

Gender Inequality and Human Development in India: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract:

Human development, refers to the expansion of human freedom and choice to lead a good life. This is not limited to economic expansion, but to education, healthcare, and the ability to make choices, coupled with being able to join and participate fully in society. All of this increase of freedoms is notably limited by gender inequality. Gender inequality refers to systematic disadvantage and gendered differences that individuals experience. It exists as uneven chances, assets, and access to power which are maintained through well-established social conventions and biased activities. Gender inequality is present in most areas of Indian existence and serves to be an obstruction in the endeavour of inclusive human development in India. India is lagging in gender inequality, as evident by its ranking number 108 in the list of 193 countries in the Gender Inequality Index of 2022. This research study, critically and systematically synthesized literature to give an integrated review of all relevant evidence available pertaining to this specific topic. This research paper explores, the inherent dynamics between the socio-cultural drivers and the demonstration of gender inequality and its influence on human development. Paper aims to contribute by analysing interrelation between gender inequality and human development. As we grasp the situational complexities of the issue, we identify effective interventions in achieving gender equality and empowering women in India.

Introduction:

India is confronted with entrenched gender inequality, deterring women's economic participation and undermining overall human development in economic development. The research examines the linkages among these factors, addressing the key issue through examination of systemic disequilibria in access to opportunities and resources (gender inequality), women's labour market participation (economic participation), and enlargement of people's freedoms (human development). Through a mixed-methods research design where quantitative national survey data are complemented with qualitative analysis of policy and literature, the current level of gender inequality will be analysed, determinants affecting women's economic activity explored, the impact on human development indicators quantified, and challenges and opportunities for gender equality and women's economic empowerment described in order to ultimately provide evidence-based input into effective interventions. This study fills the important gap in knowledge relating to inter-linkages among women's economic contribution, gender disparity, and Indian human development. This study is relevant as it can potentially make available evidence-based facts to the policymakers and practitioners to plan and execute effective intervention. By determining the

inter-linkages, we can move towards the vision of an equitable and inclusive society where women are motivated to give their best towards the development of India.

Objectives:

- Discuss the prevailing condition of gender inequality and its manifestations in India and assess the influencing factors.
- Examine the impact of gender inequality on human development and identify issues and opportunities for advancing gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

Methodology:

The research paper critically and systematically synthesized existing literature to provide an integrated review of all available evidence relevant to this particular topic, literature review, through a systematic and rigorous methodology applied to identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant research evidence.

Gender Inequality in India: A Multifaceted Analysis

- 1. Socio-Cultural Norms and Practices:** Indian society is founded on deeply rooted patriarchal norms, which pervade the lives of women. The norms generally dictate that the home is the primary domain of women, excluding them from public life and decision-making. Customs such as dowry, where bride's families are required to provide substantial aids to the groom's family, reinforce the perception that women are an economic burden.
- 2. Educational Disparities:** While improving the enrolment of more girls in primary school, there are large disparities at secondary and tertiary levels. The girls experience huge dropout rates, especially at secondary school, due to a multitude of reasons. Social pressure to marry off the girls early truncates their learning process. Furthermore, the education girls manage to acquire might not prepare them to take benefit from the modern economy. For instance, some surveys in certain areas cite a significantly lower female-to-male number of secondary school graduates than the whole country, with implications of the entrenched gender gap.
- 3. Health and Well-being:** Gender disparity has long-term health and well-being consequences for Indian women. Rural women's maternal death ratios are a cause for concern, an indication of inadequate access to quality health care and lack of prenatal and postnatal care. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by malnutrition, which leads to anaemia and other poor health. Physical and psychological violence against women is widespread with significant physical and mental health consequences for women. These health issues not only impact the health of women in isolation but also more generally their capacity to engage in economic and social life.
- 4. Intersectionality: Gender, Caste, Religion, and Region:** The interaction of gender with other social identity markers like caste, class, religion, and region makes gender discrimination in India even more real. Dalit women, for instance, face double discrimination based on gender as well as caste and are yet to be excluded and marginalized from the majority of the realms of existence. Poor women have very limited access to resources, opportunities, and fundamental services. Differences in social norms and levels of development by region also create enormous inequalities in the lives of women. A sample survey of the experience of tribal women of a specific region, for instance, would catch up with the

special issues of them like curtailed access to land rights, health care, and education determined by the interaction of the intersecting identities.

5. **Economic Participation of Women: Facts and Challenges:** Women's participation in India's formal labour force is comparatively low as compared to men. This discrepancy is due to a range of factors, including limited access to education, training in skills, and child care facilities. Large proportions of women are employed in the informal economy, where they earn low wages, their jobs are insecure, and they have no social protection. A majority of women participate in agricultural work, many in the form of unpaid family work, or home industries, whose labour is under-valued and unrecorded. The earnings gap cuts right across sectors and indicates that when women do work, they receive less than their male counterparts. Statistics documenting the high proportion of women participating in agricultural, unpaid family work capture the issue.
6. **Resources and Opportunities:** Indian women are usually excluded from access to needed resources and opportunities, denying them equal involvement in economic activity. Access to credit and financial services is usually refused by discriminatory lending and lack of collateral. Land and property rights are usually gendered against women, limiting their economic security and independence. Women also have lower access to technology and digital literacy, and hence they face a digital divide that further excludes them. Women entrepreneurs also face a myriad of challenges, such as limited business networks, markets, and capital. An examination of the number of women-owned businesses with access to formal loans compared to men-owned businesses would reflect the level of this gap.
7. **Participation of Women in Decision-Making:** Women's involvement in politics and decision-making arenas in India remains restricted even after state efforts to increase their representation. Social norms usually limit women's involvement in the decision-making bodies of societies, their inclusion in local government and development schemes, and their capacity to shape the agenda of the programs. Even when women come into local government by virtue of elections, patriarchal practice and mindset will seek to limit their impact. Figures indicating that even when there are reserved seats for women in local government, their impact is in fact minimal, indicate such limitation. Such gender exclusion of women from decision-making structures denies the potential of women to represent and protect their rights and interests, and thus perpetuates gender inequality.

Gender Inequality: Statistical Data Regarding Gender Index and Human Development Index of India:

Human Development Index (HDI)

HDI for India: 0.644 in 2022, placing the country at the medium human development level and 134 out of 193 countries and regions.

Gender Development Index (GDI)

GDI for India: 0.852 in 2022, indicating a female to male ratio of HDI values.

Female HDI: 0.582 in 2022, compared to 0.684 for men.

Gender Inequality Index (GII)

- India's GII value: 0.437 in 2022, ranking 108 of 166
- Global mean: 0.462, and South Asian mean: 0.478

- Labour force participation: one of the largest gender gaps is that of India with a gap of 47.8 percentage points between women (28.3%) and men (76.1%) GNI per Capita (2011)
- Men: 6,359
- Women: 2,846

Difference: 3,513 (higher for men by GNI per capita)

Indian employment trend reveals a wide gap between men and women. As per recent figures, India's Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) has risen to 37% during 2022-23 from 23.3% during 2017-18. But this is less than that of male labour force participation rate, which is 78.5% during 2022-23.

Impact of gender inequality on human development & challenges advocating gender equality and economic empowerment for women.

1. **Effect on Human Development:** Gender inequality has a very negative effect on human development. Healthily, it leads to higher maternal and child mortality, as well as increased violence exposure, with mental health implications. Educationally, reduced female literacy levels limit opportunities and reinforce patterns of disadvantage. Economically, it results in lost output and increased poverty. Socially, it affects the well-being of entire populations, and social stability.
2. **Challenges and Opportunities:** Existing problems are discriminatory social norms, limited access to resources, and gaps in policy implementation. Opportunities include education and skills training programs, microfinance, and legal system improvements. Technology can be utilized to empower women, and male participation is critical. Grass roots organizations and increased political representation for women provide opportunities. These problems can be solved through a multi-dimensional approach, focusing on both systemic barriers and ingrained social attitudes.

Effective interventions in achieving Gender equality and Empowering women in India.

1. **Education and Capacity Development:** Invest in girls' education, especially secondary and tertiary. Provide vocational training and computer literacy. Ensure safe schools and mentorship.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** Enhance women's access to financial services and women's enterprise. Eliminate the gender wage gap and restrict unpaid care work. Promote flexible work arrangements.
3. **Policy and Legal Reforms:** Establish robust legal frameworks and enforce them more effectively. Promote women's political participation and gender-responsive policies. Strengthen legal awareness.
4. **Social and Behavioural Change:** Shift patriarchal mindsets and engage men on the issue of gender equality. Employ the media for stereotype-breaking and women's rights organizations. Provide learning on healthy relationships.
5. **Health and Well-being:** increase health, maternal, and reproductive health coverage. Stop violence and improve nutrition. Improve primary health care.
6. **Technology and Innovation:** use technology towards financial and access to information inclusion. Improve digital literacy and e-business. Use technology towards helping survivors of violence.
7. **Developing Women's Leadership and Decision-Making:** Enhance women's leadership representation. Strengthen decision-making for women. Counter gender stereotypes in leadership. Provide leadership training.

Conclusion:

The analysis within this paper has uncovered India's complex dynamics between gender inequity, women's economic participation, and human development. Continued social-cultural impediments, economic disparity, and implementation shortcomings are still issues. However, if India adopts a convergent approach including education, economic empowerment, law reform, social reform, and innovation through technology, India can release its enormous womanhood potential. Significantly, countering the care economy, women's leadership, men as allies, and the power of data analysis are essential steps in creating a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

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