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Avinash Kumar



Avinash Kumar has completed his Ph.D. in International Investment Law from the Dept. of Law & Governance, Central University of South Bihar. His research work is on "International Investment Agreement and State's right to regulate Foreign Investment." He qualified UGC-NET and has been selected for the prestigious ICSSR Doctoral Fellowship. He is an alumnus of the Faculty of Law, University of Delhi. Formerly he has been elected as Students Union President of Law Centre-1, University of Delhi. Moreover, he completed his LL.M. from the University of Delhi (2014-16), dissertation on "Cross-border Merger & Acquisition"; LL.B. from the University of Delhi (2011-14), and B.A. (Hons.) from Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi. He has also obtained P.G. Diploma in IPR from the Indian Society of

International Law, New Delhi. He has qualified UGC – NET examination and has been awarded ICSSR – Doctoral Fellowship. He has published six-plus articles and presented 9 plus papers in national and international seminars/conferences. He participated in several workshops on research methodology and teaching and learning.

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WORLD'S PROLIFERATION, INTEGRATION OF TERRENE & LIBERATION OF WOMEN

AUTHORED BY - SHIPRA SHARMA
LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY PHAGWARA, INDIA

Abstract

This paper tries to scrutinise India's progress towards gender equality in a comparative framework with countries like Sweden, China, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. In this paper we used various indices, like the Global Gender Gap Index, UNDP Gender Inequality Index, World Bank Labour Force Data, national surveys and parliamentary representation to study and analyse gender gaps. In the present world, India is considered to be a developing nation at a fast pace and tries to make improvements in every dimension of development, but still many dimensions, like girls' education, problems like low women's participation in the workforce, gender-based violence and poor political representation, are still a challenge for development. So the paper clearly finds that India has made uneven progress. Using various reports and national statistical data, this paper will explore what is working for our country and what doesn't and will give practical scenarios to bridge all the gaps in gender equality.

Introduction

Gender equality can be defined as the scenario in which every person has the same rights or opportunities of access despite their gender. When a person thinks about gender inequality, it only gives the impression that women are not treated equally, but in actuality, it is not always women who are not affected; all genders are impacted, no matter if they are men or trans and gender-diverse people. Gender equality is not just a moral or legal issue; it is an essential parameter for our economic growth and society. Equality in gender does not imply that women and men will have exactly completely similar resources, but in actuality it is that every gender's work, right and responsibility will not depend on the gender of their birth, i.e., women are born for cooking and men for earning is not how gender equality works. The world is being interconnected with each other, and every gender on this world is essential for the smooth running of this interconnected society, and their freedom and equality do not depend only on national laws but also on various global ideas of fairness and inclusion. Gender equality isn't just about fairness and equality among genders, but it is a foundation stone for a booming

society, as when everybody in country is given chance no matter of what gender they are our economy will come as a stronger as everybody will perform their best and there would be a healthy community and a happy and safe place for every person residing in country. Equality no doubt seems a smaller word to speak but in actual it is such a word if understood properly it can break all myths and stereotypes of a person and helps each person live in world happily and helps to focus on value of a person's study, knowledge, and skills, not their gender. When we try to bring gender equality we are welcoming a bright future for our future generations.

Research Questions

1. How is India performing in Gender Equality compared to India?
2. What are the Main Problem that Indian Women will face in reaching her goals due to inequality?
3. What steps can be taken to improve india?

Research Objective

Main aim of this research paper is to study and examine India's progress towards gender equality in comparison with other countries. Specifically study aims to:-

1. Measure India's performance in education, employment and health dimensions using reliable statistics
2. Compare India's gender equality stautus with high performing countries like Sweden, China, Bangladesh and Pakistan
3. Suggest practical policies like childcare support, safer public spaces and stronger political inclusion to increase women's participation.

Historical Context Of Gender Equality In India

The historical background of gender equality can be discussed in different time zones, starting from Ancient India to present-day developing India.

Ancient India: A happy era for all

In ancient India people were clear about ethical gender norms no body was treated bad just because of being a particular gender. Women in ancient India were treated as equal to men in every dimension of their role; they were considered the most prestigious part of an economy and were mainly part of every debate, discussion, etc. They had access to education and were engaged in every religious ceremony and ritual. Women were considered the most significant

role players in society because of their abundance of knowledge, wisdom, skills and their contributions to society. However, this was not for the long term; the rights enjoyed by women were limited till the invasions of Aryans. After the invasion, the rights of equality somehow vanished and typical mindset of gender bias came into role.

Mediaeval India: A major contributor to gender Inequality

The mediaeval period was the period of shift in gender dynamics, as this is the time period when women's status started deteriorating. The society which used to think of women as goddesses started making stricter norms and confined their roles as per society's rigid and orthodox thinkers. The New Society started believing that women should be confined to a domestic role or the 4 walls of a house. This was the time when evil practices against women, like child marriage, sati pratha and purdah (veiling), etc., started becoming a normal part of every person's life, and hence, this is how the mediaeval period became a destination where women's freedom and rights were curtailed

How Colonisation Impacted Gender Equality

The colonisation was the time which can be distinguished as an era of mixture as some treat as recovery phase and some treat it as a challenging phase of gender Equality. No doubt the Colonisation took away many rights from Indians, but somewhere they were the reformers too. Britishers along with them brought many policies, laws and regulations with them. The education sector was not even left behind by them; they brought numerous education policies into the education system, which gradually had an impact on women's status. The people of colonial India were also opposing Britishers, as they were the ones who promoted women's education, stopped sati pratha and child marriage and encouraged widow remarriage, as they believed Britishers were trying to snatch away their traditions and customs from them. So from the above line, you can believe that, from ancient to colonial India, women's condition deteriorated as burning women, separating women from education and not letting them participate in rituals was now considered as the customs or norms of society. Due to British policies some women gained education and even jobs, but the number of such women was really limited, so a major difference was not counted empirically. One committee named the Status of Women came forward with its report in 1974, which brought up a remarkable change and influence in the re-emergence of gender equality activism.

So from above we can say that historically gender equality travelled a really long, hard and

complex journey. In the complete period they have seen many ups and downs, i.e., sometimes gender equality is in a progress phase and sometimes in a regression phase.

The Birth Of Feminism and Movements Start of Feminist Movement

It is well said luck is not always at the of dictator or dominant person for too long, so the arrogant and bad behaviour towards women was tried to be brought to an end, which gave birth to early feminist movement in the late 19th century and early 20th century. This was the time period when women start opposing these so-called norms and rituals brought up by the patriarchal world. These movements openly address social evils like early marriage or child marriage, promote widow marriage and encourage education especially for girls and women. The major names behind the change of ideology were reformers are Savitribai Phule and Pandita Ramabai who played a remarkable role in encouraging right for women.

How feminist wave spread in Post Independence era

Independent India also sowed a seedling in women's minds that we too need to get freedom from the orthodox thinking of the dominant male world. The moment India got independence, the new wave of feminism was spread. In this, not only women from upper households were involved, but Dalit and Adivasi women played a remarkable role in women's activism. This era made gender violence a national issue.

Modern Feminist Movements

Women in the present modern world are at a better phase than in the mediaeval one, but still women had to compete a lot to reach their desired goals. Now modern feminist movements focus on workplace equality, equal pay for all, matrimonial benefits, etc. The main motive is combating gender-based violence. The feminist world is now not limited to banners or roadblocks; now it has spread to social media, which has become the strongest tool in spreading awareness at even the grassroots level.

Literature Review

The researchers had already given a remarkable work on gender equality but these three researchers have done a remarkable work of literature on gender equality which is relevant for futher research work as its in comparative form.

Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's work on Gender, Capabilities, and Human Development

Amartya Sen's in 1999 tried the capability approach for her work and Martha Nussbaum's in 2000 researched on human development they together argued that equality can not only be defined as the criteria of providing opportunity but to make people realize that real equality is actually a real freedom to make meaningful choice in life. The both researchers revolve their study what actual equality is for women, they argued that education or just having legal rights cannot be termed as equality for women actual equality exists when they are coexisted with social and economic conditions which allow women to exercise all practically not only on theory basis. The both researchers have shown that girls education is being expanded randomly but still their access to jobs or financial independence is limited (Kabeer, 2005; Deshpande, 2020).¹

Feminist Economics and Women's Work

Many feminist economists like ¹Folbre have argued that till now in present-day developing India, women's work is still underrated and remains unpaid and invisible, especially when we talk about care work and household labour

Choudhry in 2019² argued that in India, many time-based surveys had confirmed that women spend more time of their complete day in household work when it is compared to any male time schedule, which is the biggest drawback for women to perform their best in formal employment.

Mehrotra and Parida are scholars that tried to highlight that in India female labour force participation is unusually low compared to other countries despite having similar education levels (Mehrotra & Parida, 2017).

In Nordic countries, policies like universal childcare and parental leave are crucial, which enable women to participate in the economy, and when compared to India, there is nothing like such policies in India (Esping-Andersen, 2009).

Political Representation and Institutional Barriers

Researchers like Chattopadhyay & Duflo³, in 2004, suggested that mere women's presence in politics strongly influences all policies. Many researchers have argued that countries having a

¹ (Folbre, 2006).

² (Choudhury, 2019).

³ (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004).

higher number of female legislators have demonstrated better progress in all fields, like health, education and welfare.

In India the constitutional amendment of 1993 reserves one-third ⁴of village council seats for women, which tries to increase more participation of women in politics and tries to bring both gender to work in politics even at the grassroots level. ⁵However, still the participation of women in parliament is relatively low as there is still lack in quota system

How do we measure Gender Equality?

For measuring gender equality we mainly use 2 indices

1. Global Gender Gap Report (WEF)- It focuses on gender gaps in 4 areas: Economic Participation, education, health, and political representation.
2. Gender Inequality Index(UNDP)-

It focuses on reproductive health, women's participation in politics and workforce involvement. We also analyse the data from India's National Family Health Survey which give an approx data of women's health, safety and tells about experiences of women faced domestic violence.

Empirical overview of India's current position

As per Global Gender Gap (WEF)⁶ report of 2024: India ranked 129th position out of 146 countries and had tried to cover 64.1% of its gender gap in 2024 in 2024 year there was a small backsliding compared to previous years was noted.

As per Global Gender Gap (WEF)⁷ report of 2025: This report indicated India to further slip into the low-ranking band (around ~130–131), though talking about score changes are slightly improved.

- As per UNDP Gender Inequality Index⁸ the statistical report showed India's position on index it in the middle-to-lower tier as compared to high-income countries this showed India position is underscored in dimension of maternal health, adolescent birth rates and political representation which are the most important contributors in securing healthy and social world.
- These index reports have clearly demonstrated that India's performance is really poor and relatively slow when compared to nordic countries and Western European

⁴ (Beaman et al., 2009).

⁵ (Krook & O'Brien, 2010).

⁶ World Economic Forum Global gender Report.

⁷ Human development Report Global gender gap.

⁸ Business standard WEF Gender Gap Index.

economies⁹

- Female labour-force participation in India is relatively low when analysed through international standards. Agencies like the World Bank/ILO have given estimated reports clearly stating female labour force participation rates are substantially lower than male rates, and when compared to countries like the Nordic and European, they are even below average. This continuous low participation of women in the labour force is a direct contributor to India's economic gender gap.
- Political empowerment and representation in India: as per 2025 data, women's presence in the central legislature has increased by 27.2%, but there is not a drastic change in the number of Rajya Sabha, and recently it even decreased after the 2024 Lok Sabha election despite there being more female candidates. So low participation of women in central legislature is contributing to low political empowerment. [1]
- In health, safety and violence against women NFHS-5 (2019–21) and peer analyses had given a report and analysed that there are continued cases of domestic violence against women by their intimate partners. The report also focused on how unevenly women have access to enjoy their maternal and reproductive health, being limited to the formal sector only. These health and safety dimensions are contributing to India's poor standards of health and survival and empowerment manner.

Present Scenario of India

Talking about education in the present scenario, India has improved a lot. Many girls are getting into schools. According to recent data, many more girls are enrolled in primary and secondary school compared to older years.

- In present-day India, participation of women in the workforce is only about 25%; when it is compared to Sweden, it is relatively low, as it is around 75% in Sweden.
- This low participation report clearly analyses that very few women have financial independence in present-day India.
- Talking about political representation The Indian parliament has less than 15% representation of women, which, when compared to a country like Sweden, is 50%.

Talking about the health and safety standards of modern India, the maternal health of women is a factor which has tried to improve significantly, but violence against women still remains an untackled problem.

⁹ European Institute For Gender Equality.

- It is such a scary fact that, as per the NFHS-5 survey, about one in three Indian women has reported that at some stage of life they had experienced domestic violence.

India: Comparison of India and Other Countries Globally

When India is compared to Sweden, which is a high-performing country

- When compared to India, the Nordic country Sweden has almost covered the gap between male and female in the dimensions of the workforce labour, education, and politics. It scored nearly less than 80 on the EU Gender Equality Index.
- Sweden offers facilities like universal childcare, paid parental leave, and strong laws to prevent harassment against women, whereas when compared to India, the laws are limited to theory only, and other facilities are far behind in even the thought of the informal sector of work. So India seriously lags behind all support systems due to its implementation problem.

Compared to China (Neighbouring Economy)

When India is compared with its neighbour China, both being large economies still differ in scores and their policies. If data of China is compared to India in terms of education, China does much better in education but also struggles with political empowerment of women.

- Both countries, India and China, face cultural barriers, but both countries showed their different ways of operation to tackle barriers.

Compared to Bangladesh and Pakistan (regional peers)

These countries share heterogeneous performance when compared to India. South Asian countries have shown diverse results when compared using various indices. Bangladesh tried its best to show progress in dimensions like girls' education but really lags behind in political representation.

- Pakistan has not shown a good performance in any dimension, so it lags behind in the empowerment of women and gender equality and is behind India in most measures.
- India's progress in gender equality and empowerment of women is really uneven, i.e., some states show such an outstanding performance, like Kerala, whereas some states, like Uttar Pradesh, are even working below average. The national average hides these large differences, making nationwide progress slower.

Reason of Slow Progress In Gender Equality In India.

1. Social Progress And Traditional Norms

¹⁰When we talk about traditional norms prevailing in India. These ideas expect women to look after family over work ethics, which gradually limits the chance of women doing jobs, as it is believed it's ok to stay at home and do household work despite being graduated from Oxford or Harvard. Many families till now believe in these orthodox thoughts which discourage women from working outside, travelling alone or making financial decisions. The biggest scam under this is expecting women to leave their jobs after marriage.

2. Lack Of Job Opportunities for Women

¹¹Women had to work in the informal sector. Only 25% [2] of Indian women are in paid work, which is usually low-paying and does not stand on work ethics, i.e., unwanted working hours and harassment at work, so people prefer less to send their daughters and wives to such workspaces, leaving women to be dependent on a male-dominant society.

3. Safety Issues at the Workplace

There is poor public transport, which causes safety issues for women on roads, and street harassment is common on roads in India, and weak ¹²enforcement of safety laws in practice prevents women from freely participating in society.

4. Low Participation Of Women In Politics

Few women are involved in the legislative process, i.e., the making of laws and policies that are required ¹³for the betterment of the public, but in actuality, they all are made under the dominance of men, so they are male-orientated only, so they genuinely ignore women's needs.

5. A lot of gaps in implementation

There is a lot of gap in implementation and in the making of law. Work is not completed on the making of law; it is actually completed when it is practically enforced, but sadly our ministers are confined to only making laws. Executing the laws does not seem to them as their piece of bread.¹⁴

¹⁰ Women perform the majority of unpaid care work, as shown in India's Time-Use Survey (Choudhury, 2019).

¹¹ Female labour force participation in India is about 25% (World Bank, 2024).

¹² Barriers include unsafe transport, lack of childcare, and workplace discrimination (Mehrotra & Parida, 2017).

¹³ Women hold only 15% of parliamentary seats (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2025).

¹⁴ Patriarchal norms continue to shape women's roles in family and work (Kabeer, 2005; Jeffery & Jeffery, 2011).

Steps to be done by the Indian government

- 1. Provide childcare at an affordable rate:** The biggest hurdle behind women's progress is family pressure and care. When women get proper childcare in health care, they will be free to work outside without worrying about responsibilities on their heads.
- 2. Create Incentives for Hiring Women:** By introducing schemes like offering tax breaks to all companies that hire women at a high pace.
- 3. Improve Safety Standards for Women:** by providing better public transport and proper street lighting for the safety of women. Provide easy cab facilities for women, preferably to be driven by women drivers, and easy police facilities available at a call.
- 4. Increase Women's Political Participation:** Increase reservation of women's seats in parliament in local and national elections. These seats shall always be occupied by female candidates to ensure better policies for females.
- 5. Collect Better Data:** for better implementation we require actual data to be collected of unpaid work and local gender gaps to design better policies.

Conclusion

India has tried its best to show tremendous gains in girls' education and health and proved that change can be brought and is possible, but only when the government and society are together in doing their work [1]. No doubt there is progress, but still real equality is somewhere lagging behind in India in matters of jobs, politics and safety. As discussed above, statistically, women's participation in work is still really less when compared to other countries.

Some states like Kerala are performing really well, while some are even running below average, so in conclusion, we can state that actual gender equality is not just a concern of women; it is a concern for all of India's growth and progress. As when one woman learns, many generations get educated.

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