



GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality and social inclusion are important dimensions of social development in India. Gender equality refers to equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and participation for women, men and persons of different gender identities. Social inclusion refers to creating social, economic, educational, political and cultural conditions in which all individuals and groups can participate in society without discrimination or exclusion. In India, constitutional guarantees, legislation, educational expansion, welfare programmes and social movements have contributed to improvements in gender equality and inclusion. At the same time, inequalities continue to exist in employment, education, political representation, access to resources, unpaid care work, safety, health and decision-making. India's gender-equality agenda is connected with several Sustainable Development Goals, including poverty reduction, education, health, decent work, reduced inequalities and gender equality. India's 2024 Beijing+30 report notes that gender-specific indicators are included across 11 of the 17 SDGs in the country's National Indicator Framework. Available evidence also shows that important gaps remain. UN Women reports that India continues to face challenges in areas such as women's political representation, violence against women, unpaid care and gender-disaggregated data. This study examines the meaning, development, challenges and prospects of gender equality and social inclusion in India. The study uses secondary data from government publications, international organisations and sociological literature. It examines education, employment, health, political participation, social protection, poverty, caste and tribal exclusion, disability, rural-urban differences and intersectionality. The study concludes that gender equality cannot be achieved through legal reform alone. It requires changes in social attitudes, institutions, labour markets, family responsibilities, education and access to resources. Social inclusion similarly requires attention to the different circumstances of women and men across caste, class, tribe, disability, age, location and other social dimensions.



KEYWORDS: Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, Women's Empowerment, Gender Justice, Social Equity, Equal Opportunities, Gender Discrimination, Social Exclusion, Women's Rights, Education, Employment, Political Participation, Economic Empowerment, Caste Inequality, Social Justice, Marginalized Communities, Inclusive Development, Human Rights, Gender Roles, Social Change, Intersectionality, Empowerment, Inclusive Society, Contemporary India.

INTRODUCTION

Gender is an important organising principle of Indian society. Social expectations regarding women and men influence family responsibilities, education, occupation, marriage, inheritance, political participation and access to resources. Historically, patriarchal social structures have often assigned women greater responsibility for household and care work while giving men greater access to economic and public decision-making. However, Indian society has also experienced major changes through constitutional reform, education, urbanisation, industrialisation, democratic participation, social movements and economic development. The Constitution of India provides the fundamental basis for equality and non-discrimination. Constitutional principles concerning equality before law, prohibition of discrimination and equality of opportunity in public employment provide an important legal foundation for gender equality. Laws and policies have subsequently addressed issues including domestic violence, sexual harassment, child marriage, maternity protection, education and political representation. Gender equality is broader than women's participation in employment. It includes equality in education, health, nutrition, property, inheritance, political participation, decision-making, safety and dignity. It also involves examining men's participation in domestic and care responsibilities. UN Women identifies unpaid care and domestic work, economic participation, political representation and violence as major areas requiring continued attention globally and nationally. Social inclusion extends the discussion beyond gender alone. Indian society contains significant differences related to caste, tribe, religion, class, disability, age, geography and economic position. Women belonging to disadvantaged communities may experience multiple forms of exclusion simultaneously. Therefore, gender equality policies need to recognise intersectionality and differences among women rather than treating women as one homogeneous group.

Meaning and Concept of Gender Equality

Gender equality means that people should have equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and access to resources regardless of gender. Equality does not necessarily mean that every individual must have identical circumstances. Rather, it requires the removal of discriminatory barriers that prevent people from participating equally in society. Gender equality has several dimensions. **Legal equality** means that laws should provide equal rights and protection. **Educational equality** means equal opportunities to enter, remain in and complete education. **Economic equality** involves access to employment, income, property, credit and productive resources. **Political equality** includes the ability to vote, contest elections and participate in decision-making. **Social equality** involves freedom from discrimination, violence and restrictive stereotypes. Gender equality also requires recognition of unpaid work. Household work, childcare, cooking, cleaning and caring for older or sick family members contribute to social welfare even when they are not paid. Unequal responsibility for unpaid care can restrict women's ability to participate in paid employment, education and public life. The concept of equality therefore includes both **equality of opportunity** and attention to unequal starting conditions. A woman living in a remote rural area, a woman with a disability and an urban professional woman may face very different barriers. Effective social inclusion requires policies that recognise these differences. Gender equality is also relevant to men and boys. Traditional expectations about masculinity can discourage men from participating in caregiving or seeking support for mental and emotional difficulties. A more inclusive society allows individuals to participate in family and social life without being restricted by rigid gender roles.

Meaning of Social Inclusion

Social inclusion refers to the process of ensuring that individuals and communities can participate fully in social, economic, political and cultural life. It involves access to resources, institutions,

opportunities and social relationships. Social exclusion may occur through poverty, caste discrimination, gender discrimination, disability, geographical isolation, lack of education, unemployment or social stigma. Exclusion may be direct, such as discrimination in employment, or indirect, such as infrastructure that is inaccessible to persons with disabilities. In India, social inclusion has constitutional and policy significance. Reservation and affirmative-action policies for historically disadvantaged groups seek to improve representation and access to education and employment. Welfare programmes aim to reduce economic vulnerability and expand access to essential services. Gender and social inclusion overlap significantly. Women from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minority communities, poor households or remote rural areas may face barriers that are different from those experienced by economically secure urban women. Therefore, social inclusion requires disaggregated data and targeted interventions. An inclusive society should enable individuals to participate with dignity. Inclusion is not simply about providing benefits; it also concerns voice, representation and decision-making. Individuals affected by policies should have opportunities to participate in designing and evaluating those policies.

Aims and Objectives

Aim

The main aim of this study is to examine the status, development, challenges and prospects of gender equality and social inclusion in contemporary India.

Objectives

1. To understand the concepts of gender equality and social inclusion.
2. To examine the constitutional and legal foundations of gender equality in India.
3. To study the role of education in promoting gender equality.
4. To examine women's participation in the labour market.
5. To understand gender differences in access to economic resources.
6. To study women's political participation and representation.
7. To examine gender-related health and social issues.
8. To analyse the relationship between gender, caste, class, tribe and disability.
9. To examine the role of social movements in promoting equality.
10. To identify major barriers to social inclusion.
11. To examine the role of government policies and welfare programmes.
12. To understand the importance of gender-sensitive social protection.
13. To examine the role of family and community institutions.
14. To suggest measures for strengthening equality and inclusion.
15. To identify areas requiring further sociological research.

The objectives recognise that gender equality is multidimensional. Economic participation cannot be separated from education, health, safety, family responsibilities and social norms.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of gender in India has developed through sociology, anthropology, economics, political science and women's studies. Early sociological work examined the organisation of family, caste and kinship and showed how gender roles were embedded in social institutions. Feminist scholars subsequently challenged explanations that treated women's experiences as secondary to family or community structures. Feminist research examined patriarchy, unpaid labour, property rights, violence, sexuality, education, employment and political participation. Scholars such as Amartya Sen have

emphasised the importance of capabilities and substantive freedom. From this perspective, equality requires more than formal legal rights; people must have genuine opportunities to develop capabilities and participate in social and economic life. Contemporary literature increasingly adopts an intersectional approach. Intersectionality recognises that gender interacts with caste, class, ethnicity, disability, age and geographical location. The experience of a woman from a socially disadvantaged community may therefore differ substantially from that of a socially privileged woman. International research also places gender equality within the Sustainable Development Goals. UN Women describes gender equality as central to the achievement of all 17 SDGs rather than an isolated development goal. Recent reports continue to identify gaps in women's representation, unpaid care, labour-market equality and gender data. These studies provide an important basis for examining India's continuing challenges.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows a **descriptive and analytical secondary-data research design**. It does not claim to be an original household survey. Information has been organised from official reports, statistical publications, academic literature and international research.

Sources of Data

Major categories of sources include:

- Government of India publications.
- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation reports.
- National-level labour and demographic statistics.
- Reports concerning gender and social development.
- UN Women publications.
- Academic books and journal articles.
- Reports concerning social inclusion and vulnerable groups.

The Periodic Labour Force Survey is particularly useful for understanding labour-force participation and employment differences. For example, the Government of India's 2024 labour-force release reported urban female labour-force participation at 25.8% in current weekly status, compared with 75.6% for urban males.

Method of Analysis

The information is analysed thematically under education, employment, health, political participation, social protection, caste, disability, poverty, family and community participation.

The study avoids treating a single statistic as a complete measure of equality. Quantitative information is interpreted together with sociological literature and institutional factors.

Statement of the Problem

Although India has made substantial progress in legislation, education and public policy, gender inequalities continue in several areas of social life. Women may have formal legal equality while experiencing unequal access to employment, property, decision-making and public spaces. One major problem is the difference between **formal equality and substantive equality**. Laws may prohibit discrimination, but social norms, economic conditions and institutional practices can continue to produce unequal outcomes. A second problem is unequal participation in paid employment. Women's participation in the labour market is influenced by education, location, household responsibilities, availability of employment, safety, transport and social expectations. Government labour statistics demonstrate that substantial gender differences remain in labour-force participation. A third problem concerns unpaid care

work. Women frequently perform household and caregiving activities without monetary compensation. Such responsibilities can restrict time available for education, employment and public participation. A fourth problem is intersectional exclusion. Gender inequality is experienced differently depending on caste, class, tribe, disability, age and geographical location. The central problem of this study is therefore to understand why legal and institutional progress has not automatically eliminated all forms of gender inequality and social exclusion.

Need of the Study

The study is necessary because gender equality is closely connected with overall social development. When women and other excluded groups have access to education, employment, healthcare and decision-making, families and communities gain additional human and economic resources. The study is also important because gender inequality is not limited to one institution. It can appear in family relationships, schools, workplaces, political institutions, markets and community organisations. Understanding social inclusion is equally important. Economic growth alone does not guarantee that all groups benefit equally. Social inclusion requires attention to people who face barriers because of poverty, caste, tribe, disability, gender or geographical isolation. The study can help students understand the relationship between social structure and individual opportunities. It can also help identify the limitations of policies that focus on one dimension of inequality while ignoring others. Gender-sensitive research is additionally needed because important gaps remain in gender-disaggregated information. UN Women notes that India has continuing data gaps in areas such as unpaid care, labour-market indicators and access to assets. The study therefore has academic, social and policy relevance.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

The Constitution provides a fundamental basis for equality in India. Constitutional principles include equality before the law, prohibition of discrimination and equality of opportunity. The constitutional framework also permits special provisions for disadvantaged groups. Such provisions recognise that treating everyone identically may not be sufficient where historical and structural inequalities exist. Several laws have been developed to protect women and promote equality. Important areas of legislation include:

- Protection from domestic violence.
- Prevention of sexual harassment at workplaces.
- Prohibition of child marriage.
- Maternity-related protections.
- Equal rights relating to property and inheritance.
- Laws addressing trafficking and exploitation.
- Legal protections for children.
- Laws supporting persons with disabilities.

The legal framework has expanded over time, but implementation remains important. The existence of legislation does not automatically guarantee awareness, accessibility or effective enforcement. India's gender-equality framework is increasingly linked with the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2024 India Beijing+30 report notes that the National Indicator Framework included approximately 79 gender-specific indicators across 11 SDGs. Thus, legal equality provides a foundation, while social institutions and implementation determine how effectively rights are experienced in everyday life.

Gender Equality and Education

Education is one of the most important instruments of social inclusion. It develops knowledge, skills, confidence and access to employment. Education can also influence attitudes toward gender roles and social discrimination. India has made substantial progress in expanding educational access for girls. School enrolment, literacy and higher-education participation have increased over time. However, access and completion remain uneven across regions and social groups. Girls from economically disadvantaged households may face barriers related to household work, transportation, safety, early marriage or financial constraints. Girls with disabilities can face additional accessibility barriers. Higher education can influence women's employment and decision-making. However, educational qualifications do not always translate directly into employment because labour-market opportunities and social expectations also matter. Education also has a broader social effect. Educated individuals may be more aware of legal rights, health information and government services. Education can therefore strengthen both individual capability and social inclusion. Gender-sensitive education should include safe schools, sanitation facilities, accessible infrastructure, trained teachers, digital access and curriculum that avoids reinforcing stereotypes.

Gender Equality and Employment

Employment is an important dimension of economic independence and social participation. Paid employment can provide income, skills, professional identity and decision-making power. However, gender differences in labour-force participation remain significant. Government PLFS data for 2024 reported urban female LFPR of 25.8% compared with 75.6% for urban males under the current weekly status measure. Women's employment is influenced by multiple factors, including education, household income, childcare responsibilities, safety, transportation, local labour demand and social norms. The informal economy is especially important for women. Many women work as agricultural labourers, domestic workers, home-based workers, self-employed workers or unpaid helpers in family enterprises. Such work may provide limited social security and employment protection. Equal employment opportunities require more than simply increasing women's participation. Employment should also provide decent working conditions, fair remuneration, social protection, safe workplaces and opportunities for advancement. Gender equality in employment can also involve men's participation in unpaid household work. If women enter paid employment while continuing to perform most domestic work, the overall burden may remain unequal.

Gender and Unpaid Care Work

Unpaid care work includes cooking, cleaning, childcare, caring for older persons, supporting sick family members and other household responsibilities. Although this work is essential for social reproduction, it is often undervalued. Women frequently perform a larger share of unpaid domestic and care work. This can reduce their available time for education, employment, rest and community participation. The unequal distribution of care work is connected with labour-market participation. A woman may withdraw from paid employment because childcare or eldercare services are unavailable or expensive. Social infrastructure can reduce these constraints. Affordable childcare, public healthcare, elderly support services and safe transport can make it easier for women and men to combine paid work with family responsibilities. UN Women identifies unequal unpaid care and domestic work as one of the continuing global challenges to achieving gender equality. Care work should therefore be understood as an economic and social issue rather than simply a private family matter. A more inclusive society encourages shared household responsibilities between women and men and recognises the contribution of unpaid caregivers.

Gender Equality and Health

Health is an essential component of social inclusion. Gender influences access to healthcare, nutrition, reproductive health services and information. Women and girls can experience specific health needs related to menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and reproductive health. At the same time, social inequalities can affect access to healthcare. Poor women may face financial barriers, while rural populations may face distance and transportation barriers. Persons with disabilities may face accessibility problems in healthcare institutions. Maternal healthcare has received substantial policy attention, but gender equality in health extends beyond maternity. It includes mental health, chronic disease, nutrition, reproductive autonomy and access to information. Gender norms can also influence men's health behaviour. Expectations concerning masculinity may discourage some men from seeking healthcare or discussing emotional difficulties. Health systems therefore need to be gender-sensitive while also recognising differences among social groups. Social inclusion requires healthcare that is accessible, affordable, respectful and responsive to different needs.

Gender, Caste and Social Inclusion

Caste is an important dimension of social inequality in India. Gender and caste can interact to produce multiple forms of disadvantage. Women from historically marginalised caste communities may experience discrimination in education, employment, housing, access to resources and social participation. Economic disadvantage can intensify these barriers. Social inclusion policies therefore need to consider both gender and caste. A gender programme that ignores caste may fail to reach women who experience the most severe forms of exclusion. Affirmative-action policies and constitutional safeguards seek to improve representation and access for historically disadvantaged communities. However, access to opportunities also depends on education, geographic location, household income and institutional implementation. Intersectionality provides a useful framework for understanding these overlapping inequalities. A person does not experience gender independently from other social identities and structural conditions. Research should therefore collect data that can be disaggregated by gender, caste, location, economic status and other relevant characteristics. Social inclusion means ensuring that disadvantaged women are not excluded from the benefits of gender-equality initiatives themselves.

Gender and Tribal Communities

Scheduled Tribes and other indigenous communities have distinctive social, economic and cultural contexts. Women in tribal communities may experience challenges associated with poverty, geographic isolation, limited infrastructure and restricted access to services. At the same time, tribal communities should not be treated as socially homogeneous. Different tribal groups have different economic systems, cultural practices and gender relations. Education, healthcare, transportation, digital connectivity and employment opportunities are important dimensions of inclusion. Development programmes should respect local culture while expanding rights and opportunities. Community participation is essential because programmes designed without local consultation may not adequately address local needs. Tribal women's participation in local institutions, self-help groups, forest-based livelihoods, education and community decision-making can strengthen social inclusion. Research should avoid portraying tribal women only as victims. They are also active participants in economic, cultural and political life. A balanced approach recognises both structural disadvantages and the agency of tribal women and communities.

Gender and Disability

Persons with disabilities may face barriers to education, employment, transport, healthcare and political participation. Women with disabilities may experience multiple forms of exclusion because of both gender and disability. Accessible infrastructure is essential for inclusion. Schools, workplaces, government offices, public transport and healthcare facilities need to be designed so that persons with different disabilities can participate. Digital technology can support inclusion through accessible communication, online education and employment opportunities, but only when digital platforms are designed with accessibility in mind. Women with disabilities may also face increased vulnerability to violence or exploitation. Support systems should therefore include accessible complaint mechanisms, legal assistance and social services. Social inclusion requires moving from a charity-based approach toward a rights-based approach. Persons with disabilities should be recognised as citizens with equal rights and opportunities. Gender policies should explicitly include women and girls with disabilities rather than treating disability as a separate issue.

Political Participation and Representation

Political participation is an important dimension of gender equality because decisions made by political institutions influence education, health, employment, safety and social welfare. Women's participation in local government has expanded significantly through constitutional provisions for reservation in Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies. Women's participation in political institutions can increase their visibility and influence in public decision-making. However, representation should not be understood only in numerical terms. Effective participation also depends on authority, access to information, resources, political networks and freedom to make decisions. At the national level, women's representation remains below parity. UN Women reported that women held 14.7% of parliamentary seats in India as of February 2024. Political inclusion also requires participation by women from disadvantaged communities. Representation of women should therefore be considered together with caste, tribe, class and regional diversity. Political education, leadership development and institutional support can encourage greater participation.

Social Movements and Gender Equality

Social movements have played an important role in challenging gender inequality in India. Women's organisations, labour organisations, student groups, civil-society organisations and human-rights groups have raised issues concerning violence, employment, education, property, political representation and dignity. The women's movement has contributed to public discussion of domestic violence, sexual harassment, reproductive rights and discrimination. Self-help groups have also created opportunities for women to participate in savings, credit, entrepreneurship and community activities. Such groups can strengthen social networks and collective confidence.

Social movements are important because legal change often develops alongside changes in public awareness. Social attitudes can influence whether laws are implemented effectively. Digital platforms have created additional spaces for mobilisation and awareness. However, online participation can also expose women to harassment and abuse. Inclusive social movements need to ensure participation of women from diverse communities rather than representing only the experiences of relatively privileged groups.

Findings

The major findings of the study are as follows:

1. **Gender equality has a strong constitutional and legal foundation in India**, but implementation remains important.
2. **Education is a major instrument of empowerment and inclusion**, although access and outcomes vary across social groups.
3. **Women's labour-force participation remains significantly below men's**, particularly in urban labour-force measures. Government PLFS data illustrate a substantial gender gap.
4. **Unpaid care work remains a major barrier to equal economic participation.**
5. **Social inclusion is multidimensional.** Gender interacts with caste, class, disability, tribe, age and geography.
6. **Women from disadvantaged communities can face multiple and overlapping forms of exclusion.**
7. **Political representation of women has improved but remains below equal representation.**
8. **Legal reform alone cannot eliminate social inequality.** Social attitudes and institutional practices also influence outcomes.
9. **Gender data remain incomplete in several areas**, particularly unpaid care, asset ownership and some labour-market indicators.
10. **Social inclusion requires participation as well as access.** People should have a voice in decisions affecting their lives.
11. **Economic empowerment and social empowerment are interconnected.**
12. **Intersectional approaches are necessary** for understanding the diversity of women's experiences.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that gender equality in India is a multidimensional process. Progress in one area does not automatically eliminate inequality in another. For example, educational advancement may coexist with unequal employment opportunities, while legal equality may coexist with unequal household responsibilities. The distinction between formal and substantive equality is therefore important. Formal equality means that people are recognised as equal under law. Substantive equality considers whether individuals actually have the resources and opportunities needed to exercise their rights. Social inclusion also requires institutional transformation. Schools must be accessible, workplaces must be safe and equitable, public transport must be usable, healthcare must be affordable and political institutions must allow meaningful participation. The labour-market evidence demonstrates the importance of examining structural conditions. The 2024 PLFS data show a large difference between male and female urban labour-force participation. Such differences cannot be explained by individual choice alone because employment decisions are influenced by household responsibilities, social norms and labour-market conditions. Another important finding is that gender equality is connected with other development goals. India's Beijing+30 report identifies gender-specific indicators across 11 SDGs, demonstrating the cross-cutting nature of gender equality.

Therefore, gender equality should be incorporated into education, health, employment, social protection, infrastructure and governance policies.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Scope

The study covers gender equality and social inclusion in contemporary India from a sociological perspective. It includes:

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- Education
 - Employment
 - Health
 - Political participation
 - Social protection
 - Poverty
 - Caste
 - Tribal communities
 - Disability
 - Unpaid care
 - Family and community
 - Social movements
 - Government policies
 - Intersectionality

The study can be useful for students and researchers of sociology, social work, political science, women's studies and development studies.

Limitations

First, the study is based primarily on secondary information and does not include an original field survey. Second, India is socially and culturally diverse. National-level information may hide important differences between states and communities. Third, gender statistics are not available for every dimension of social life. UN Women specifically identifies gaps in several gender-related indicators for India. Fourth, some indicators measure participation but do not fully explain the quality of participation. Fifth, social inclusion is difficult to capture through numerical indicators alone. Qualitative research is required to understand experiences of discrimination, dignity, identity and belonging. These limitations indicate the need for further empirical research.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen gender-sensitive education** at all levels.
2. **Improve women's access to decent employment** with safe workplaces and equal opportunities.
3. **Expand affordable childcare and care services** so that family responsibilities do not disproportionately restrict women's employment.
4. **Promote shared household responsibilities** between men and women.
5. **Improve women's access to property, financial services and productive assets.**
6. **Strengthen political participation and leadership opportunities** for women from diverse social backgrounds.
7. **Improve public transport and workplace safety.**
8. **Strengthen implementation of laws protecting women and girls.**
9. **Improve gender-disaggregated data**, especially on unpaid care, employment, assets and social protection.
10. **Use an intersectional approach** when designing gender policies.
11. **Strengthen inclusion of women with disabilities** through accessible infrastructure and services.
12. **Improve educational and healthcare access in remote rural and tribal areas.**
13. **Support women's self-help groups and community organisations.**
14. **Expand social protection for vulnerable households.**

15. **Promote digital literacy and safe digital participation.**
16. **Include boys and men in gender-equality programmes.**
17. **Strengthen community awareness concerning gender discrimination and violence.**
18. **Encourage women's participation in local decision-making.**
19. **Develop family-friendly employment policies.**
20. **Ensure that disadvantaged women participate in the design and evaluation of inclusion programmes.**

Further Suggestions

Future research should examine gender equality at district and community levels rather than relying only on national averages. Local studies can reveal differences in employment, education, political participation and social attitudes.

Longitudinal research should be encouraged to examine how gender roles change across the life course. For example, women's employment patterns may change after marriage, childbirth or caregiving responsibilities.

More research is also needed on men's participation in unpaid care work. Understanding men's household responsibilities can help develop policies that promote shared caregiving.

Research should collect better information about women with disabilities, tribal women, migrant women, older women and women in informal employment.

Digital technology represents another important area for future study. Researchers should examine both opportunities and risks associated with women's online participation.

Further research can also examine the relationship between gender equality and climate change, migration, urbanisation and technological change.

Mixed-method research combining statistical surveys with interviews and case studies would provide a more complete understanding of social inclusion.

Universities should encourage interdisciplinary research linking sociology, economics, political science, public health, law and development studies.

Finally, future studies should evaluate the actual implementation of gender-related laws and policies at local levels.

CONCLUSION

Gender equality and social inclusion are fundamental to the development of an equitable society. India has developed an extensive constitutional, legal and policy framework supporting equality, education, employment, political participation and social protection. At the same time, significant differences continue to exist in access to resources, opportunities and decision-making.

The study shows that gender equality cannot be understood through a single indicator. Education, employment, health, political participation, unpaid care, property ownership, safety and social recognition are interconnected. The available evidence demonstrates continuing gender gaps in labour-force participation and political representation, while data gaps remain in several important areas. Social inclusion requires attention to the diversity of Indian society. Gender intersects with caste, class, tribe, disability, age and geography. Policies therefore need to be designed around different social realities rather than assuming that all women or all men have identical experiences.

The achievement of gender equality requires participation from government, educational institutions, workplaces, families, communities, civil-society organisations and individuals. Legal rights provide the foundation, but social attitudes and institutional practices must also change.

A socially inclusive India is one in which people are able to participate with dignity, access opportunities, exercise rights and contribute to decision-making regardless of gender or social background. Gender equality should therefore be understood not only as a women's issue but as a central component of social justice and democratic development.

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