

Inequality with Women in the Indian System: A Review Paper

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Abstract

Social inequality remains a pervasive issue across societies, influencing economic opportunities, education, healthcare, and legal systems. In India, gender-based inequality is deeply entrenched due to cultural, social, economic, and political factors. This research review examines the multifaceted dimensions of gender inequality in India, including economic disparity, discrimination in education, healthcare, political representation, and legal rights. The study employs theoretical frameworks such as structural functionalism, conflict theory, and intersectionality to understand the roots and mechanisms perpetuating inequality. Additionally, the review highlights social justice initiatives aimed at reducing disparities through policy reforms, legal interventions, and grassroots movements. By synthesizing empirical studies and policy analyses, this paper underscores the necessity of a multidimensional approach to addressing systemic inequalities and fostering a more equitable society.

Keywords: Social justice, Gender inequality, Legal interventions, Women empowerment, Policy reforms

Introduction

Gender inequality is a persistent issue in India, affecting various aspects of life, including education, employment, political participation, and legal rights. Despite constitutional provisions that guarantee gender equality, the lived experiences of Indian women often reflect systemic discrimination and marginalization. This paper reviews existing literature to understand the causes and consequences of gender inequality in India and explores potential solutions.

Theoretical Perspectives on Gender Inequality

Several sociological theories help explain gender-based disparities:

- **Structural Functionalism:** Views gender roles as necessary for societal stability but also recognizes that rigid gender norms can hinder progress.
- **Conflict Theory:** Highlights power struggles between genders, arguing that men historically control resources and decision-making processes.
- **Intersectionality:** Examines how overlapping identities, such as caste, class, and religion, compound gender-based discrimination.

Dimensions of Gender Inequality in India

Economic Disparity

- Women's labor force participation in India remains low (~20%), with a significant wage gap across sectors.
- Many women work in the informal economy without legal protections, leading to economic insecurity.
- The "glass ceiling" effect limits women's access to leadership positions in corporate and public sectors.

Education and Literacy

- The female literacy rate (around 70%) lags behind that of men (~85%).
- Societal norms and economic constraints often lead to higher dropout rates for girls.
- Gender stereotypes in curricula reinforce traditional roles, limiting career aspirations for women.

Healthcare and Nutrition

- Women face higher maternal mortality rates due to inadequate healthcare access.
- Sex-selective abortion and female infanticide contribute to a skewed sex ratio.
- Menstrual health remains a stigmatized issue, affecting school attendance and workplace participation.

Political Representation

- Women's representation in Parliament and state legislatures remains low (~15% of seats held by women).
- The Women's Reservation Bill (2023) aims to improve representation, but full implementation remains pending.
- Grassroots movements have enabled more participation in local governance (Panchayati Raj institutions).

Legal Rights and Protection

- Despite strong legal frameworks (e.g., Domestic Violence Act 2005, POSH Act 2013), enforcement remains weak.
- Marital rape is not yet criminalized under Indian law.
- Personal laws across religions often disadvantage women in matters of inheritance, marriage, and divorce.

Violence Against Women

- Domestic violence, sexual harassment, and honor killings are prevalent, with many cases going unreported.
- Cyber harassment and digital abuse have increased with technological advancements.
- Legal and social barriers prevent many survivors from seeking justice.

Government Policies and Legal Reforms

- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (2015) aims to improve education and welfare for girls.
- Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017 enhances workplace rights for women.
- The recent Women's Reservation Bill seeks to address political underrepresentation.

Grassroots Movements

- NGOs and feminist groups work to challenge patriarchal norms and promote gender equality.
- Movements like #MeToo and Pinjra Tod have raised awareness about gender-based violence and workplace discrimination.

- Community-driven initiatives focus on skill development and financial independence for women.

Role of Media and Education

- Media representation of women has improved, but regressive portrayals still exist.
- Gender-sensitive education can help dismantle stereotypes and encourage equal opportunities.
- Digital literacy programs aim to bridge the gender gap in technology access.

Conclusion and Recommendations

While India has made progress in addressing gender inequality, significant challenges remain. A multi-pronged approach, involving legal reforms, policy changes, grassroots activism, and societal attitude shifts, is essential. Recommendations include:

- Strengthening legal enforcement to ensure gender justice.
- Increasing female workforce participation through workplace policies and financial inclusion.
- Enhancing political representation through reservation and leadership training.
- Promoting gender-sensitive education and media representation.

By integrating policy interventions with social awareness campaigns, India can move towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

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