering the labor force and supporting her family. In addition to the low economic returns for female education, the educational gender gap reflects entrenched biases that discourage women and other marginalized communities from pursuing their ambitions.

### **Poverty**

Over 30 percent of the population in India lives below the poverty line; 70 percent of these are women. Women's poverty in India is associated with limited economic opportunities, and lack of access to financial resources, such as credit, land ownership, and inheritance. As a result, women are more likely to lack access to education and support services, and to play a minor role in decision-making processes. Economically, women are also less fortunate, and men still enjoy a larger share of the pie. In other words, poverty is the root of gender discrimination in our patriarchal society, and economic dependence on the male counterpart is a cause in itself of gender disparity. Consequently, it is India's biggest hindrance in the quest for gender equality.

### **Unemployment**

In India, women spend a large share of their waking hours doing unpaid work for their families. They tend to have slow mobility due to intra-household division of responsibilities, so they cannot respond to new opportunities and move to new occupations.

Generally, rights and obligations in households are inequitably distributed between the male and female members. Male ownership of assets and traditional methods reduce women's motivation to start new businesses. Thus, unemployment prevents women from being economically self-sufficient. Their reliance on men for economic support is a major factor contributing to gender disparity in India.

### **Social Customs and Beliefs**

Throughout their lives, women have been bound by traditional beliefs and practices. The traditional patrilineal joint family constrains women's roles to domestic duties, putting them in a position of power and subordination. Indian culture has traditionally seen men as the primary provider and protectors of their families, while women are only expected to be supportive. Boys and girls are raised for their different roles, status, and authority. Throughout many communities, sons are considered economic, and political assets, while daughters are viewed as liabilities. This preference for sons persists in many different areas. Sons, particularly in business communities, are regarded as economic, and political assets, while daughters are seen as liabilities. Thus, in India, the anti-female mindset is the main hindrance to achieving gender equality.

### **Benefits of Gender Equality in India**

It is high time to make a clear call to action for a positive change in the way women are treated in India when it comes to their health and well-being. Hence, the growing dialogue about the urgent need for gender equality in India makes good sense as the adage carries that woman is the ‘architect of a family, a nation, and the whole world.’ Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly apparent that equality is no longer a feminist issue but rather a socioeconomic one. Organizations and nations will be able to prosper and realize their fullest potential when the rights of women are respected. (Arora, Rashmi Umesh, 2012).

As a result, empowering women economically reduces poverty, as they tend to devote more time to their families and communities. The government is doing its part with programs such as Skill India Mission.

### **Other Benefits Include**

The protection of women/girls from violence is one of the reasons for gender equality. Gender equality is also an important human right. Gender equality is also a good thing for the economy of the nation. The equality of women and men in the country makes our society safer and healthier. Challenges Involved Every girl residing in the country and around the world has the right to achieve her full potential, but the gender disparity hinders it. It seems every day that girls in India experience gender inequality at home and in their communities, including through textbooks, movies, and the media.

There is gender inequality in India that leads to unequal opportunities for women and men, but statistically, it is most disadvantaged girls who suffer. (Jha, Priti and Nagar, Niti, 2015).

In India, girls are more likely to die than boys at birth and are more likely to drop out of school than boys. Across the globe, girls have a higher survival rate and are more likely to be developmentally on track.

There is a distinct difference between girls and boys in India when it comes to adolescence. While boys tend to have greater freedom, girls are likely to face significant restrictions on their freedom and ability to make decisions regarding their careers, education, marriage, and social lives. Gender barriers continue to grow as girls and boys grow up and continue into adulthood. In India, women make up only one-quarter of the workforce in formal employment. However, some Indian women are global leaders in a variety of different fields. India cannot truly prosper if girls and boys aren’t equally supported to be their best without continuing to be rooted in patriarchal ideologies, norms, traditions, and structures. Indian women stay under-represented in

many aspects of society because of deeply entrenched patriarchal ideologies, norms, traditions, and structures. (Jha, Priti and Nagar, Niti, 2015).

We live in a society where gender equality and social norms and practices are prevalent, which expose girls to risks, violations, and vulnerabilities as a result of their gender identity. Girls in our society face issues such as child marriage, early pregnancy, domestic work, and inadequate education because of the prevalence of gender inequalities. Unless girls are valued more, many of these signs won't change.

### **Solutions to Achieve The Goal of Gender Equality in India**

In order to enhance girls' value, education, skills, sports, and a variety of other opportunities are crucial. By recognizing the value of girls, we can collectively contribute to achieving specific results, some short-term (increasing access to education), others long-term (ending child marriage), and others both (eliminating gender-biased sex selection). (Arora, Rashmi Umesh, 2012).

In order to change society's perception of girls, it must mobilize men, women, and boys. Only when society's perception changes will girls' rights and gender equality be affected in India. Girls need a variety of essential services and education, as well as safety, so they can function properly in everyday life. This will reduce their risks and allow them to develop and contribute to India's growth. (Arora, Rashmi Umesh, 2012).

It is incredibly difficult for girls to find life-saving resources, information, and social networks in their daily lives. Programs designed specifically for girls' needs - emphasizing education and life skills, mitigating violence, and including girls' needs and contributions from vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, can strengthen their resilience.

In addition, long-term solutions designed to address girls' needs can enhance their strengths and provide a roadmap of opportunities that will transform them and be a part of their lives.

It is crucial for adolescent girls to have platforms that enable them to face the challenges they face in everyday life and discover solutions that help them build better futures.

As part of UNICEF's 2018-2022 plan, which identifies a variety of deprivations that Indian children endure, including gender-based discrimination, each program's goals and objectives have explicit gender considerations.

### **This Includes**

**Healthcare :** The reduction of excess female mortality in children under five and the promotion of equal access to health care for girls (such as reminding families to take sick babies straight to the hospital). (Chand, Saumya, 2011).

**Improving Nutrition :** In order to improve the nutrition of women and girls, we must promote more equitable eating practices (For example, women cooperatives can develop their own micro-plans for improved nutrition in their villages).(Chand, Saumya, 2011)

**Education :** A gender-sensitive approach is needed to promote out-of-school girls' learning and a gender-sensitive curriculum in schools. Education for all should be the mantra for promoting gender equality in India.

**Child Protection :** In India, the main hindrance to gender equality is female foeticide and early marriage. To achieve gender equality in India, practices like child marriage, female foeticide, teenage pregnancy, etc. should be mitigated.

**Social Policy:** There is a need to support state governments and the central government in creating gender equality in India. The government should begin launching programs to support women in local governance.

### **Conclusion**

Society should turn its attention to gender equality in India and abandon its old-school notion that women are commodities. It is the only way to usher the nation on the path of prosperity and accomplishments. There can be no doubt that gender equality in India can greatly impact India's progress. A number of statistics and figures concerning countries in which a large population of empowered women resides demonstrate that countries that rank highly in gender equality on all fronts are increasing on a regular basis at the global level. In India, gender equality goes beyond equal representation in society; it is closely connected to women's rights, which require policy changes. Gender Equality in India is the key to the long-term prosperity our Nation deserves.

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