

Gender Inequality and Gender Justice in Contemporary India: A Sociological Analysis of Structural Constraints, Unpaid Work and Substantive Equality

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Abstract:

In India, gender inequality manifests not merely through unequal results within a single social system but also through interconnections between family relations, socialization of gender, employment, unpaid care work, education, practices of social institutions, and possible cultural expectations. The paper analyzes the question of gender inequality and gender justice in India today by focusing on social constructs that shape everyday opportunities, responsibilities, and authorities. In this regard, the analysis combines sociology and inter-disciplinary research with empirical materials from official Indian sources and gender-data worldwide. The analysis pays special attention to unpaid domestic work and care work, economic activities, decision-making, equality of institutions as well as the intersectionality of gender with caste, class, place of living, age, disability, etc. Time-use statistics show significant gender segregation in unpaid domestic and caregiving work, while recent peer-reviewed articles show that unpaid care work may limit women's participation on the labor market and affect their well-being. The analysis proves that legal equality is necessary but does not eliminate inequality as long as the social institutions distribute time, resources, power, and responsibilities for care differently. Therefore, the idea of gender justice is developed as a multidimensional process which includes rights, resources, representation, recognition, redistribution, autonomy, and institutional accountability. Thus, the paper argues that gender justice cannot only be measured based on the number of women participating, but one must ask what social and institutional circumstances made that participation possible.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Gender Justice, Patriarchy, Gender Socialization, Unpaid Care Work, Substantive Equality, Intersectionality, Women's Empowerment, India

Introduction:

Gender remains a significant basis for social organization and stratification. It influences where work and care is carried out, who is in charge of making decisions, and how education, jobs, mobility, and public engagement are perceived. Even though biological differences do exist among individuals, the

meanings ascribed to the differences between sexes are created and recreated in institutions, interactions, cultures, and systems of power. From a sociological perspective, the attitude of individuals is a partial explanation. The choices made are constrained and enabled by social structures.

India does have, at least on paper, a constitutional commitment to equality and anti-discrimination. **Article 14** states equal protection of law; **Article 15** prohibits discrimination on specified grounds including on account of sex and yet allows for special provision for women and children; and **Article 16** establishes equal opportunities in public employment. This means that while these provisions provide an important basis for norm and law, merely having the rights in theory does not imply substantive equality in practice. The question thus remains about the nexus between formal equality and the actual distribution of time, resources, power, opportunities, and recognition.

Modern statistics concerning gender reveal the importance of the described differentiation. The report presented by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation called "Women and Men in India 2024" includes gender-specific statistics on different aspects of life, such as demography, health, education, economy and decision-making.

The report also states the significance of gender-segregated statistics for determining inequalities. For instance, the Time Use Survey that was carried out in 2019 present's important data since it discloses the nature of unpaid work different from the overall data on job statuses.

The findings of the Time Use Survey conducted in 2019 show significant gender disparities in unpaid work at home and providing care. MoSPI states that nearly 81% of women participated in unpaid household work while fewer men were involved; moreover, among respondents aged 15-59 years, the participation can be evaluated at about 92% and 29% for women and men respectively.

Recent studies support this claim. **According to Sahu (2024)**, who refers to the time-use data from India in 2019, there is a large disparity between genders in terms of paid, unpaid, and total work (married women aged from 15 to 59 years old work even more). Based on the time-use survey conducted in Kanpur among 1076 participants, Sinha et. al. were able to identify that an additional hour of caregiving decreases the number of women participating in the economy and lowers their levels of self-care and well-being. This shows that the conversation is changing from whether women are involved in work to the conditions of paid and unpaid work distribution.

In light of this research, the paper returns to the concept of gender inequality and gender justice as the process involving, in particular, classical feminist theory, the theory of intersectionality, and other recent studies conducted in India, and thus attempts to develop an integrated model explaining how gender inequality is reproduced and how to ensure the achievement of gender equality in reality.

Statement of the Problem:

The central problem concerns the continuous presence of inequality between genders even when structural rights, education, work, and legal institutions have been extended. This inequality is manifested in many interrelated forms: unequal load of household tasks, job segregation, disproportional access to sources of income, gender prejudices, hindrances to travelling and decision making, neglect of unpaid work, violence and harassment, and inequality of power. A narrow focus on one kind of outcome can miss the connections between different forms of inequality. For example, women might earn money but still assume most of the responsibility for unpaid household chores. Probably, even though women reach high education and improve their possibilities for work, social norms may still influence their professional choice, movement, marriage, childcare, or leadership. So the problem lies not in the lack of

women's engagement per se, but in the unfair social construction of opportunities, responsibilities, resources, and power.

Objectives of the Study

- To study gender equality as multidimensional social stratification in modern day India.
- To explore the impact of patriarchy, gender socialization and institutional practices in maintaining existing gender difference.
- To examine unpaid domestic and care work as a key aspect of gender inequality.
- To find out the relationship between education and economic participation, and the impact of these factors on autonomy and gender justice in modern day India.
- To study the intersectionality of gender with caste, class, location, age, disability and other social positions.
- To differentiate between formal equality and substantive equality and determine the sociological conditions needed for gender justice.
- To find out the institutional and social measures that could facilitate a fairer distribution of resources, responsibilities, representation, acknowledgement and power.

Questions of the Research

- What are the ways in which gender inequality is reproduced through family structure, education, labour market, and institutional arrangements?
- How can the distribution of unpaid domestic and care work be connected to the economic and social opportunities of the members of society?
- How do education and economic resources interact with autonomy and decision-making process?
- What is the relationship between gender, caste, class, location, age, disability and other social categories?
- What conditions enable formal legal equality to coexist with substantial gender disparity?
- How do institutions and social conditions contribute to advancing gender equity in today's India?

Literature Review

Gender as Social Construct

According to Oakley (1972), it is crucial to differentiate between sex and gender because gender is acquired through social processes. Similarly, Beauvoir contended that womanhood is not entirely determined by biological differences. These ideas are significant because they provide focus on the processes of socialization instead of arguing that gender roles are innate

Walby (1990) defined patriarchy as a system of structures and practices through which men's power and women's oppression operate. This definition is useful in the Indian context where gender relations are influenced by several institutions, i.e., family, kinship, economy, politics, religion, and culture. In the same vein, Bhasin (2000) pointed out that patriarchy has both visible and invisible aspects making this idea helpful in understanding various forms of inequality.

Gender Relations, Masculinities and Power

Connell's work on gender relations and hegemonic masculinity shows how gender should be understood as a relational term rather than just a term for women. This perspective allows for studying how

hegemonic masculinity can influence authority, employability, care-giving roles, and institutional cultures. It also allows for distinguishing between diverse social categories of both men and women.

Intersectionality

Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality developed the framework through which it is possible to analyze how different systems of oppression intersect. In the case of India, it is impossible to speak of gender without discussing caste, class, religion, ethnicity, rural/urban living conditions, disability, age, marital status, and economic situation. The intersectional framework, therefore, avoids homogenization of the category 'women.'

Unpaid Work and Time Inequality in India

The emerging body of work on the issue of unpaid labor creates an important empirical link between feminism and the measurement of disparity. The Time Use Survey from MoSPI (2019) made the contribution of unpaid care and domestic work visible in statistics. Sahu(2024) shows that the division of paid, unpaid, and total work remains very clear in the country and wives of working age bear the highest burden of work.

Sinha et al. (2024), another study has emerged from the context of Uttar Pradesh. The authors argue that a structured survey involving 1,076 individuals showed that women engaged more in caregiving, while also noting that a greater involvement in caregiving was tied to the reduced involvement of women in the labor market and to worse results in the well-being category. The message from this study for sociology research is that caring is not simply a personal family issue, but is closely linked to labor market opportunities, time management, health, community involvement, and autonomy.

More Recent Studies on Gender Disparities in India

The trend of research that seeks to emphasize the many facets of gender disparities continues to be observed today. **Dixit and Yadav (2026)**, upon conducting a systematic review of the findings of empirical studies carried out between the years of 2016 and 2025, underscored the existence of relevant issues that were associated with women's worth, rights, empowerment, work, career, private lives, and cultural norms. This issue demonstrates the necessity to bridge what people experience and a broader range of social processes at the same time, rather than evaluating individual indicators separately.

Recent studies have also highlighted that gendered time use remains a crucial aspect of inequality. The 'feminist' and 'intersectional' perspectives employed in research about unpaid care in India in the Journal of Gender Studies highlight the importance of such views for understanding gendered time use and the process of care giving (2025); the use of nationally representative time-use data in the context of caregiving, mobility and time poverty allowed deeper insights into the impact of time allocation on people's lives (2026). Therefore, it is essential to study time, care, work, and well-being closely through the lens of gender justice.

Research Gap

The studies prove that gender inequality appears in several forms; still, only partial connections between different dimensions of gender inequality have been revealed. First, researchers tend to concentrate on various results, including education, employment, violence, and empowerment of people. Furthermore, researchers pay insufficient attention to such mechanisms that connect the dimensions studied through time allocation, socialization, institutional practices, and caring obligations. Second, relying on general comparisons of people of different genders, researchers ignore the differences within gender groups resulting from various factors, including age, caste, class, location, disability, and family conditions. Finally, it should be emphasized that, in daily life.

The current article brings together important concepts through the connection of structural power, gender socialization, institutional norms, unpaid labor, economic resources, representation, and substantive equality.

The paper does not present any original data but instead connects previously existing literature to elaborate on the ways through which gender inequality is maintained and what aspects should be focused on in a gender justice analysis.

Theoretical framework

Feminist perspective

Feminist sociology is the main theoretical framework of the paper. It focuses on gender inequality based on power relations, patriarchy, division of labor, institutions, and unequal distribution of resources. This perspective rejects approaches that view gender differences as something purely natural or individual but rather questions how social institutions contribute to creating inequalities.

Socialist/Marxist feminism

The socialist/Marxist feminist approach is particularly effective in goal understanding the link between productive and reproductive labor. One can recognize paid labor through market institutions, while domestic work, child care, elder care, cooking, cleaning, and emotional labor can hardly be compensated. It can create dependence in terms of economy and time.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality serves as an addition to the analysis within a feminist framework by showing that how a person experiences gender is related to various social identities. A specific gender-related social expectation may mean different things for a woman depending on her caste, social class, faith, physical impairment, rural or urban origin, age, marital state, and availability of resources.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism offers a low level of analysis of gender. It shows that gender is socially produced through social processes of everyday people's practices. That is how it becomes possible to understand the way broader structures penetrate into everyday lives of people within their families.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework made in this article demonstrates the links between the structural conditions and everyday practices of the social structure. According to the presented framework, the patriarchal structure and racially biased norms form the basis for socialization and its results.

Level	Key mechanism	Illustrative outcome
Structural	Patriarchy, caste/class hierarchy, labour-market structure	Unequal power and resources
Cultural	Gender norms, stereotypes, socialisation	Role expectations and sanctions
Institutional	Family, education, workplace, state and media practices	Differential access and treatment
Household	Division of paid/unpaid work and decision-making	Time inequality and autonomy
Individual/interactional	Agency, negotiation, identity and everyday interaction	Acceptance, resistance or transformation
Transformative	Education, economic resources, legal	Greater substantive equality

	awareness, institutional reform	
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Research Methodology

Research design: This paper utilizes a qualitative-analytical approach to research design with the use of secondary data. It does not claim to be a finished primary field research project. The evidence base integrates classical sociology and feminist studies, peer-reviewed literature, official statistics from India, and international gender data.

Sources: Leading secondary sources are statistical publications Women and Men in India and 2019 Time Use Survey by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, the Constitution of India, UN Women gender-data source, and recent peer-reviewed literature on unpaid care work, time poverty, and gender inequality in India.

Analysis: Literature and statistical evidence are organized thematically in five interconnected dimensions: (1) structural and cultural reproduction of gender inequality; (2) unpaid household and care work; (3) economic participation; (4) intersectionality and access; and (5) formal vs substantive equality. The evidence is interpreted sociologically rather than treated as evidence of a causal relationship unless the empirical study cited in the text states that it has a causal or quasi-causal design.

Scope and constraints: This article does not include data obtained directly from research subjects, so it does not present any new estimates, hypothesis testing, or statistical significance levels. Hence, this paper has to be submitted as a theoretical/secondary data-based research paper or review article unless the author includes first-hand data and respective empirical methodology in future.

Secondary Data on Gender Inequality in India

What has been discussed below provides evidence of the multiple dimensions of gender inequality without weighting it as a simple composite number.

Dimension	Evidence	Sociological significance
Unpaid domestic work	MoSPI Time Use Survey 2019 reports much higher female participation in unpaid domestic services than male participation; among ages 15–59, approximately 92% of females versus 29% of males participated.	Shows that household reproduction remains strongly gendered and can shape time available for other activities.
Unpaid caregiving	MoSPI reports female participation in unpaid caregiving substantially above male participation. Sinha et al. (2024) also find gender-differentiated well-being effects of caregiving in Uttar Pradesh.	Connects care responsibilities with labour, self-care, well-being and autonomy.
Total work burden	Sahu (2024) finds pronounced gender differences in paid, unpaid and total work using the 2019 national time-use data.	Shows that employment status alone cannot capture total workload.
Gender-disaggregated	Women and Men in India 2024 consolidates indicators across health,	Demonstrates the need for multidimensional gender

monitoring	education, economic participation, decision-making and violence.	statistics.
Political representation	UN Women Data Hub reports that women held about 14.7% of seats in India's national parliament as of February 2024.	Illustrates the distinction between population presence and institutional representation.

It is important to note that these indicators cannot be seen as proving the validity of one reason only behind gender inequality. Gender inequality generates from many different processes and under many different circumstances. In this respect even the same indicator could be construed in terms of family settings, labour market, culture, public services, households, etc. The sociological approach allows us to consider different levels of inequality simultaneously, rather than say that the inequality can be explained solely by one factor.

Family plays the first role in socialization, because it is in the family where children first learn their norms. There are many norms they learn in the family, such as norms about work, power, movements, emotions, profession, and care.

Schools and universities also play an important role in socialization, since the educational institutions can either reinforce or reject norms learned in the family.

Unpaid Care Work, Time Poverty and Economic Participation

Unpaid care work is crucial to gender sociology as it connects the home with the bigger economy. Activities such as cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing help in producing goods but may not be considered as jobs.

According to the Time Use Survey of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, unpaid work is highly gendered. As Sahu (2024) reveals, this is true in terms of the overall workload, while Sinha et al. (2024) find that unpaid caregiving affects women's employment status and welfare in the labor market. These data confirm that inequality can be identified broadly, whereby time itself becomes an asset which is unequal between social groups.

Therefore, the notion of time poverty is significant in understanding gender justice. Somebody can have the legal right to work and study while lacking time to do so because of domestic duties. As a result, policies and institutions that concentrate on formal rights can miss the point of the unequal conditions of access to these rights.

Education is generally linked to the increase in awareness, opportunities for economic advancement and social mobility. However, it should be highlighted that education must not be considered a panacea for gender inequality. The results depend on such factors as the situation on the job market, the expectations of families, the level of safety, the cultural environment of institutions, and the presence of financial means.

The sociological approach regards education as a resource for individuals and an institutional process. A gender-sensitive curriculum, equal involvement in academic and leadership activities, prevention of harassment, as well as formal procedures to file complaints in the school/higher education institution are essential in defining the outcomes of education.

Economic empowerment of women means having access to job opportunities, incomes, properties, loans, financial services, education, and social security, but empowerment does not equal income. Being capable of managing available resources is an important component of autonomy.

Nonetheless, the issue of the relationship between work opportunities and empowerment needs to be analyzed critically. Employment enables women to gain access to salaries and social networks while they still perform the major share of domestic labor. Thus, economic empowerment and redistribution of unpaid labor should be analyzed together.

Intersectionality and Heterogeneity within Gender Groups

A gender-centric view of gender groups is likely to treat men and women as cohesive categories. The concept of intersectionality emphasises the need to investigate the ways in which gender intersects with caste, class, religion, place of birth, age, disability, marital status, profession, and financial position. This is particularly relevant to the situation in India, given the differences in educational, employment, property, mobility, political, and institutional opportunities across different social groups. The question to be asked is not just whether women face discrimination, but rather how their experience of discrimination differs.

Formal Equality and Substantive Equality

Formal equality means being treated in a similar way according to the law and set rules. Substantive equality, on the other hand, asks whether people can have real access to such rights. Equal treatment can lead to different results if people are not starting from the same point or have different responsibilities. For instance, having equal access to employment does not imply having the same chances for employment if one group has more unpaid work. Similarly, equal access to education does not mean that mobility matters if a person is limited in his decisions at home and workplace.

Equal access to jobs doesn't equate to being equal in terms of getting equal opportunity, especially when only certain groups are doing the majority of unpaid care work. Likewise, access to institutional education does not exclude limitations on the ability to move freely or make choices.

In this paper, the concept of gender equity encompasses the following five interconnected elements:

- Rights, which means that one is recognized as legally and institutionally equal to others;
- Resources, which means equity in relation to education, income, property, employment, and services;
- Representation, which means having an opportunity to participate in important matters;
- Recognition, which means that certain contributions made by women are recognized as valuable;
- Redistribution, which means that paid work, unpaid care, time, chances, and authority are distributed in a fairer manner.

Importance of Government and Institutions

The state is believed to play an important role when it comes to creating necessary legal and institutional conditions for equity. The notion of equity includes discrimination prevention laws, protection in working places, social security, public services, education, political representation, and resolution of complaints against gender discrimination.

However, it's not enough to have legal provisions; the implementation should be carefully analyzed as well.

Implications for Gender Justice

1. Recognize the importance of unpaid domestic and care work and implement better means of measurement.
2. Promote fairer division of unpaid care work in households and communities.
3. Ensure better access to respectable jobs, social security, property, services, and training.
4. Involve gender-sensitive education and critique of stereotypes in schools.

5. Build stronger mechanisms for fighting discrimination and harassment.
6. Make use of gender statistics with an intersectional approach in order to uncover the differences based on caste, class, disability, place of living, age, and other social characteristics.
7. Assess the success of gender policies not only based on participation in labour activities, but on autonomy, time usage, decision making, safety, and institutional access.

Discussion

To sum up, all of the studies suggest that gender inequality should be examined as a social and relational issue rather than only a problem of choice. Though individuals have agency, agency functions in the worlds in which time, resources, power, risk, and obligations are distributed unequally.

The significance of the data describing unpaid labor cannot be overstated. National time-use statistics and recent empirical research show that tasks associated with household and caregiving duties are not just things that people do for personal reasons. Gender affects domestic duties just like everything else related to work, leisure, self-care, and social activities.

At the same time, it must be understood that the data does not imply that women have the same experience or that men benefit in similar ways. The context matters significantly. The use of intersectionality is important as it shows the diversity among male and female groups in accordance with gender differentiation.

Finally, the difference between formal and real equality explains why constitutional and legal commitments do not relieve situations of inequality. The concept of gender justice implies the necessity of institutions and social relations where rights can be exercised in concrete terms and the distribution of care activities, resources, power, and recognition does not place some groups at a disadvantage.

Limitations

- The research relies on secondary data and conceptual analysis rather than primary data collection.
- The sources vary in population, geographic scope, methods of research, and years of reference, and therefore their indicators are not interchangeable.
- The study does not develop a new causal model or test any statistical hypothesis.
- The data at the national level may hide significant variations at the regional, caste, class, and household levels.
- Future research should use the framework proposed for empirical studies, ensuring that transparent sampling is used.

Conclusion

Gender inequality in modern India cannot be considered as differences between women and men. It is produced through different social processes.

This body of evidence has also highlighted certain forms of work often neglected in traditional measures of employment and economic activities. Time-use studies indicate strong gender segregations in unpaid domestic work and caregiving. New empirical studies also connect unpaid work to labour market and wellbeing outcomes. Furthermore, these findings show the importance of time, care, resources, acknowledgement and institutional power in the discussion about gender justice.

In that respect, the paper makes a distinction between formal and substantive equality. Gender justice means equal legal status, whilst also ensuring proper means of access to resources, representation,

autonomy, recognition and distribution of responsibility. In order to make a real change, transformation should happen at household, institutional, labor market and political levels.

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