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Contemporary Debates in Gender Equality: Issues, Perspectives, and Emerging Challenges

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Abstract

Gender equality is one of the most significant social, economic, and human rights issues in today's global society. Over the past few decades, remarkable progress has been made regarding women's rights, education, employment, political participation, and legal protection. Many countries have developed constitutional provisions, laws, policies, and institutional frameworks to reduce gender discrimination. Despite this, gender inequality remains evident across various levels of society. Problems such as differences in educational and employment opportunities, inequality in pay for equal work, unequal distribution of domestic and care work, limited participation of women in decision-making processes, discrimination and violence at the workplace still remain serious challenges. Therefore, merely providing for equality in laws is not enough to ensure real gender equality. In the present research article, contemporary discussions related to gender equality have been critically studied from social, economic, educational and technological perspectives. At the societal level, the influence of family, marriage, social norms, gender roles and stereotypes has been analysed. Economically, the focus is on women's workforce participation, wage disparity, employment opportunities, representation in leadership roles, and unpaid domestic and caregiving work. In the educational context, the study addresses challenges related to access to education for girls and women, participation in higher education, choices regarding subjects and careers, and opportunities for digital education. At the same time, emerging issues such as digital divide, access to internet and digital resources, online harassment and potential gender bias in artificial intelligence and digital platforms have also been considered in the context of technological change. This study is based on secondary sources, including research papers, scholarly literature, reports from international organizations, government policy documents, and available academic material related to gender equality. The study makes it clear that gender equality is not a static or merely a legal concept, but it is a continuously evolving process with social change, economic development, technological advancement and changing human consciousness. The key finding of the study is that gender equality should be seen not just as a question of women's empowerment, but as a broader process of building a just, inclusive and humane society. For this, along with effective implementation of laws and policies, it is necessary to ensure education, social awareness, equality of economic opportunities, equitable distribution of responsibilities in family and workplace and equal access to digital resources.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Gender Justice, Women's Empowerment, Intersectionality, Gender Pay Gap, Digital Gender Divide, Gender-Based Violence, SDG 5, Inclusive Development

Introduction

Gender equality refers to a social and human system in which individuals of all gender groups have equal rights, equal opportunities, equal respect, and the freedom to develop according to their potential in every sphere of life. Gender equality is not limited to equality between women and men, but rather addresses all social, economic, political, educational, and cultural conditions that affect a person's opportunities and life experiences based on their sex or gender identity. Traditionally, society has largely viewed gender through a binary division of male and female, assigning specific social roles to each. These roles have long confined women primarily to domestic, family, and reproductive responsibilities, while men have enjoyed greater rights and opportunities in economic resources, political power, education, decision-making, and public life.

Historically such gender roles have been deeply rooted in patriarchal social structures. Family, education, religion, culture, traditions and social institutions have many times been directly or indirectly reinforcing these roles. As a result, women faced many obstacles in areas such as education, property, employment, political participation and independent decision making. However, with time there was a change in social consciousness and social reform movements, women's movements and feminist discussions raised questions on these inequalities. These movements played an important role in establishing that confining women only to the role of family is not in line with their fundamental rights and human dignity.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), set by the United Nations and known as Agenda 2030, offer a comprehensive global roadmap for building a prosperous, just, and sustainable future for the entire world. Of these goals, SDG-5, which aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", is particularly important. This goal recognizes that real and inclusive development is not possible without women and girls having equal rights, opportunities, respect and freedom to make decisions in every sphere of life.

In the South Asian context, the issue of gender equality appears even more complex. The region, despite being rich in diverse cultures, languages, religions and social traditions, has long been affected by social structures that have placed various limitations on women's independence, decision-making power and participation in public life. Problems such as unequal opportunities in education and employment, child marriage, gender-based violence, unequal distribution of domestic work, discrimination in health and nutrition, limited access to property and economic resources and relatively low representation in political and administrative decision-making still remain challenges for many communities.

South Asia cannot be viewed as a monolithic region solely in terms of gender inequality. The status of women varies across different countries, regions, communities, and social classes. The experiences of urban and rural women may differ, and economic status, education, social background, and geographical conditions also influence gender opportunities. Therefore, the perspective of intersectionality is extremely useful for studying gender equality in South Asia. This means that gender, as well as class, poverty, region, education, social status and other circumstances, also affect a person's access to opportunities and rights.

At present, despite legal reforms and policy efforts, gender inequality persists in direct and indirect forms. Key examples are the gap in pay for equal work, low participation of women in the labour force, inadequate representation in leadership and decision-making positions, gender violence, unequal burden of domestic and caregiving work, and unequal access to digital resources. While technological advances have provided new opportunities for education, employment and communication, it has also brought new challenges such as the digital gender divide, online harassment and unequal access to digital resources.

The objective of this study is to critically analyse the contemporary issues, perspectives and emerging challenges related to gender equality. The study specifically seeks to understand how social and structural inequalities persist despite progress made at the legal and policy level. Mere legal recognition of rights is not enough to make real progress on gender equality. It is necessary that women get opportunities for full and effective participation in social, economic and political life. For this, concrete and effective steps will have to be taken in areas like quality education, safe and respectable employment, access to economic resources, political representation, participation in decision-making and protection from gender violence. Besides, it is also necessary to bring about change in the stereotypical gender beliefs prevalent in the family and society.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the major contemporary debates surrounding gender equality.
- To analyse the social, economic, political and technological dimensions of gender inequality.
- To examine emerging challenges affecting gender equality in the contemporary era.
- To analyse gender equality through intersectional and feminist perspectives.
- To examine the role of law, policy, institutions and technology in promoting gender equality.

- To suggest strategies for achieving more inclusive and substantive gender equality.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a conceptual and descriptive research design to examine contemporary debates, perspectives and emerging challenges related to gender equality. It focuses on understanding existing social, economic, political, technological and institutional dimensions of gender inequality.

Sources of Data

The study is based on both foundational and secondary sources. Foundational sources include international conventions and declarations, constitutional and legal provisions, and relevant policy documents. Secondary sources include books, peer-reviewed research articles, government reports, and reports published by UN agencies and other international organizations working on gender and development.

Contemporary Debates in Gender Equality

Gender Equality vs. Gender Equity: Gender equality means providing women and men with equal rights, opportunities, and respect, while gender equity aims to provide additional support as needed, taking into account historical, social, and structural inequalities, to ensure substantive equality. Equality of opportunity includes equal opportunities for education, employment, and political participation, but simply providing equal opportunities is not enough if social, economic, or family barriers make them difficult to access. Therefore, it is also essential to focus on equality of outcome. In this context, affirmative action, such as reservations, scholarships, and special employment opportunities, are important tools for increasing the participation of disadvantaged groups. However, this also raises a debate between merit and representation where one side emphasizes merit-based selection, the other side believes that true equal opportunity is not possible without addressing historical inequalities

Gender Wage Gap and Economic Inequality: Economic independence is a key pillar of gender equality, but differences between women and men persist in pay, employment, property, promotion, and economic decision-making opportunities. The gender pay gap is not merely the result of unequal pay for equal work; it is also influenced by factors such as the employment sector, working hours, experience, career interruptions, and social roles. Occupational segregation often results in women being concentrated in relatively low-paid sectors such as education, care, and service, while

their representation in technical and higher managerial positions is lower. Similarly, women bear the bulk of unpaid care work, such as domestic work, childcare, and elderly care, which can impact their employment and career opportunities. Women's labour force participation is influenced by factors such as marriage, motherhood, domestic responsibilities, social norms, and workplace barriers. Additionally, the Glass Ceiling refers to the invisible barriers preventing women from reaching higher positions, while the Glass Cliff refers to the situation in which women often assume leadership responsibilities in crisis or difficult situations. Therefore, for gender economic equality, it is necessary to ensure equal opportunities in employment, leadership and economic decisions along with equal pay.

Political Representation and Leadership: Women's participation in political power and decision-making is an important foundation of democratic equality. Women's political participation is not limited to voting or contesting elections, but also includes playing an active role in political parties, local governance, administration, Parliament, legislatures and policy-making. With increased participation of women, issues like education, health, nutrition, social security and gender violence can gain greater importance in policy-making. Although women's political representation has increased in many countries, their participation in high political and decision-making positions remains relatively low. Gender Quotas and reservations are considered effective means of increasing women's representation, although they are also associated with challenges such as symbolic representation and actual decision-making power. Therefore, the aim of women's leadership should not be merely to increase numbers, but to give women power, voice and real decision-making power.

Gender-Based Violence: Gender-based violence is a serious challenge to gender equality and social justice, affecting women and girls' safety, dignity, education, employment, and participation in public life. This includes various forms of violence such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, workplace violence, online harassment and human trafficking. Domestic violence can take physical, mental, emotional, economic and sexual forms, while sexual harassment in the workplace and public places affects women's equal opportunities. With the expansion of digital technology, new challenges have emerged such as cyber harassment, online threats, trolling and cyber stalking, which can limit women's digital and public participation. Furthermore, factors like poverty, illiteracy, and social insecurity heighten the risk of human trafficking and exploitation. Therefore, effective laws, safe institutional environment, awareness, support mechanisms for victims and changes in social attitudes are essential to prevent gender-based violence.

Reproductive Rights and Bodily Autonomy:

Reproductive rights and bodily autonomy are important dimensions of gender equality, relating to women's freedom to make their own decisions regarding their bodies, health, marriage, pregnancy, motherhood, and family planning. This necessitates equal access to quality health and reproductive services for all women, particularly those from rural areas and economically disadvantaged sections of society. Safe and accessible healthcare facilities during pregnancy and childbirth are vital for maternal health and social justice. Reproductive Justice is not limited to the availability of health services, but also includes the social and economic conditions necessary to live a safe and dignified life. Furthermore, issues concerning reproductive rights require a balance between individual liberty, law, ethics, culture, and social norms.

Gender Equality and Education: Education serves as a crucial foundation for gender equality, women's empowerment, and social change, as it strengthens women's access to employment and healthcare, as well as their political participation and decision-making capabilities. Although the gender gap in primary education has narrowed in many areas, women's participation remains relatively low in higher education, vocational training, and fields such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). Social stereotypes, family expectations, economic hardships, child marriage, domestic responsibilities, and safety concerns impact girls' education and contribute to school dropout rates. Furthermore, while the expansion of digital education has created new opportunities, a "digital gender divide" has also emerged due to unequal access to the internet, digital devices, and digital literacy. Therefore, gender-sensitive curricula, inclusive teaching methodologies, and adequate representation of women in scientific, leadership, and social roles are essential to achieving genuine gender equality through education.

Gender Equality and Technology: Technological advances have opened up new opportunities for women in education, employment, entrepreneurship, digital finance, and social participation, but they have also led to new gender inequalities. The digital gender divide can limit women's access to the internet, digital devices, and digital services, especially in rural and economically disadvantaged communities. Mere availability of digital resources is insufficient; digital literacy, cybersecurity, and independent usage are also essential. Furthermore, artificial intelligence and algorithmic bias can lead to unequal gender outcomes in recruitment, lending, advertising, and other decision-making systems. On the other hand, AI can be helpful in enhancing education, health, financial inclusion and employment opportunities, hence the need for Gender-Responsive

AI has become important. At the same time, online harassment, cyberstalking, and digital violence can impact women's safety and their participation in public discourse. Therefore, it is essential to make technological development inclusive, safe and gender sensitive.

Emerging Challenges to Gender Equality**Artificial Intelligence and Algorithmic Gender Bias:**

The use of AI is increasing in recruitment, education, banking, and decision-making, but biased datasets and algorithms can lead to discriminatory outcomes against women. Underrepresentation of women in technical fields is also a significant challenge. Therefore, there is a need for gender-responsive AI and transparent technological systems.

Digital Gender Inequality: Unequal access to the internet, smartphones, digital services, and digital skills between women and men creates a digital gender divide. Online harassment, cyberstalking, and digital violence also impact women's digital participation. Therefore, digital literacy and cybersecurity are essential.

Climate Change and Gender: Climate change, drought, floods, and resource scarcity can impact women's livelihoods and household responsibilities. Rural women, in particular, may be more vulnerable. Furthermore, women can become important agents of climate resilience in water conservation, agriculture, and environmental management.

Migration and Gender: Women migrant workers may face problems such as insecure employment, low wages, exploitation, and lack of social protection. Therefore, it is essential to ensure women's access to safe migration, labour rights, and social protection.

Gender and Global Economic Inequality: Poverty, informal employment, and limited access to resources impact women's economic independence. Financial inclusion, property rights, employment opportunities, and access to productive resources are crucial for women's economic empowerment.

Gender, Conflict, and Humanitarian Crises: Women in situations of war and conflict may be more vulnerable to violence, displacement, exploitation, and health problems. Protection and social assistance for refugee women is essential. Women's participation in peacebuilding and peacebuilding must be promoted.

Backlashes Against Gender Equality: Social and institutional resistance to women's empowerment, online misogyny, traditional gender stereotypes, and obstacles to the implementation of gender-sensitive policies impact progress towards gender equality. Therefore, along with law, social awareness and institutional sensitivity are also necessary.

Intersectionality: New Perspectives on Gender Equality

Intersectionality is a significant modern approach to understanding gender inequality. Its main idea is that a person's experience is not determined solely by their gender, but that many factors such as caste, class, age, disability, social status, rural-urban background, education and economic status interact to influence inequality. So not all women have the same experiences. For example, an educated urban woman and a poor rural woman may experience gender discrimination in different circumstances. This approach is particularly important in the Indian and South Asian context, where caste, class, poverty, social structure and regional inequalities influence gender relations.

Gender and Class: Gender inequality and economic class are deeply interconnected. Economically advantaged women may have relatively better access to education, health, employment, technology and legal aid, while poor and low-income women may face problems such as job insecurity, low wages, economic dependence and limited social security. Poor women's greater employment in the informal and unorganized sector can also make them vulnerable to exploitation. Therefore, gender equality policies need to take into account not only gender, but also economic class and poverty.

Gender and Caste: The relationship between caste and gender is of particular importance in the Indian context. The experiences of women from various caste groups can differ based on social status, economic opportunities, and access to resources. Women from marginalized caste communities may face issues such as social exclusion, economic inequality, and a lack of opportunities, alongside gender discrimination. Disparities in education, employment, property ownership, and political representation further complicate this situation. Therefore, caste-sensitive gender policies are essential for social justice.

Gender and Race/Ethnicity: Along with gender, racial and ethnic identity can also affect social opportunities and discrimination. Women from minority ethnic or racial communities may face gender discrimination as well as cultural stereotypes, social exclusion and discrimination in employment. The situation of migrant and minority women in a global context illustrates this issue. Therefore, gender equality requires taking into account cultural diversity and social identities.

Gender and Disability: Women with disabilities may face physical, social, and institutional barriers alongside gender-based discrimination. Their access to education, employment, healthcare services, public transport, and digital resources may be limited. Furthermore, societal prejudices against women with disabilities and concerns

regarding their safety impact their independence. Therefore, it is essential to incorporate accessible education, inclusive employment, and safe healthcare services into gender policies.

Gender and Age: Age also influences the experience of gender inequality. Girls may face challenges related to education, nutrition, child marriage and protection, while young women may face societal expectations related to employment, marriage and career. Older women may face problems such as economic dependence, health problems, loneliness and lack of social security. Therefore, a life-course approach is necessary in gender policies.

Rural-Urban Gender Divide: There can be significant differences between the experiences of rural and urban women. Urban women may have relatively greater access to education, health, employment, and digital technology, while rural women may face challenges such as limited access to transportation, health services, digital resources, education, and employment. Despite rural women playing an important role in agriculture and domestic work, their labour often does not receive adequate economic recognition. Therefore, it is necessary to increase education, skill development, financial inclusion and employment opportunities for rural women at the local level.

Multiple and Overlapping Discrimination: The most important aspect of intersectionality is that individuals can experience multiple types of inequality at the same time. For example, a poor rural woman who belongs to a socially disadvantaged community and lives with a disability may face multiple barriers based on gender, class, social status, region, and disability. In such situations, policy based on only one dimension is not sufficient. Therefore, it is necessary to make social policies multidimensional and inclusive.

Gender Equality in the Indian Context

The question of gender equality in India is not limited to equal opportunities between women and men, but is a broader issue encompassing constitutional rights, social justice, education, economic empowerment, political representation, health, digital inclusion, and sustainable development. The Indian Constitution guarantees equality and non-discrimination, while the protection and empowerment of women have been promoted through various laws, policies and institutional arrangements. Yet challenges such as social stereotypes, economic inequality, violence, unpaid care work and unequal access to resources remain.

Constitutional Provisions: The Constitution of India provides the fundamental legal basis for gender equality.

Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, caste, sex, etc., and permits the making of special provisions for women and children. Article 16 ensures equality of opportunity in public employment. Additionally, Article 39 directs the State to secure the right to an adequate means of livelihood for both men and women and to ensure equal pay for equal work. Article 42 directs the State to make provisions for humane working conditions and maternity relief. Article 51A(e) establishes the duty of every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Legal and Institutional Framework: Various laws and institutional arrangements have been developed in India to protect the rights and protection of women. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013, laws against child marriage and legal provisions against dowry and other forms of exploitation are important means of protecting women. Along with this, the National Commission for Women (NCW) and various State Women's Commissions work on women-related grievances, awareness and policy issues. The judiciary, police, administration and other institutions also play an important role in protecting the rights of women.

Political Representation of Women: In a democratic system, women's political participation is a crucial indicator of gender equality. Reservation for women in local self-government institutions in India has brought a large number of women into the political process in panchayats and municipal bodies. Women's political representation should not be limited to increasing numbers, but they should also have real power in policy-making, leadership and decision-making. Particularly important for increasing the political representation of women in India is the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, which constitutionally provides for the reservation of one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies and the Delhi Legislative Assembly, the implementation of which is linked to the respective census and delimitation processes.

Women and Economic Participation: Women's economic participation is an important foundation for gender equality and self-reliance. Access to employment, entrepreneurship, financial services, assets and productive resources strengthens women's decision-making capacity. Women in India contribute significantly to agriculture, domestic work, self-employment, micro-enterprises, service sector and various informal employments. Yet unpaid care work, employment insecurity, wage gaps, skills shortages and workplace barriers impact their economic participation.

Gender-Based Violence: Gender-based violence poses a serious challenge to gender equality in India. Domestic violence, dowry-related violence, sexual harassment, child marriage, human trafficking and online harassment affect the safety and dignity of women. Despite legal provisions, problems such as social stigma, economic dependence, lack of legal knowledge, hesitation in reporting and complexity of judicial processes remain. Therefore, laws alone are insufficient to prevent such violence. Education, gender sensitivity, reforms in the police and judicial system, victim support services and changes in social attitudes are also necessary.

Women in STEM and Higher Education: While women's participation in higher education in India has increased, the gender gap in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)—as well as in certain research and technical fields—remains a cause for concern. Social stereotypes, family expectations, lack of role models, workplace culture, and career disruptions can affect women's STEM participation. Scholarships, mentorships, research opportunities, safe and inclusive institutional environments, and leadership opportunities are essential to increasing women's STEM participation.

Rural Women and Self-Help Groups: Rural women contribute significantly to agriculture, animal husbandry, household production, handicrafts, and the family economy. Yet their labour does not always receive adequate economic recognition. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have played a vital role in the economic and social empowerment of rural women. These groups connect women to savings, credit, financial literacy, skill development, and collective entrepreneurship. Through SHGs, women can develop self-confidence, collective decision-making, financial independence and leadership capabilities at the local level. Therefore, SHGs are an important socio-economic vehicle for rural gender equality.

Gender Equality and NEP 2020: The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes an inclusive and equitable education system. The policy emphasizes the need to increase access to education for socially and economically disadvantaged groups and reduce gender disparities. The importance of NEP 2020 from the perspective of gender equality is not limited to girls' education only. It offers the potential for comprehensive empowerment of women and girls through inclusive education, skill development, digital education, vocational education and equal opportunities.

Gender Equality and Sustainable Development Goals: The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. In the Indian context, SDG 5 relates to areas such as education,

health, employment, political participation, violence prevention and economic empowerment. Gender equality is not limited to SDG 5 alone; It also relates to poverty eradication (SDG 1), quality education (SDG 4), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reduction of inequalities (SDG 10) and climate action (SDG 13).

The Role of Institutions and Policies in Gender Equality

Laws alone are insufficient to promote gender equality; it requires the coordinated efforts of various institutions such as the government, international bodies, educational institutions, civil society, the corporate sector, the media, and the family. These institutions can strengthen gender justice through policy formulation, raising awareness, ensuring equal opportunities, enhancing safety, and fostering a shift in social attitudes.

Government Initiatives: The government implements laws, policies, schemes, and social protection programs to promote gender equality. Schemes related to women's education, health, economic empowerment, political participation, security and skill development are important in enhancing their opportunities. Schemes promoting women entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, maternity assistance, girl child education and self-help groups strengthen the social and economic status of women.

International Organizations: International organizations such as the United Nations, UN Women, UNESCO, ILO, WHO, and the World Bank develop global policy direction and standards for gender equality. Gender equality and women's empowerment have been made a key part of the global development agenda through SDG 5. These organizations provide research, data, financial assistance, technical support, and policy guidance, and help evaluate countries' progress.

Educational Institutions: Schools, colleges, and universities play a crucial role in fostering a mindset of gender equality. Institutions reduce gender inequality by providing gender-sensitive curriculum, equal opportunities, safe campuses, scholarships, and promoting women's participation in STEM and leadership.

Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Society: NGOs and civil society organizations play a vital role in awareness, women's rights, legal aid, health, education, skill development, and rehabilitation of women affected by violence. These organizations can reach out to communities at the grassroots level where access to government services is limited. Civil society also contributes to building public opinion against gender discrimination and monitoring government policies.

Corporate Sector: The corporate sector can promote equality in the workplace through equal pay, a safe environment, maternity and paternity support, women's participation in leadership, and the prevention of gender discrimination. Companies can contribute to economic empowerment by supporting diversity and inclusion, gender-responsive workplace policies, and women's entrepreneurship. Initiatives such as CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) can also foster education, skill development, and the economic advancement of rural women.

Media and Popular Culture: The media influences perceptions about the roles of women and men in society. Respectful and diverse representation of women in films, television, advertisements and social media can reduce gender stereotypes. Conversely, objectification of women, stereotypical representation and online misogyny can reinforce inequality. Therefore, the media should promote responsible, inclusive, and gender-sensitive representation.

Family and Community Institutions: The family is the primary institution for shaping gender roles and social values. Providing girls and boys with equal education, freedom, resources, and decision-making opportunities strengthens the foundation of gender equality. Equitable distribution of household work and care responsibilities is also essential. Discriminatory traditions and stereotypes can be challenged by promoting social awareness, women's groups and local leadership at the community level.

Strategies for Advancing Gender Equality

Gender-sensitive education: It is essential to promote equal opportunities, inclusive curricula, and girls' participation in STEM and leadership roles while minimizing gender stereotypes within the education system.

Economic Empowerment and Financial Inclusion: Providing women with equal access to employment, skill development, entrepreneurship, banking, credit, and financial resources will strengthen their economic independence.

Equal pay and dignified employment: Equal pay for equal work, safe workplaces, social security, and equal employment opportunities must be ensured for women.

Political Representation: Women's participation in parliaments, legislatures, local governments, and other decision-making bodies should be increased, along with giving them real leadership and decision-making power.

Strengthening legal protections: Effective implementation of laws regarding discrimination, violence, and harassment against women, along with

speedy justice and robust victim support mechanisms, is essential.

Prevention of gender-based violence: Emphasis should be placed on preventing violence through awareness, education, safe public and workplace environments, effective grievance redressal mechanisms, and a shift in societal attitudes.

Digital and Technological Inclusion: Providing women with equal access to the internet, digital devices, digital literacy, and secure online services is essential.

Gender-responsive budgeting: Gender-responsive budgeting should be effectively implemented in government schemes and budgets, taking into account the specific needs of women.

Recognition and equitable distribution of unpaid care work: A more equitable distribution of responsibilities between men and women regarding domestic and care work must be ensured, while also recognizing the economic and social value of such work.

Gender-Sensitive AI and Digital Governance: Diverse datasets, transparent algorithms, regular audits, and accountability are essential to mitigate gender bias in AI systems.

Intersectional and Inclusive Policies: Policies should take into account not only gender but also factors such as caste, class, poverty, age, disability, and rural-urban status.

Discussion and finding

The study makes clear that while constitutional rights and legal provisions are essential for gender equality, they do not in themselves ensure substantive equality. Social stereotypes, patriarchal thinking, economic dependency, unpaid care work and institutional discrimination can limit women's equal opportunities. There is also a tension between tradition and modernity, where some traditional beliefs limit women's freedom, while modern approaches emphasize equality and individual rights. That is why a balance between Equality and Equity is necessary. Technology expands opportunities for education, employment, and financial inclusion for women, but also creates new inequalities such as the digital divide, cyber violence, and algorithmic bias. Intersectionality helps understand how women's experiences vary due to caste, class, poverty, age, disability, and rural-urban status. Ultimately, gender equality should be considered an essential foundation for social justice as well as sustainable development.

The study concludes that despite legal and constitutional progress, structural gender inequalities still exist. There remains a gap between formal equality and women's

real-life experiences. Economic dependency, unpaid care work, employment inequality and limited leadership opportunities hinder women's empowerment. Gender-based violence remains a serious social challenge. On the other hand, digital technology and AI are providing new opportunities for women, but digital divide and algorithmic bias are also creating new inequalities. The study also shows that effective gender policies cannot be developed without understanding the intersections of gender with caste, class, age, disability and regional status. Therefore, a coordinated, inclusive, and multidimensional policy approach is essential.

Conclusion

In the contemporary context, the concept of gender equality has traditionally been limited to providing equal rights and opportunities to women and men, but has become linked to broader questions of economic independence, social justice, political representation, education, health, digital inclusion, bodily autonomy, safe workplaces, and a dignified life. The present study reveals that while significant progress has been made towards gender equality in many countries through constitutional provisions, laws and policy initiatives, a substantial gap still exists between formal equality and substantive equality. Social stereotypes, patriarchal values, economic dependency, unpaid care work, gender pay gap, under-representation in political and institutional leadership, and gender-based violence remain significant barriers to equality.

The study also shows that modern technology, on the one hand, provides new opportunities for gender equality, while on the other hand, it also creates new challenges. Digital education, online employment, digital banking and artificial intelligence can help empower women, but problems like Digital Gender Divide, Cyber Harassment and Algorithmic Gender Bias can exacerbate technological inequalities.

Similarly, an intersectional approach helps understand that not all women have the same experiences. Factors such as caste, class, poverty, age, disability, education and rural-urban status give different shapes to the experience of gender inequality. To advance gender equality, gender sensitivity in education, economic and political empowerment of women, equal pay, safe workplaces, effective legal protection, digital inclusion, gender-responsive budgeting and proper recognition of unpaid care work are essential.

Ultimately, gender equality is not merely a women's issue but a fundamental pillar of human rights, social justice, and sustainable development. The achievement of SDG 5 is closely linked to other Sustainable Development Goals—poverty eradication, quality

education, decent work, reduction of inequalities and sustainable development. Therefore, for real gender equality, it is not enough to provide equal opportunities but it is necessary to create such social, economic and institutional conditions.

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