

1. Gender Equality and Gender Parity

Context:

The lack of Gender equality and Gender Parity in India which has also been reflected in the recent reports has highlighted back the everlasting issue again into the limelight.

Gender Equality:

Gender equality is achieved when women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic participation and decision-making, and when the different behaviors, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favored.

Gender Parity:

Gender parity is a statistical measure that provides a numerical value of female-to-male or girl-to-boy ratio for indicators such as income or education.

For example, if there is equal number of girls and boys who completed primary education in a specific country, the gender parity ratio for that indicator is one. The greater the difference between girls and boys, the lower is the gender parity value.

Gender parity is a useful tool for assessing gender inequality in specific areas, in setting goals, and in assessing change and progress under specific indicators of gender equality. However, gender parity is not the same as gender equality.

“World Employment and Social Outlook Trends for Women” Report,2018:

1. According to the ‘World Employment and Social Outlook Trends for Women’ 2018 report, more women than ever before are both educated and participating in the labour market today.
2. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2018, it will take 108 years to close the gender gap and 202 years to achieve parity in the workforce.
3. Economists at the University of Chicago, using census data from 1970 to 2000, found that marriages in which the woman earned more were less likely in the first place and more likely to end in divorce.
4. India ranks at a dismal 108 out of the 149 countries included in the 2018 Global Gender Gap report, released at the World Economic Forum. Even within the South Asian region,

which is the second lowest scoring region, with a remaining gender gap of 34.2 per cent, India ranks fourth, well behind Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Causes of Gender Inequality in India:

1. Cultural Institutions:

Cultural institutions in India, particularly those of patrilineality (inheritance through male descendants) and patrilocality (married couples living with or near the husband's parents), play a crucial role in perpetuating gender inequality.

2. Preference for Sons:

A culturally ingrained parental preference for sons - emanating from their importance as caregivers for parents in old age - is linked to poorer consequences for daughters.

3. Dowry System:

The dowry system, involving a cash or in-kind payment from the bride's family to the grooms at the time of marriage, is another institution that disempowers women.

The incidence of dowry has been steadily rising over time across all region and socioeconomic classes.

4. Patriarchal Mindset:

Patriarchy is a social system of privilege in which men are the primary authority figures, occupying roles of political leadership, moral authority, control of prosperity and authority over women and children.

5. Poverty and lack of Education:

Extreme poverty and lack of education are also some of the reasons for women's low status in society.

Poverty and lack of education derives countless women to work in low paying domestic service, organized prostitution or as migrant laborers.

Constitutional Safeguards against Gender Inequality:

► Indian Constitution provides for positive efforts to eliminate gender inequality. For example:

1. **The Preamble** to the Constitution talks about goals of achieving social, economic and political justice to everyone and to provide equality of status and of opportunity to all its citizens.
2. **Voting Rights:** Women have equal right to vote in our political system.
3. **Article 15** of the Constitution provides for prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex also apart from other grounds such as religion, race, caste or place of birth.
4. **Article 15(3)** authorizes the State to make any special provision for women and children.

5. **DPSP:** The Directive Principles of State Policy also provides various provisions which are for the benefit of women and provides safeguards against discrimination.

Legal Safeguards against Gender Inequality:

Various protective Legislations have also been passed by the Parliament to eliminate exploitation of women and to give them equal status in society. For instance:

1. **The Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987** was enacted to abolish and make punishable the inhuman custom of Sati;
2. **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961** to eliminate the practice of dowry;
3. **The Special Marriage Act, 1954** to give rightful status to married couples who marry inter-caste or inter-religion;
4. **Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994** to stop female infanticide and many more such Acts.
5. **IPC Provisions :** The Parliament from time to time brings out amendments to existing laws in order to give protection to women according to the changing needs of the society, for instance, **Section 304-B** was added to the Indian Penal Code, 1860 to make dowry-death or bride-burning a specific offence punishable with maximum punishment of life imprisonment.

Religion -Elephant in The Room:

When it comes to the issue of gender inequality, the elephant in the room is religion, which has been an integral part of human existence for a long time.

All the key functions of organized religion, such as conducting religious ceremonies and heading the religious hierarchy, are reserved for men. No organized religion treats women equal to men. The unequal treatment of women by religion has exerted a very strong influence on every society's gender norms.

The "Status of Women in the Societies of World Religions" report, have established that countries where the majority of inhabitants have no religious affiliation display the lowest levels of gender inequality, and countries with the highest levels of gender inequality are those with high levels of religious affiliation. We cannot achieve gender parity if religion, one of the strongest forces in most societies, continues to turn its back on women.

The agenda of creating a planet 50-50 cannot come true if religion, religious leaders, and faith actors remain outside the conversation.

Suggestions to Eliminate Gender Inequality:

- ▶▶ The list of legislations as well as types of discriminations or inequalities may go on but the real change will only come when the mentality of men will change; when the male species

of human beings would start treating women as equal and not subordinate or weaker to them.

- ▶▶ In fact, not only men but women also need to change their mindset as through cultural conditioning they have also become part of the same exploitative system of patriarchy and are playing a supportive role in furthering men's agenda of dominating women.
- ▶▶ In the movement for Women's empowerment where women can become economically independent and self-reliant, it is required that they fight their own fears and go out in the world fearless.
- ▶▶ The Women Reservation Bill need to be passed in the parliament to give representation to women in political system.

Conclusion:

Men and women are the two halves of a perfect whole. Strength is borne of their union their separation results in weakness. Each has what the other does not have. Each completes the other, and is completed by other.

'Just as a bird cannot fly with one wing only, a Nation cannot march forward if the women are left behind', as rightly said by Swami Vivekananda. 'Just as a bird cannot fly with one wing only, a Nation cannot march forward if the women are left behind', as rightly said by Swami Vivekananda.

Etymologically, the word 'woman' means - half of man. The relation of the male and female is very well illustrated in our Nyaya Darshan by the analogy of mind and matter, which means that man and woman are closely associated with each other, as the soul and body. Therefore, the women ought to be respected.

GATEWAY