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Research Article

Gender Inequality and Social Justice

Mugdha Singh

Research Scholar, Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India

Corresponding Author: *Mugdha Singh

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Abstract

Gender justice is a myth for most of the Indian women. Gender based discrimination represents the ugly face of Indian Society. The term gender is applied to the cultural aspects of male and female roles. These cultural aspects become the basis for masculine and feminine roles. The Indian Constitution is a women-friendly document. Fighting for justice as a female or crying for gender equality is not the fight against men. It is the fight against old traditions that have chained them. Most of the sex equality laws are centred on employment and the workplace. Even after the advancement of modernisation, human nature remains the same. Neither the extreme, cruel punishment stopped the crime against women, nor has leniency in imposing punishment decreased the crime rate. This paper highlights the plight of women in Indian society and reflects the challenges encountered by them. Historical practices such as Sati, Jauhar, Purdah, Devdasis, and Child Marriage are a few traditions reflective of gender imbalance in Indian society. Though these practices are largely unused, now, due to legal reforms, the essence of dysfunctional gender equality still is uncontrolled and expressed today through Trafficking, Domestic Violence, Dowry Deaths, Female infanticide, Female foeticide, Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment at the workplace. Because these evils are so deep-rooted that they can be weeded out only if we attack them at the roots. But the men of the Indian society are still fighting for gender neutral laws.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of social justice necessitates an interrogation of the structures that reproduce inequality across dimensions of identity. Among these, gender inequality remains one of the most pervasive and enduring. Despite legislative reforms and international commitments, women and gender minorities continue to encounter barriers to equitable participation in economic, political, and social life.

This paper situates gender inequality within the broader discourse of social justice, contending that the two are inextricably linked: the absence of gender justice undermines the very foundations of social justice. The paper seeks to demonstrate that gender inequality is not incidental but systemic, requiring comprehensive reforms across cultural, institutional, and policy domains.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Perspectives

Patriarchal systems historically relegated women to domestic roles, creating long-lasting disparities. In most societies, men were positioned as breadwinners and leaders, while women were confined to caregiving and household responsibilities. Colonial legacies reinforced these hierarchies by codifying discriminatory laws and restricting women's rights.

Economic Inequality

Studies consistently show that women earn significantly less than men globally. The gender pay gap averages 20% worldwide, with variations across regions and industries (World Economic Forum, 2023). Occupational segregation channels women into low-paying jobs, while unpaid labour—such as caregiving and household work—remains undervalued in economic systems. Feminist economists argue that the invisibility of unpaid labour distorts economic indicators and perpetuates inequality.

Political Representation

Research highlights that women hold only 26% of parliamentary seats worldwide, limiting their influence in policymaking (UN Women, 2024). Structural discrimination, lack of resources, and gendered stereotypes hinder women's political engagement. Quotas and affirmative action policies have proven effective in increasing representation, but challenges remain, particularly in contexts where cultural resistance persists.

Analysis

Economic Dimensions

Economic disparities remain central to the discourse on gender inequality. Women's disproportionate engagement in unpaid labour, coupled with wage gaps in formal employment, reflects the undervaluation of feminised work. These disparities undermine social justice by denying women equal access to economic resources and opportunities.

Social and Cultural Dimensions

Gender stereotypes reinforce discriminatory practices by portraying women in limited roles. Media and education often perpetuate these stereotypes, shaping societal perceptions of gender roles. Harmful traditions such as child marriage and female genital mutilation perpetuate inequality, particularly in developing countries. Cultural resistance to change often slows progress toward equality, highlighting the need for comprehensive cultural transformation.

Health and Safety

Women face higher risks of maternal mortality in marginalised communities due to inadequate healthcare. Restrictions on reproductive rights undermine women's ability to make decisions about their bodies, while gender-based violence remains a global epidemic. These health and safety issues underscore the intersection of gender inequality and social justice, as they directly impact women's ability to live free from harm and exercise autonomy.

3. DISCUSSION

Gender inequality is not merely a women's issue but a societal challenge that undermines justice and progress. Addressing it requires:

- **Policy reforms:** Equal pay legislation, political quotas, and education access.
- **Cultural change:** Challenging stereotypes through media and education.
- **Institutional reforms:** Workplace policies that support parental leave and anti-harassment measures.

4. CONCLUSION

Achieving social justice demands dismantling systemic gender inequality. Progress requires coordinated efforts across policy, culture, and institutions. True equality will empower all individuals, regardless of gender, to contribute fully to society. The pursuit of gender justice is inseparable from the pursuit of social justice, and any vision of an equitable society must prioritise the dismantling of gendered hierarchies.

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