

A STUDY ON GENDER EQUALITY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN SOCIETY

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*Gender Equality and Contemporary Indian Society, Development, Empowerment,
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When we turn the pages of history, we find the roots of discrimination based on Gender. Indian Society is a patriarchal society where Women were always treated inferior to men, they were subordinated to men. Since childhood women have been conditioned to owe their allegiance to men be it her father, brother or husband. It is very unfortunate to know that women themselves have taught girls in their transformative years to confirm to the norms of the Indian Patriarchal Society. Gender Equality has been a utopia for Indian Society.

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ABSTRACT

The present study entitled, "A Study On Gender Equality in Contemporary Indian Society aims to study the sustainable development goal no. 5 i.e Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Indian society has been tagged as a patriarchal society as the members of the society are responsible to perpetuate this patriarchal character and most importantly women. Women themselves expect the fellow women and adolescent girls since childhood to confirm to the norms of patriarchy but owing their allegiance to men.

We intend to study in this paper the position of women in contemporary society and compare opportunities of men and women at various social aspects .It includes the participation of women in various fields and comparing men and women.

So, this paper attempts to analyse the gender inequality in present Indian society through secondary data which entails, magazines, newspaper, interview of related personalities and various other research articles as a part of method used in the study.

And through various case studies, we have found that, even today there are cases of sati, child marriage, women infanticide being practice, especially by people belonging to rural areas. On the other hand in urban environment women are working along with men and even better than men. They are engaging into businesses, politics, sports, space technologies and what not. There is a gradual increase in literacy rate and less gap between men and women literacy rate when compared to the previous one.

So the future women looks much more empowering, much more confident, much better educated and the dream of gender equality is on the way to be realised soon in Indian society.

Review of Literature

In urban, rural, and tribal regions of southern India, Prathyusha Kadiyala, Smitha Malenahalli Chandrashekarappa, and Narayana

Murthy (2020)¹ . Goals: To determine how teenagers in the Mysuru district's urban, rural, and tribal areas feel about gender equality. To ascertain the relationship between adolescents' perceptions of gender bias, interpersonal influences from family and peers, and sociodemographic factors. Identified factors that influence adolescents' attitudes toward gender equality. Gender stereotypes and preconceived notions about men and women influence attitudes toward gender standards and daily interactions between individuals. Adolescents who will be shaping tomorrow's society will be crucial in upholding gender equality standards and educating the next generation about them.

Therefore, the purpose of the study was to determine the adolescent's attitude toward gender equality norms and investigate the factors that influence it.

T. Rama Devi, M.D. (2017)² Equality of Gender: Empowerment of Women Gender equality is a fundamental human right that guarantees everyone the ability to live in dignity and with liberty. Reducing poverty and promoting all-around development are also contingent upon gender equality. Strong, independent women play a critical role in raising the standard of education, health, and family productivity. and communities, which enhances the chances for the following generation. The empowerment of women and gender equality are also top priorities for the Millennium Development Goals. The notion that women's empowerment and gender equality are essential preconditions for attaining development outcomes has gained widespread acceptance. Keeping in mind the state of women's empowerment. Position of Women – Historical Context

1Sutha R (2021) Attitude towards gender equality among higher secondary school students in relation to home environment and emotional adjustment. Annamalai University

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When we look back to Ancient history of India, we do not find much inequality based on gender here, but the practice of discrimination against women have been developed in the later stages and after the onset of Medieval Period in India.

Women in pre-historic times –

Women enjoyed equal position and honor during the Indus Valley Civilization. They were revered as mothers, as evidenced by the adoration of the mother goddess. During the Rig Vedic era, women enjoyed greater equality and independence along with a higher status. Wives enjoyed special privileges in the home and were given preference when it came to carrying out religious rituals. Boys and girls have equal access to educational possibilities. Girls were allowed to live their entire lives in Gurukul after observing Upanayana Samskar. Girls' education was regarded as a crucial prerequisite for marriage. . But, the later years saw a decline in the role and status of women in public life. Early marriage started hindering education and women slowly started diminishing from away from political and educational spheres. The Maurya and later, the Gupta period saw the practice of Sati increasing, and women's lives were dictated by the men in their life. The upper-class women were much more confined to their homes and were not allowed to be out in public life.

Women in the Medieval period-

This period saw many social evils like female infanticide, sati, child marriages, the Purdah system, and widow's condition was miserable. The inflexibility of the caste system deprived of them the right to freedom and social movement. She was forced to lead a life away from society as well as family. The inhuman practice of Sati had become forced and predominant.

Women in Modern India

Then the modern period witnessed the Women's struggle to gain their position and stature back slowly. Many movements and organisations were led by both men and women for the

upliftment of women in society. The early Indian society was plagued by various social evils against women such as Sati, polygamy, poor conditions of widows, child marriage, female infanticide, etc.

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) was one of the earliest social reformers to focus and work on issues of women. He condemned sati pratha, and polygamy, and spoke in favour of property rights for women.

- Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar is well known for his efforts for widow remarriage. He and Rani Roshmoni's efforts helped in the passing of the Widows' Remarriage Act in 1856, which was conscripted by Dalhousie and passed by Canning.

- Keshab Chandra Sen of Brahmo Samaj worked for the upliftment of widows, held educational programs, and started a women's journal. Similar work was done by the Prarthana Samaj in Gujarat and Maharashtra.

- Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule worked immeasurably to educate girls and established girls' schools for the same.

- M.G Ranade, Narayan Ganesh Chandavarkar, and R.G Bhandarkar in Pune started organizations for ending child marriage, to encourage widow remarriage and women's education.

Even after these reforms women's position cannot be considered equal to men, and gender equality has not come into picture properly yet.

Gender Equality – A Sustainable Development Goal

To fetch sustainable development in the mainstream, the United Nations (UN) launched the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs. This universal, integrated and transformative agenda intends to offshoot actions that will end poverty and build a more sustainable world over the succeeding 15 years. There are 17 goals and 169 targets specific targets to be achieved by 2030. Attaining the goals requires action on all fronts – governments, businesses, civil society and people everywhere all have a role to play. Sustainable Development Goal 5 is to Achieve gender equality and empower all women

and girls.

India has witnessed an improvement of 4 points ('fast progress') on the SDG Gender Index overall between 2015 and 2020, placing it among the top 15 fastest-moving countries in the Index. But its score remains 'poor' at 65 points.

India has seen several progressive legislative shifts in recent years, such as the repealing of Section 377 to decriminalize consensual same-sex relationships and the extension of maternity leave to 26 weeks. Yet gaps persist in policy implementation, women's labour force participation remains low and rates of violence against women are high.

Now we will be discussing the role and status of women in Contemporary Indian Society in diverse spheres .

Position of Women in Present Society

-Education of Women- As per recent report from NSO (National Statistics Office) the Male Literacy Rate is 84.7% and the Female Literacy Rate is 70.3%. Though there is a substantial increase in female literacy rate but the male literacy rate is higher than the female literacy rate among all states with a considerable gap in the worst-performing states. And after Covid-19 for the school dropouts, the majority of them are girls. Hence, there is a need for real emancipation of the people. Education systems transversely in the world should provide the training required for children and working adults so that they can learn to read and write. National educational plans should contain schooling for children and the 2/3 literacy training for adults as parallel elements.

•Women in Health- The UNFPA State of World Population 2020 estimated the sex ratio at birth in India as 910, which is on the lower side of index. At the adolescent age -70% of the girls are anaemic and their problems associated to their menstrual health and hygiene often go unaddressed.

It is unfortunate to note that there are 3 times more chances of deaths of girls in teenage pregnancies. Reproductive and sexual health needs of women are often ignored. About 113

women in India every year lose their lives as a result of libels due to teen pregnancies. Moreover, under-reporting of such deaths are also there. Then 70% of women of India are suffering from reproductive tract infections which may lead to infertility, abortions and similar kind of problems that are perceived as normal. This condition of women is detrimental to Indian Society, as it is very important for a women to be healthy. Women who worked amid the pandemic as frontline workers, many of them didn't have access to simple necessities at such times like PPE kits which makes them more vulnerable to infections. Even the women suffering from covid-19 who are admitted to the hospital, their mean number of days of admission are much less as compared to their male counterparts. Though there are many governmental initiatives for the betterment of women's health but their implementation needs to be regulated in a better way. A healthy society cannot be shaped if the health needs of women are neglected as they are the bedrock of a healthy society. Safeguarding good health of women is not just a personal but national priority. India and its economy need a healthy women workforce because increasing women's labour force participation by 10 percentage points could add about 700 billion dollars to India's GDP by 2025.

Women in Politics- Notwithstanding a large increase in the number of women participating in elections, data on women's representation in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha indicate that the proportion of women representatives has remained low in comparison to their male counterparts. The percentage of Women elected to Lok Sabha stood at 14.94% and in Rajya Sabha at 14.05%.

- Women in Business- This has a better picture, India has 432 million working-age women and 13.5 –15.7 million women-owned businesses that provide direct employment to 22–27 million people. In addition, a number of businesses are being regulated by women. Indian women are independent and have a strong enthusiasm to

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-Women in Science- According to the Department of Science and Technology (DST), women made up 28% of participants in 2018-19 in extramural Research and Development (R&D) projects, up from 13% in 2000-01. The proportion of women primary investigators in R&D increased more than fourfold, from 232 in 2000-01 to 941 in 2016-17. The proportion of female researchers increased from 13.9% in 2015 to 18.7% in 2018

-Therefore, with diverse instances we have taken into account the discrimination based on gender that prevails in Indian Society even today. The position, status or role of women have been undermined in Indian Society since ancient times but with the modernisation of India there have been plethora of reforms for the better condition of women to eradicate the evils like Sati, Purdah, Child Marriage and what not. And women have gradually stepped out of their homes to enter into the modern world through various fields. This gradual awakening of women is weakening the deep-rooted gender inequality that had prevailed in Indian Society. Yet, a large gap needs to be bridged to bring men and women equal..

Comparing Men and Women

So when we come to compare the areas with regard to gender equality, we get:-

Areas where Gender Equality Exists-

1. The Constitution of India grants equal position to men and women, such as the right to vote, to contest elections, and to citizenship.
2. Women and men are considered equal in law. They enjoy equal rights and privileges and all rules apply to them equally. In fact, some legal

provisions, such as the law against dowry, seek to improve the current position of women in society.

3. Some may also argue that in jobs, salaries, and other economic opportunities women enjoy equal position as men, but this can be contested as there is hidden discrimination against women employees while hiring, offering salaries, etc.

Areas where the Gender Inequality prevails-

1. Women enjoy inferior status than men in many cultures and families when it comes to deciding whom to marry, inheriting property, and getting equal pay for equal work among other things.
2. If we look at development indicators such as health, educational achievements, and wealth/income, it is clear that Indian women are worse than Indian men. This points towards systemic bias against women in the society.
3. Women face higher levels of violence, unfair treatment in society, and unequal access to resources when compared with men.

So, there are plethora of reasons affecting Cultural bias against girls and preference for sons majorly undermines position of women in private as well as public sphere. Like most modern societies, Indian society is patriarchal and this leads to unequal position of women although that is being challenged and changed.

Though women are modernising yet India remains a male dominated society in maximum spheres even in these contemporary times. But when we consider the future of Indian women – it looks positive in modern India Because when compared from ancient times women have better access to education, health, and opportunities than before even though not equal. The government role cannot be undermined as it has hastened the process of women's empowerment through various acts, schemes, and provisions, such as reservation in local panchayats, but it needs to continue aggressive efforts to give equal position to women. The cultural attitude towards women in India is changing with changing times, as women are getting educated, proving their mettle, and showing that they can be positioned equal to

men if they are given the same opportunities. The Biological Theory of Gender is now reiterated in modern times – that only biological differences makes men and women different from each other. The future looks bright for women in modern Indian society as government initiatives are helping them overcome prejudice and society attitudes are changing. Way Forward

The way forwards for the bright future of India in terms of gender equality can be discussed as :-

1. Better Opportunities in Education: Giving education to women means giving education to the whole family. Education plays an important role in building self-confidence among women. It also enables people to change she/her status in society. Education enables and builds confidence to make decisions in a better way.

Thus, The Education policy needs to be all-encompassing to guarantee girls right to education and their right to be free from discrimination within educational institutions. Also, education policy should target young men and boys to positively change their attitudes towards girls and woman.

2. Skilling and Micro Financing: It can get women financially stable and therefore she is no longer dependent upon others in the society. Training women in non-traditional skills with market demand, creating more public and private sector jobs for women is important for financial empowerment.

3. Actions at the Lowest Level of Governance: There is a need to devise, support and promote projects at the lowest level of governance, to bring more inclusivity in governance and recover the status of women in India. For instance: Swagatam Nandini (Katni, Madhya Pradesh): This initiative was launched with an objective of celebrating the birth of girls. With a small procession to celebrate the arrival of the daughter, parents of new-born baby girls are felicitated with baby kits under the Ladli Lakshmi Scheme. Nanhe Chinh (Panchkula, Haryana): Encouraged by Anganwadi Workers (AWWs), baby girls are brought to local AWCs by their families. Their footprints are outlined on

a chart paper and are put up on the wall of the AWC with the mother's and baby girls' names.

4. Incentives in Education: In order to restrict the higher dropout rate among girls, there is a necessity for providing relatively higher financial incentives for higher education. Reward should be given to villages/districts that are able to attain equal child sex ratio through education, information and communication campaigns.

5. Improvement in basic infrastructure can reduce domestic work burdens. For instance, domestic work for rural women often comprises laborious tasks such as fetching water and fuelwood. Piped drinking water and clean natural gas (already improving) will reduce this load.

Hence these are the way forwards to bring the gender quality and witness bright future of women. But there is one important factor that cannot be undermined while taking gender equality into consideration and that is Women's Safety. It is extremely important to ensure women's safety- this deep rooted gender equality prevails because women feels unsafe; they go through harassment in various ways by way of mocking, ridiculing, staring, sexually commenting etc. So, a multi-sectoral strategy by the government ensuring women's safety needs to be ensured. . Like Panic Button, Nirbhaya Police Squad are some good steps in the direction of women's safety or The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 to ensure safe working spaces for women and to build an enabling environment that respects women's right of equality of status and opportunity.

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