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## Gender Inequality in Indian Society: Causes and Solutions

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**Abstract--** This short research paper examines the problem of gender inequality prevalent in Indian society. Although women in Indian culture are often symbolically placed on a pedestal and worshipped as goddesses, in reality they are frequently not even treated as full human beings and are denied complete human rights. The reality of gender inequality in Indian society is extremely complex and multidimensional, as women face discrimination in almost every sphere of life, including education, employment opportunities and availability, income, health, nutrition, decision-making power, and socio-cultural aspects.

The lack of gender equality not only restricts women's access to resources and opportunities but also hampers the development of future generations. The primary cause of gender inequality in Indian society is the deeply rooted patriarchal system. In recent times, the expansion of education has contributed to a gradual change in this mindset. According to the 2011 Census of India, the female literacy rate was 65.46 percent, indicating a growing awareness among women.

The government has implemented several laws and provided reservations for the upliftment of women; however, despite these efforts, only about 3 percent of women, compared to men, are represented in legal administration and senior administrative positions. Therefore, this short research paper attempts to analyze the issue of gender inequality by discussing its extent, causes, and consequences, and also suggests policy measures to eliminate gender inequality in India.

**Keywords--** Gender Inequality, Education, Socialization, Patriarchy

Gender inequality in India refers to disparities between men and women in terms of health, education, economic status, and political participation. Various international gender inequality indices rank India differently across these factors as well as on an overall basis, and these indices often remain a subject of debate. The social causes of gender inequality affect India's sex ratio, women's health, life expectancy, educational attainment, and economic conditions. Gender inequality in India is a multidimensional issue and has become a matter of global concern. At present, studies related to gender inequality are no longer limited to a single country; rather, it has emerged as an international issue. The era of globalization and liberalization has brought the problems of different countries onto a common platform.

The right to equality is the foundation for social development, upon which the structure of progress can be built.

This raises an important question: what exactly is gender equality? Why has it become a fundamental element for any society and nation? Is it truly relevant in the changing social context? Gender equality does not merely mean having the same biological sex; rather, it implies equal rights, responsibilities, employment opportunities, and equal income for all individuals in society. Keeping this in mind, in September 2015, the United Nations, under the Agenda 2030, defined 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which were signed by 193 countries including India. Among these 17 goals, Goal 5 is specifically aimed at achieving gender equality.

Gender inequality refers to viewing women as weaker than men on the basis of gender. Women face dual standards, exploitation, humiliation, and discrimination within the household and society. Men are given priority in education, independent decision-making, socialization, politics, and cultural activities, whereas women, even today, continue to remain subordinate in Indian society.

Every human being has the right to opportunities for the full development of their potential, but due to the social evil of gender inequality, this potential is often not properly nurtured. In India, gender inequality also affects access to opportunities, and the primary reason for this is the lack of education. According to the 2011 Census, the overall literacy rate in India was 74.04 percent, with 82.14 percent literacy among men and 65.46 percent among women. These figures clearly indicate that the educational level of women in India is extremely low.

According to data from the National Statistical Office, in 2021 the overall literacy rate in India was estimated at 77.30 percent, with male literacy at 84.70 percent and female literacy at 70.30 percent. These statistics reveal a significant gap of 14.4 percent between male and female literacy rates, highlighting the poor educational status of women in Indian society.

Focusing on the status of women, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote that "*the progress of a country can be judged by the progress of its women.*"



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Education is the dimension that ensures the holistic development of women; it is the crucial link between women and development. It is a well-established fact that when a woman is educated, she educates the entire family.

Discrimination against women begins at birth and continues throughout their entire life. In the Indian social context, recurring incidents such as female foeticide and rape demonstrate how unsafe and hostile society can be for women. Due to the problem of gender inequality, almost all women face harassment by men, while some unfortunate women suffer sexual exploitation and rape. For the development of any country and society, both women and men are equally essential. If one section remains weak, true progress is not possible.

#### I. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this short research paper is to study the problem and causes of gender inequality prevalent in Indian society, to examine how gender inequality is related to education, and to analyze facts related to women's equality through the promotion of education in India.

Several books and research papers have focused on gender inequality and related issues such as women's education, women's empowerment, and patriarchy.

**Pathak, Sumedha (1986)**, in her book *"Gender, School and Society"*, divided issues related to gender inequality into five units. These include gender issues, gender roles, gender and education, educational equality in curriculum and schools, and strategies for change. The book presents a detailed and logically argued discussion of these topics supported by relevant facts.

**According to Bhargava, Chandana (2016)**, education is the condition that distinguishes human beings from animals; an uneducated human being is no different from an animal. In Indian society, educating only men is considered essential, while women are treated as inferior, kept uneducated, and subjected to ill-treatment.

**Rani, Dr. Upa (2016)**, in her book *"Women Empowerment"*, described the status of women in Indian society and pointed out that women's inequality exists across the entire world. Today, women's movements have acquired a strong role globally. In the twentieth century, efforts to eliminate the oppression of women achieved significant success at the international level.

**Ramasamy, E.V. Periyar (2020)**, in his book *"Caste System and Patriarchy"*, expressed the view that the construction of a modern society is impossible without eliminating the practices of caste and patriarchy. Periyar's writings clearly indicate that equality between men and women is essential for the development of society.

#### II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This short research paper is based on secondary data. The study has been conducted with the help of sources such as magazines and journals, newspapers, reports (annual and semi-annual), and the internet.

##### *Types of Gender Inequality*

Gender inequality exists in society in many forms. Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has generally categorized gender inequality into the following seven forms

1. Inequality in Mortality
2. Natal (Birth-related) Inequality
3. Inequality in Basic Facilities
4. Inequality in Special Opportunities
5. Occupational Inequality
6. Ownership Inequality
7. Household Inequality

#### III. CAUSES OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIAN SOCIETY

The following reasons are responsible for the problem of gender inequality prevalent in Indian society:

##### *1. Patriarchal Mindset*

The main cause of gender inequality in Indian society is its patriarchal system. According to renowned sociologist Sylvia Walby, *"Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women."* Patriarchy in Indian society derives legitimacy and acceptance from religious and cultural beliefs, whether in Hinduism, Islam, or other religions.

##### *2. Son Preference*

In Indian society, the head, guardian, and provider of the family is traditionally considered to be a male child. According to Ganu, *"During childhood, women live under their father's protection; after marriage, under their husband's; and in old age or widowhood, under their son's protection."* At no stage are they allowed to live independently according to their own wishes.

##### *3. Ownership of Property*

Traditionally, only sons are considered rightful heirs to their father's property. Although legally, according to Supreme Court orders, daughters have equal rights to their father's property, in practice they are often denied ownership. Sons are still considered the "lamp of the house."



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#### 4. *Lineage Continuation*

Due to patriarchy, Indian society believes that only a son can continue the family lineage, whereas a daughter will contribute to another family's lineage after marriage.

#### 5. *Considering the Daughter as Property of Another Household*

According to Indian tradition, after marriage, a daughter resides in her husband's home. Therefore, having a son is considered essential to carry forward the family.

#### 6. *Viewing Women as a Weak Section*

Society holds the belief that a woman cannot live independently or support her family on her own as a man can. While nature may have made women physically weaker than men, society has also conditioned women to be mentally dependent.

#### 7. *Dowry System*

The practice of dowry plays a major role in reinforcing gender inequality. Poor parents who cannot arrange dowry for their daughters may fail to get them suitable matches, and even if marriage occurs, women are often harassed for additional dowry after marriage.

### IV. LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS AGAINST GENDER INEQUALITY

The Indian Constitution, from Article 14 to Article 18, focuses on the development and empowerment of women. According to Article 14, women are granted the right to equality before the law. Article 15(1) provides that the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on the basis of religion, caste, gender, or place of birth. Article 15(3) allows the State to make special provisions in favor of women and children. In addition, the Directive Principles of State Policy provide various provisions for the benefit of women and protection against discrimination.

To eliminate the exploitation of women and ensure equality in society, the Parliament has enacted several protective laws, including:

1. Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
2. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
3. Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
4. Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987
5. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (*implemented in 2008*)
6. Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

### V. GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX 2022

The World Economic Forum released the Gender Gap Index for 2022, in which India ranked 135th. In the previous year, 2021, India was ranked 140th. India's overall score improved from 0.625 in 2021 to 0.629 in 2022, marking the seventh-highest score in the last 16 years. In this index, Iceland ranked first, followed by Finland in second, Norway in third, New Zealand in fourth, and Sweden in fifth place.

### VI. THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION IN ELIMINATING GENDER INEQUALITY

Eliminating gender inequality and establishing gender equality in the social environment is the responsibility of the entire society. Gender inequality is reflected in every sphere of society—within the family, in neighborhoods, schools, and playgrounds. Generally, men dominate society, and one of the most significant areas of this dominance is education.

In ancient times, girls were provided education similar to boys, which included both scriptures and martial training. Gradually, however, girls were denied education, and their lives were confined to the domestic sphere, with marriage and household responsibilities considered their only roles. Although the situation has improved in modern times, the problem still persists at its roots.

A major issue related to women's education is the high dropout rate at primary and secondary levels, which prevents most girls from accessing higher education and realizing their full potential. According to the National Statistical Office, in 2021, India's overall literacy rate was estimated at 77.70%, with male literacy at 84.70% and female literacy at 70.30%, revealing a gap of 14.4%. According to the 2011 Census, out of 763.4 million literate people, 434.6 million were men and 328.8 million were women, showing a gap of 10.58%. The overall literacy rate at that time was 72.09%, with male literacy at 80.89% and female literacy at 64.64%, reflecting a national-level gap of 16.25%.

### VII. SUGGESTIONS TO ELIMINATE GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIA

The issues faced by women in Indian society are primarily linked to social structure. As long as structural changes are not implemented in the patriarchal and male-dominated framework, no permanent improvement in women's status can be achieved. The following measures can help address gender inequality:

1. *Enactment of a Women's Act* – With the support of women's groups, India should pass a comprehensive Women's Act that provides clear provisions regarding marriage, inheritance, and property, ensuring equal benefits for women.



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2. *Promoting Women's Education* – Education for women should not only be made compulsory, but poor girls should also be provided scholarships, hostels, and free transportation. The goal of women's education should be to make women economically self-reliant.
3. *Encouraging Employment* – Women should be encouraged to participate in more employment opportunities and receive training. The government should implement reservations and protective policies for this purpose.
4. *Promoting Women's Organizations* – Women should be encouraged to form organizations at local levels, and these organizations should receive support and assistance.
5. *Eradication of the Dowry System* – The dowry system should be completely abolished.
6. *Implementation of Women's Empowerment Policies* – Policies that promote women's empowerment should be adopted and strictly enforced.

#### VIII. CONCLUSION

Based on the above study, it can be concluded that gender inequality in Indian society is at its extreme. Women face discrimination and inequality in matters governed by laws created by religious communities, including marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody.

Whether it is health, education, freedom, desires, or needs, men continue to dominate every sphere. While the government has implemented several provisions for the development of women, **education remains the only fundamental solution** to improve women's status and eliminate gender inequality at its root.

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