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## INDIA'S GENDER EQUALITY MOVEMENT: ACHIEVEMENTS, OBSTACLES, AND PROSPECTS

**Dr. Subhash Patil**

**Associate Professor and Head , Dept of Political Science,  
Rani Parvati Devi College of Arts and Commerce, Belagavi, Karnataka.**

### ABSTRACT

*In addition to being a vital human right, gender equality is also a major force behind social and economic advancement. In India, a nation renowned for its abundant cultural diversity, attaining gender parity has long been a formidable obstacle. This study looks at gender equality as it stands in India now, stressing both the achievements and the ongoing difficulties. This article seeks to illuminate the complex nature of gender inequality in India by means of an extensive examination of social, economic, and political data. It also makes suggestions for promoting more gender parity.*



**KEYWORDS:** *empowerment, feminism, human rights, gender inequality, and gender imbalance.*

### INTRODUCTION:

Gender equality is a foundational principle of a just and equitable society, and international human rights agreements like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights protect it. With a population of more than 1.3 billion, gender inequality is a pervasive problem that affects women in all areas of life in India. This study aims to give a broad overview of gender equality in India today, accounting for both achievements and obstacles, and make policy recommendations to close the gaps.

### CONTEXTUAL HISTORY:

Studying the historical background that has impacted gender dynamics and inequalities in India is crucial to understanding the current condition of gender equality in that nation. The intricate interplay of cultural, social, economic, and political influences throughout India's history has shaped gender roles, conventions, and discrepancies. Different Traditions: Different cultures and traditions may be found throughout ancient India, with certain areas displaying more gender-neutral customs than others. For instance, women were given increased authority in property ownership and decision-making in certain matrilineal communities in Kerala. Religion Texts: The major religions of ancient India, Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, all have texts that affirm women's spiritual equality and promote respect for them. However, patriarchal practices and interpretations were frequently in place.

## The Mediaeval Era

**Feudal Structures:** During the Middle Ages, caste-based societies and feudalism became more prevalent. These institutions frequently restrict women's rights and freedom of movement while upholding patriarchal standards. Child marriage and sati: During this time, it became more common for women to self-immolate on their husbands' funeral pyres, a practice known as sati.

## Colonial Rule

**Impact of British Colonialism:** Gender relations were significantly impacted by British colonial control in India from the 18th to the mid-20th centuries. Indian society was impacted by colonial rules and regulations, which occasionally had a negative effect on the status of women. During the colonial era, social reform movements also started to take shape, led by individuals such as Jyotirao Phule and Raja Ram Mohan Roy. These movements supported women's rights and education while opposing restrictive traditions.

## Constitutional Reforms:

India's authorities realised the value of gender equality after the country gained independence in 1947. After being ratified in 1950, the Indian Constitution guaranteed basic rights and outlawed discrimination based on gender. Legal Reforms: To safeguard the rights and welfare of women, significant legal reforms were enacted in the decades that followed. These reforms included the Maternity Benefit Act (1961), the Equal Remuneration Act (1976), and the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961).

## Women's Initiatives:

**Feminism's Emergence:** Women's rights advocacy groups and feminist movements both flourished during the post-independence era. Notable people like Indira Gandhi, the first female prime minister of India, played significant roles in advancing gender equality. Reservation for Women: In the 1990s, India used the Panchayati Raj system to create a reservation of seats for women in local government with the goal of increasing women's political participation.

## Modern Difficulties:

Despite legislative and social advancements, deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and attitudes still shape gender relations in many parts of India. Sexual harassment, domestic violence, and other gender-based violence, including violence related to dowries, continue to be major problems. Enforcing laws and rules effectively is still a challenge. There are still gender differences in employment and education, especially in rural areas. Concerns about the gender pay gap still exist.

## Women's Differences in Schooling

A key component of attaining gender equality is having access to education. Even though India's total literacy rates have increased significantly, gender gaps in schooling still exist. As per the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), girls residing in rural areas have obstacles to obtaining a high-quality education because of several issues, such as cultural norms, child marriage, and safety concerns. In India, gender differences in schooling have long been an issue, despite some significant progress made in this regard over time. The most important information regarding gender differences in Indian education as of my most recent knowledge update in September 2021 is summarised here. Note that more recent data might be accessible; therefore, for the most recent information, it's crucial to refer to updated sources.

## Literacy Rate:

74.04% of Indians were literate overall in 2011, according to the Census of India. But there were still notable gender differences: Female literacy rate: 65.46%; male literacy rate: 82.14%; Despite these improvements, there was a persistently large difference in the literacy rates of men and women. Over

time, there has been a notable improvement in the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for girls in Classes I–V at the primary level. In elementary education, the GER for females as of 2018–2019 was 100.5%, meaning that more girls were enrolled than the age group that qualified. Higher education levels do, however, still see gender differences. As girls move on to secondary and university studies, their GER decreases. In the past, girls have typically dropped out at higher rates than boys, especially in rural areas. Cultural conventions, early marriage, and domestic duties are some of the factors that contribute to this.

### **Gender Parity Index (GPI):**

One often-used metric to assess gender differences in educational attainment is the Gender Parity Index. Gender parity, or equal access to education for boys and girls, is shown by a GPI of 1. The GPI for the primary level (Classes I–V) as of 2018–2019 was very near 1, suggesting gender parity. In contrast, the GPI was lower at the secondary and tertiary levels, suggesting that males continued to have somewhat better access to education. The differences between genders in education depend on the Indian area. While some states and union territories have made great strides towards gender balance, obstacles still beset others.

### **Governmental Programmes:**

The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the daughter, Educate the daughter) campaign, and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) are two of the many programmes the Indian government has put in place to support girls' education. In some places, obstacles like child marriage, a lack of sanitary facilities in schools, and worries about one's safety when commuting to and from school persist in impeding females' education. While there has been progress in reducing gender gaps in Indian education, there are still issues, particularly at the higher education levels and in certain areas. Getting girls access to high-quality education is still essential to empowering women in India and achieving gender equality.

### **Employment Disparities and Economic Empowerment:**

Two crucial challenges pertaining to gender equality in India are economic empowerment and the gender pay gap. Financial Empowerment: Men in India were more likely than women to be in the labour force, according to statistics from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2019–20. For men, the participation percentage was roughly 76%, and for women, it was roughly 22%. Analysis: There is still a sizable gender disparity in labour force participation, which suggests that many Indian women lack access to formal employment options. Women-Led Business Development: Data from the 2013 Sixth Economic Census showed that 13.76% of Indian commercial firms were owned by women. Analysis: Although women do own firms in India, the proportion of these businesses is low, indicating a need for more encouragement and support for women who want to pursue entrepreneurship.

The gender pay gap The "Monster Salary Index 2019," which examined pay data from a variety of industries and job roles, found that women in India made, on average, 19% less than men did. Analysis: Women are still paid significantly less for doing the same job as men do, which raises serious concerns about the gender pay gap.

### **Separation by Profession:**

The World Bank's data suggests that women in India are typically employed in lower-skilled, lower-paying jobs. Women's salaries are typically lower in sectors including agriculture, domestic labour, and the unorganised economy. The gender wage gap is exacerbated by occupational segregation since women are disproportionately underrepresented in high-paying professions.

Pay disparity and education: Studies indicate that women typically make less money than men, even with comparable educational backgrounds and credentials. The term "unexplained" or "unadjusted" gender pay disparity refers to this issue. Analysis: Even after accounting for other variables like education and experience, bias and discrimination in the workplace can result in salary discrepancies.

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### Policy Proposals:

India has implemented legislation such as the Equal Remuneration Act (1976), which stipulates that equal labour must be paid equivalent compensation; nevertheless, these rules can be difficult to police and keep up with. Analysis: Although the establishment of laws promoting pay fairness is a step in the right direction, narrowing the wage gap requires strong enforcement.

### Political Representation

A key component of gender equality is political representation, which entails making sure that women are fairly and proportionately represented in entities that make decisions. Here, we'll look at data and offer insight pertaining to women's political representation in India: The representation of women in parliament: House of the People, or Lok Sabha: The lower house of the Indian parliament, the Lok Sabha, had 545 members as of September 2021, when I last updated my information. Women held 78 seats out of 545 in the 17th Lok Sabha, which was elected in 2019. This is about 14.3% of the total seats. Analysis: Although the number of women elected to the Lok Sabha has increased over time, gender parity has not been reached, and women's representation in this crucial legislative body remains far below par.

### The Council of States, or Rajya Sabha:

There are 245 members of the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of the Indian parliament. In the Rajya Sabha, women held about 27.8% of the seats as of my most recent information update, suggesting a comparatively greater level of representation than in the Lok Sabha. Analysis: While women's participation in the Rajya Sabha has improved, more work has to be done to guarantee more equitable representation in both chambers of Parliament.

### The Percentage of Women in State Legislatures State Legislatures:

In India, the number of women serving in state legislatures varies throughout Indian states and union territories. In 2021, the percentage of female legislators varied among states; West Bengal and Rajasthan had comparatively larger percentages of female legislators, while other states had lesser representation. Analysis: The disparity in women's representation in state politics emphasises the necessity of focused initiatives to advance gender equity in local politics.

### Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs):

Early in the 1990s, India's constitution was amended to include a 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) at the village, intermediate, and district levels. According to the data, women's involvement in local governance has significantly increased as a result of the reservation policy. Analysis: Women's political engagement at the grassroots level has been successfully increased by the reservation policy for PRIs, and it can be used as a model to advance gender representation in higher-level political bodies.

### Opportunities and Difficulties:

Even if there has been growth in the number of women in politics, there are still numerous obstacles to overcome, such as societal expectations, cultural biases, and obstacles to women's political participation. Promoting women's candidatures and making sure they have the chance to run for office are important tasks for political parties and civil society organizations. Closing the gender gap in political representation can be achieved in part by raising awareness and motivating women to get involved in politics.

### Violence and Discrimination Against Women

Discrimination and violence against women are major problems in India. Here are some data on gender-based violence and discrimination in the nation as of September 2021:

In 2015–2016, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS–4) found that about 28.8% of Indian women who had ever been married (aged 15–49) reported having been physically or sexually abused by their spouse at some point in their lives. Violent Mistreatment: The category "outraging the modesty of women" was used by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) to report 32,033 cases of crimes against women in 2019. The NCRB registered 32,033 rape cases in 2019. Sexual assault It's crucial to remember that rape cases are underreported because of societal stigma and reprisal fears.

### **Violence Connected to Dowries:**

The NCRB reported 21,084 instances of deaths related to dowries in 2019. In India, violence related to dowries is still a major concern. Gender disparities and discrimination: In 2020, 21 percent of Indian women were married before turning eighteen, according to UNICEF data. Girls are disproportionately affected by child marriage, which is a type of gender discrimination. Gender differences still exist even though females' access to education has improved. In secondary school (Classes IX–X), girls' Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) as of 2018–2019 was 81.32%, compared to 85.01% for boys.

### **Gap in Wage and Employment:**

There is still a sizable gender pay disparity in India. In 2019, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) revealed that women in metropolitan areas earned almost 19% less than men.

**The representation of politics:** The representation of women in Indian politics is low. Women only accounted for about 14.3% of the seats in the lower house of Parliament as of the 17th Lok Sabha (2019). Stereotypes about Gender and Cultural Norms: In Indian society, discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes continue to affect women's positions and prospects. These conventions support the persistence of discrimination and violence against women.

### **Laws and Their Application:**

India has enacted legislation and regulations, such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, to combat gender-based violence and discrimination. Effective enforcement and execution, however, continue to be difficult. In order to advance gender parity in India, the following important suggestions may be discussed:

### **Education:**

Develop focused interventions, such as creating secure school environments and increasing awareness of the value of education, to address obstacles to girls' education in rural areas.

### **Economic Empowerment:**

Facilitate women's access to resources, training, and financing in order to promote their entrepreneurial endeavours. Encourage fair compensation for equivalent labour and make sure anti-discrimination laws are upheld.

### **Political Representation:**

Put policies in place to boost the number of women in legislative bodies, such as allocating more seats in state and federal legislatures for women.

**Gender-Based Violence:** Boost awareness efforts, give survivors support resources, and enforce current laws prohibiting gender-based violence more strictly.

### **CONCLUSION:**

An essential objective for any community aiming for social and economic advancement is gender equality. India has made strides in a number of areas, but problems still exist. It will take

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coordinated efforts from the public, business, and civil society sectors to achieve gender equality. India can build a more inclusive and equitable society by addressing these issues and putting the suggested policies into practice, thereby moving the country closer to achieving gender equity.

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