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Gender inequality in India from ancient to modern scenario

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Abstract

Gender inequality is a social stigma that primarily affects woman around the globe. Inequality in any form creates a very harsh and hostile environment and can affect Woman of any age. Although, gender inequality started rooting in the society in earlier time when human beings advanced their settlements in need of shelter and food. However, from giving a God like status to merely a status of working puppet in household this transition took various years by the adamant nature of men in the society who felt threatened by the upliftment of Woman. The society started to follow biased rules once created to bring order to the community now used as a fundamental excuse to nurture and cultivate the mis happenings and tragedy brought upon the Woman of society. Furthermore, from the implementing of practices like sati, purdah, and child marriage to their banishment from the minds of people it took a heavy toll on the lives of various Woman from Indus valley civilization to the modern period. Inequality of any kind attach itself within the community till its proper disposal which can only be done the government, men and Woman of our ages. Additionally, the task of removing these societal norms can only be done by implementing policies and laws which can protect the working Woman and as well as a woman working for the family.

While gender inequality in India has its origins in ancient patriarchal structures, it has developed through different historical periods, characterized by both advancements and ongoing challenges. Today, modern India continues to face issues such as unequal access to education, economic opportunities, and political representation, as well as violence against Woman.

Introduction

Equality, the situation in which everyone has equal rights and privileges. By classifying gender in everyday activity readily creates a sense of indifference. Gender inequality refers to power disparities

between men and Woman, the low value placed on Woman (especially underprivileged Woman), and unequal access to resources and opportunities [1]. It is a worldwide situation mainly attributed in poor countries and marginalized areas. Men earn more than Woman in essentially all societies. However, disparities in health, education, and bargaining power within marriage tend to be larger in countries with low GDP per capita [2]. The status of Woman throughout history, from ancient to modern times, has not been constant it has evolved in accordance with the changing times across social, political, and economic dimensions. The roots of gender inequality in India run deep, tracing back from ancient times to the present day. The Indus Valley civilization, which thrived from 2500 to 1700 BCE, is regarded as one of the most sophisticated civilizations of its era.

Additionally, with regards to gender equality, tons of artefacts of female figurines have been excavated that suggest that Woman were given a goddess like status, and that such goddesses played a central role. In Rigvedic period, although mythology and religious texts featured strong female figures, societal structures were mainly patriarchal, confining Woman to domestic roles and restricting their access to education, property, and political power. However, in the later Vedic period the status of Woman fell as the ideals of unity and equality fails to prevail and began to fade with time. Moreover, Woman couldn't participate in same activities as men but restricted to the family activities as a silent observer(Adeen, 2023). Also, the certain ancient texts such as the Vedas and Upanishads suggest that Woman had a more equal role in spiritual and intellectual spheres, though these instances were often exceptions rather than the norm [4].

Woman held an equal status to men in ancient India, During the early Vedic period, Woman were highly educated, and ancient texts reference Woman sages like Maitrayi. However, with the arrival of the renowned treatise Manusmriti authored by Manu, Woman's status was demoted to that of a subordinate in relation to men [5]. The era of the Middle Ages in India, characterized by the invasion of Islam and the later founding of the Mughal Empire, experienced a deterioration in Woman's liberties.

The custom of purdah (veiling) and the confinement of Woman to private spaces became common. Although, the idea of purdah was practiced to save the woman of the house from the vulgar gaze but this

custom along with the caste system introduced a period of exclusion of Woman to participate in temple activities as it was the place where elementary education takes place thus restricting them. Unfortunately it was considered that Woman's tasks should be limited to household and domestic activities Woman (Adeen, 2023). Throughout this period, social norms concerning Woman's chastity and modesty were rigorously upheld, which contributed to the establishment of a gender hierarchy [7]. The effects of British colonialism were twofold. Colonial legislation, such as the regulation against Sati (1829) and the Age of Consent Act (1891), sought to limit some of the most severe manifestations of gender inequality. Conversely, British policies frequently overlooked the fundamental cultural and social factors contributing to gender discrimination. The emerging nationalist movement largely excluded Woman, and their participation in public life remained limited [8].

Following, India's independence in 1947, some significant strides were taken to address gender inequality the Indian government acted to tackle gender inequality. Consequently, enacted in 1950, the Indian Constitution established the tenets of equality and non-discrimination, affording Woman rights to education, equal remuneration, and involvement in politics. Even though Woman have the same legal rights to property ownership and equal inheritance, they are disadvantaged in practice. The Hindu Succession Act of 2005 grants equal inheritance rights to ancestral and jointly owned property however, the law is weakly upheld. Woman were granted property rights by this act, while the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 aimed to address violence linked to dowries. Additionally, improved access to education, Woman's workforce participation began to grow, especially in urban regions [9]. Even with these legal progressions, Woman remain marginalized due to entrenched social and cultural norms, especially in rural India. Patriarchal attitudes have been further strengthened by the growth of political conservatism and religious fundamentalism. In many regions of the country, practices such as female infanticide, child marriage, and honor killings continue to exist [10].

Moreover, due to the economic liberalization of the 1990s, Woman have found new work opportunities, especially in sectors such as education and information technology. Nevertheless, considerable hurdles continue to be posed by gender pay disparities, workplace discrimination, and insufficient representation in leadership roles [11]. Woman are prohibited from serving in combat roles within military services. Since

female officers in India have not undergone command training or been assigned command responsibilities, they cannot be granted permanent commissions. Men and Woman have unequal access to banking services, with significant disparities between the two groups. Due to low property ownership levels, Woman often lack collateral for bank loans. Additionally, micro-credit schemes have faced criticism for coercive lending practices. Gender-based disparities regarding who holds power and authority over organizational management are common inequalities observed in the workplace. Fig.1

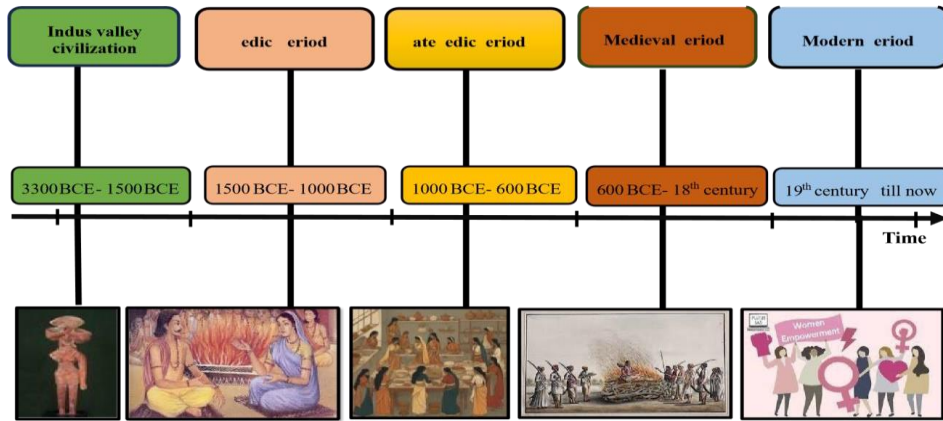


Figure.1 Timeline of Woman status in India from Indus valley civilization till now

Woman cannot ascend to higher-paid positions as quickly as men can. Some organizations experience greater inequality than others, and the degree of its occurrence can vary significantly. Men typically occupy higher positions in the workplace, while Woman often hold lower-paid roles, such as that of a secretary. In India, Woman possess less authority than men in terms of legal recognition and protection, access to public knowledge and information, and decision-making power both in domestic and external contexts. This is also among the factors contributing to gender inequality. In 2022 India holds 108th position in gender inequality index among 193 countries.

Gender inequality index (GII) a composite measure of gender inequality that utilizes three dimensions i.e. reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market [12].

India			
1992 GII value	0.698		
GII change from 1991	+0.003		
Maternal Mortality Ratio	482.3 death/100,000 live births		
Adolescent Birth Rate	128.9 births/1,000 women age 15-19		
	Female	Male	Gender gap
Share of seats in parliament	7.3%	92.7%	-85.3%
Population with at least some secondary education (age 25 and older)	13.4%	29.5%	-16.0%
Labour force participation rate (age 15 and older)	31.9%	79.9%	-48.0%

Figure.2 Gender Inequality index in 2022 highlighting gender gap [12]

In certain cultures, gender equality would entail something as fundamental as ensuring that both male and female have the same access to formal education. Furthermore, there is inequality regarding the gender in educational opportunities across various groups in India. [13] fig.3

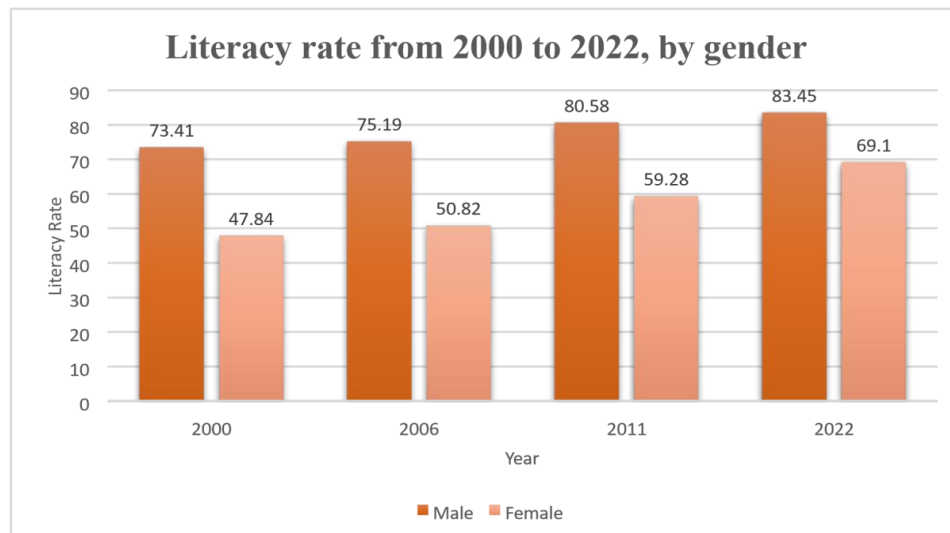


Figure.3 literacy rate from 2000 to 2022 in India, by gender [14]

Throughout the years, initiatives from both governmental and non-governmental organizations have aimed at tackling gender inequality. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992), which established a 33% reservation for Woman in local governance, represented a major advancement in political empowerment [15]. India has made notable progress in tackling gender inequalities since independence, particularly regarding political participation, education, and legal rights. The Indian government has sought to implement policies and legal reforms to tackle gender inequalities. As an example, the Indian Constitution has a

provision that guarantees the rights to equality and freedom from sexual discrimination. India is a signatory to the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Woman as well. Gender equality is guaranteed as a fundamental right in the preamble of the Constitution of India. Through various legislations and policy reforms, the government has implemented numerous measures of positive discrimination aimed at benefiting Woman [16]. Additionally, India has ratified several international conventions and human rights forums to ensure Woman's equal rights, including the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Woman in 1993 [17]. Woman are securing positions in local governance structures, surmounting gender biases. The 1993 amendment to the Indian Constitution mandated that 1/3 of the elected seats in local governing bodies be reserved for Woman, resulting in the election of over one million Woman to local panchayats[18].The enactment of the Pre-natal Diagnostic Tech Act in 1994 also represented a move toward eliminating gender discrimination. This Act aims to eliminate sexdetermination tests and female foeticide, forbidding doctors from performing such procedures if the intent is to ascertain the sex of the foetus [19]. In 2001, the Government announced the National Policy for Empowerment of Woman aimed at promoting Woman's advancement, development, and empowerment. Additionally, the Government has prepared a draft National Policy aimed at empowering Woman. This document serves as a policy statement detailing the state's response to issues of gender discrimination. With enduring gender inequalities, it is necessary to reconsider the concepts and strategies aimed at advancing Woman's dignity and rights.

Fig.4

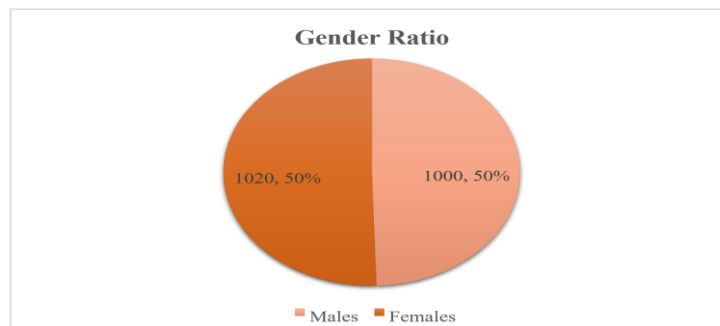


Figure.4 Gender Ratio as per NFHS 2021 data (NFHS, 2021)

For every 1000 males there are 1020 females

Indicators of Woman's empowerment show significant progress at the national level and across all phase-II States/UTs. At the all-India level,

there has been a notable increase in the percentage of Woman managing bank accounts, rising from 53% to 79% between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5. In the second phase, over 70% of Woman across all states and UTs have operational bank accounts (NFHS, 2021). Violence against Woman is recognized as a means through which men try to retain power and control over Woman. Gender differences manifest in educational and professional job attainment, asset ownership, the feminization of poverty, among others. These disparities heighten the risk of violence against Woman. The global estimate indicates that thirty percent of Woman undergo physical violence at some point in their lives, highlighting the magnitude of this issue.

Furthermore, men who hold traditional, inflexible, and misogynistic beliefs about gender norms, attitudes, and behaviors are at a greater risk of perpetrating violence against Woman. The personal and group behaviors of men regarding various established gender norms [22]. A large number of the practices that are currently being tackled in low- and middle-income countries, child marriage Woman's economic empowerment, violence are deeply rooted in gender. Some traditions promote quite different conceptualizations and interpretations of norms and their functioning. Fig.5



Figure.5 Gender inequality factors: Lack of Education, Dowry, Bias society, Social Norms, Violence, Child marriage

Conclusion

In India, the path from gender inequality to gender equality has involved incremental reforms, major challenges, and an ongoing necessity for cultural change. Even though legal systems have progressed to safeguard Woman's rights, social customs and cultural practices still maintain

gender inequality. The contemporary situation reveals a paradox: even with progress in education, healthcare, and jobs, gender inequality remains, especially in rural and marginalized communities. India must adopt a comprehensive strategy that merges legal reform with sociocultural change in order to attain genuine gender equality. Continued advocacy, education, and social mobilization will be crucial in breaking down the entrenched systems of discrimination and ensuring that Woman can fully participate in all aspects of society.

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