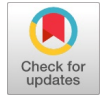


Gender Disparities in India: Causes, Impacts, and Measures



Nijra Brahma

Abstract: *The gender gap that still exists in Indian society has touched the various spheres of life such as education, employment opportunities, income, health, economic issues, social and cultural issues, etc. Discrimination towards women starts even before her birth in the form of female foeticide and after her birth in the form of female infanticide has been in practice. Gender inequality restricts women's access to opportunities and resources. In this paper, we have tried to highlight the causes and consequences of gender inequality in India and put forward measures to reduce this inequality.*

Keywords: *Gender Inequality, Economic, Social and Cultural Issues, Discrimination, Female Foeticide, Female Infanticide.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In gender inequality, women are considered inferior to men in various disciplines such as social, economic, political, cultural, and legal. [1] In India, despite achieving high rates of economic growth in recent years, the gender gap remains a massive issue of concern. Societies based on patriarchy have given women a secondary status within the workplace as well as in the household [2]. During the period of ancient India, an Indian woman was given high respect. In Vedas and Upanishads, terms such as Devi (goddess) or Maata (mother) associated with women are mentioned. During the Rig Vedic period, Women were held in high esteem [3] [13] [14] [15] [16] [17]. They enjoyed equality with men in all spheres of life. No religious rite could be performed without their presence. Their respectable position can be known from the absence of 'Purdah' and 'Sati'. Women were not deprived of education and allowed to participate in philosophical debates. The girls were also married at a right age. However, during the later Vedic period, the condition of women deteriorated, mainly because of polygamy and polyandry. The birth of a daughter was regarded as a source of misery and sorrow. The birth of a son was preferred more than a daughter. Women had no right to inherit properties. Women in both the Mauryan and Gupta periods were confined mostly to roles as wives and mothers. They were deprived of legal and property rights. In the Medieval Period 'Sati System' and 'Dowry System' came into existence.

The system of dowry gave birth to female foeticide and female infanticide in India [4]. Female foeticide means aborting an unborn girl child with the help of sex determination techniques [5]. T. M Kolloor (1990) defines female infanticide as, "Killing of an entirely dependent child under 'one year of age' who is killed by mother, parents or other in whose care the child is entrusted" [6]. As a result of female infanticide, the sex ratio of females to males has dramatically dropped and in many Indian States like, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, etc. the ratio of males is much higher than the ratio of females [4]. Indian society is dominating and women in many parts of India are considered as financial and economic accountability. The male-dominated society of India results in many discriminations against women. The crime against women is increasing day by day. Domestic violence, eve teasing, rape, sexual harassment, molestation, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation, etc. is today very common. So, it is a matter of concern for our Country [7].

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature related to this paper includes relevant published works, journals, magazines, and seminar papers. Dr. K. C. Jena (2008) and T. M. Kollor (1990), wrote the barbaric act of killing a girl child and how as a result of this the female population is declining in comparison to the male. Dr. P. Das (2012), wrote that the dowry system is the main cause of female infanticide in India. S. Jayachandran (2014), has highlighted the main causes of gender inequality in developing countries and presented several measures to reduce the gap between men and women inequality. Mrs. S. Missiriya (2012), wrote about various measures to empower women in various fields. Renuka Choudhary (2018), in her paper, focuses on the history, causes, and means to reduce gender inequality in India. Sumanjeet Singh's paper ((2017) 'The State of gender inequality in India' speaks that the gender gap still exists in India. This article discusses the extent, causes, consequences, and policy measures to reduce gender inequality. Sugandha Kohli (2017), in her paper, discusses Indian society in which gender inequality is deeply penetrated. She highlights the causes and measures to reduce gender inequality. Nijra Brahma (2018) in her article talks about the dowry system and female infanticide in India, its causes, and policy implications. Rajiv Azad (2014) in his book highlights the discrimination against females in India, which can be seen in all the strata of society, and effective measures to recover the situation. In their book, Neera Desai and Usha Thakkar (2001) speak about the present status of Indian women against their ever-changing social, economic, political, and academic background.

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* Correspondence Author (s)

Dr. Nijra Brahma*, Department of History, Bodofa U. N. Brahma College, Kokrajhar (Assam), India. E-mail: nijrabrahma@gmail.com, ORCID ID: [0009-0008-7488-1628](https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7488-1628)

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She highlights the major issues of women and actions to reduce the issues. In their paper, Khritish Swargiary and Kavita Roy (2022) examine the literacy rate in India 2022, identify the states with the highest and lowest literacy rates in India 2022, and highlight the differences between male and female literacy rates in India. Priti Jha and Niti Nagar (2015), in their paper, indicate gender inequality in economic, social, cultural, and legal businesses. They have tried to suggest some relevant strategies and policy implications for reducing this inequality to promote a dignified position for Indian women. Raju, Dr. Nagaraju Kilari, and Dr. S. Vinay Kumar (2020), in their paper attempt to convey the elements that are accountable for gender inequality and show measures to get rid of this trouble. M. V. Jaya Praksham, Dr. P Sai Babu and Dr. M. Subba Rao (2017), write about the concept of gender inequality, its causes and types of gender inequality and measures to eliminate gender inequality. M. Siva Kumar (2008), writes about gender discrimination in India, various forms of gender inequality, and its causes. P. Kumar (2020), write about gender issues in Indian politics.

III. OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the causes of gender disparity.
2. To highlight the impacts of gender disparity.
3. To suggest measures to reduce gender disparity in India.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on newspapers, published works, journals, and seminar papers.

V. ROOT CAUSES OF GENDER INEQUALITY AND CONSEQUENCES

A. Social Causes and Impacts

In India, a girl child is generally viewed as inferior to a boy and this discrimination against her begins at or even before her birth. The female foeticide and infanticide are the result of complex cultural and economic orders. The continuing abuse of the dowry tradition has been the main reason for gender inequalities, as many Indians living in poverty cannot afford to raise funds for suitable dowry and this created the perception that girls are a burden on families. This creates a limitation on her bargaining power within the family [2].

The female literacy rate in India is lower than the male literacy rate. According to 2022, India recorded a nationwide higher literacy rate among men than women. As far as the census, the literacy rate of the female population is 70.30 percent as compared to 84.70 percent of the male population [8]. In many regions of India educating a girl child is still considered as an option rather than a necessity. As a result of the lack of education, women lack the knowledge and confidence to make choices and are encouraged to marry early. The low female literacy rate has an intensely negative impact on family planning, and population stabilization efforts in India as well as uneducated mothers are unaware of nutritional choices for their children.

The gender inequality on health-related issues can be seen in India. The life expectancy of a male is better in comparison to a female, because of violence, diseases, and other related factors.

Most of Indian society is patriarchal, in which the father or a male elder has absolute authority over the family and passing of power and property from fathers to sons. Women get married, then move in with the husband and his family after paying the bride price or dowry. The poor representations of patriarchy are son preference, dowry, harassment towards women, unequal pay and personal laws, religious oppression of women, etc.

There is much gender-based violence in India because of gender inequality, such as rape, sexual attack, abduction, domestic violence, girls trafficking, dowry, etc.

Women are given less authority in comparison to men for legal protection and recognition in India as well. Men have higher access to public knowledge and information. Women have less decision-making power in the home as well as outside the home, creating factors that are obstacles to the reduced advancement of women in India [3].

B. Cultural Causes and Impacts

Sons are considered more useful than girls in India. They are considered as the old age security of their parents. This is a key factor in driving gender inequality in India [7].

In India, it is a common understanding that an individual's family members derive only from his or her father's lineage. The title, name, or the inheritance of family property is related only to one's male relatives. Therefore, people have more inclination for male babies. Because inheritance laws discriminate against women, with the inheritances being left only to sons, women are dependent upon their husbands and in-laws, who keep dowry after marriage. Religiously, in India, it is regarded that only males can perform for their parent's afterlife religious practices and funeral rights. So, parents regard having a male child as important for their salvation. The exclusive rights to inherit the family name and properties are given to boys [9]. Boys are regarded as additional worth to their family and on the other hand girls are regarded as burdens because of expensive dowry which the parents are made to pay during marriages along with their daughters to the son-in-law and the in-laws.

C. Economic Causes and Impacts

Women are deprived insufficiently of property inheritance. According to the religious constitution, women are not to be given equal inheritance of property to men. As a result of women's inequality in the proper legacy, she has to depend on their parents before their marriage and on their husbands and in-laws who keep the dowry after marriage.

Under the law even though women have equal rights to own property as well as equal rights to inherit property, in practice women are deprived. According to the Hindu Succession Act of 2005, women have equal rights to ancestral and jointly owned property yet the enforcement law is weak.

In India still, women are not favored for higher positions and if ever they are found, only at a later stage of their career. Mostly men hold higher positions in the workplace in comparison to women. Therefore, women are likely to receive fewer opportunities at work in comparison to men [1].



India stands out for the underrepresentation of women in the labor force, men are three times as likely as women to be working [10]. In India, there is wage inequality between men and women. A woman earns less than a man.

There is professional inequality between men and women. In military service, women are not allowed to have a conflict role and permanent commission could not be granted to women officers, as they are not trained for command nor they have been given this responsibility in India.

Gender inequality is prominent in access to banking services. Women are often denied loans from banks because of low levels of property ownership and micro-credit schemes have come under scrutiny for aggressive loaning practices [2].

D. Legal Causes and Impacts

The constitution of India promotes that men and women are equal according to laws. However, because of legal bias, the law could not attain success in gender equality [11].

E. Political Causes and Impacts

Though steps have been taken to remove gender inequality in politics and the Indian constitution has constitutionally given woman many rights but yet there is gender bias in the politics because of the fact that Indian politics is male-dominated. The participation of women in the politics is very low [12].

VI. MEASURES TO REDUCE GENDER INEQUALITY

- Men and women should be treated equally, men are the only ones who can earn a livelihood, has to be removed. Women's Empowerment in every sphere of life is important and it will help in increasing the political, social-economic, and spiritual strength of both individuals and communities. Women should be given opportunities for leadership in decision-making in private or public life.
- The Indian Government has passed many laws to empower women in India politically, socially, economically, legally, and educationally, which can improve the status of women only if the Government looks into the strict functioning of these laws.
- All forms of violence against women as well as girls both in private and public life should be eliminated.
- Women should be given equal access with men to access to basic health resources and women should be given sufficient counselling for maintaining physical health. Child marriages, forced marriages, female foeticide, female infanticide, etc. should be eliminated.
- Mahatma Gandhi correctly said, "If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate an entire family." Motivation should be given to girls to take up higher education and for girls below 14 years, universal education should be strictly implemented. Education develops skills, imparts knowledge, changes attitudes improves self-confidence. Hence educated women can work for the upliftment of women.
- The socio-economic status of women is important, as it will help in the improvement of their shelter, income, and nutritional status. Women should be given opportunities to work. This will allow them to contribute and benefit from the

growth process, as a result, their contributions will be valued and their dignity will be respected. Women should be given equal rights to economic resources, and property rights over land and other properties. Economic independence will help free women from the position of slavery and lift the self-confidence. Through economic independence women can also help in the national economic development.

- NGOs should organize gender equality and women empowerment programs against growing violence against women and should also help women to know their rights and know the safeguards provided by the law.
- The participation of women in Indian politics should be increased by the political system of India.
- The Indian Government as well as the women themselves should have a clear vision to remove the hindrances to the path of women's emancipation. Every woman in the society should be given their due. The men in the Country should also have a strong determination to respect every woman in the Country. The Indian Government should work for the promotion of gender inequality and the empowerment of girls and women at all levels.

VII. CONCLUSION

Without the participation of women, a society or a country cannot achieve development. Indian women have always been underestimated, valued less, and suppressed not only in society but also in their families. In India, various factors are responsible for promoting gender inequality such as social causes, cultural causes, economic causes, legal and political causes. As a result, there are various crimes against women in the Country, which is pushing our Country backward. The favor of males socially, culturally, economically, legally, and politically should be changed. Man and woman are equal and one cannot live without the other. To reduce the gender gap, the Government, NGOs, society as well as the women themselves should come together. Swami Vivekananda has rightly said, "That Country and the Nation which doesn't respect women will never become great now nor will ever in future". If gender disparity is eliminated, women will bring out all the skills, potential, and knowledge to uplift the family, the country and the whole world. Let us all contribute our bits to make Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" successful, for the better future of women and our Nation.

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AUTHOR PROFILE



Dr. Nijra Brahma did her B.A. and M.A. in History from North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. She did her PhD from Bodoland University, Kokrajhar. She is presently working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Bodofa U. N. Brahma College, Dotma, an affiliated college under Bodoland University, Kokrajhar. She has attended and presented many papers at National and International Seminars/Conferences. She has also published many research papers in UGC-approved and peer-reviewed or refereed journals. Her specialization includes Traditional Tools and Technology of the Bodos, Gender Studies, and Ancient History.

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