

# Gender Equality as a Pillar of India@2047: Empowering Women and Girls

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**Abstract:** *Gender equality remains one of the most critical challenges and aspirations for India's development, particularly as the nation envisions a transformative future through its India@2047 roadmap. This paper explores gender equality as a foundational pillar for achieving socio-economic progress by the centenary of Indian independence. Through a sociological perspective, it analyses how structural inequalities, patriarchal institutions and intersectional barriers limit the empowerment of women and girls, especially in rural and marginalized communities. Drawing on feminist theories, conflict theory and empirical data from national surveys and case studies, the paper critiques current social institutions—including family, education, labour and policy frameworks—that both inhibit and support women's advancement. It examines key policies like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, reservation in local governance and gender budgeting, evaluating their sociological impact on real-world outcomes. The paper argues that gender equality is not only a human rights imperative but also a sociological necessity for the holistic development of Indian society. It proposes actionable recommendations focusing on education, economic independence, representation and cultural change. The conclusion affirms that achieving gender equality is essential for building a vibrant, inclusive and equitable India by 2047.*

**Keywords:** Gender equality, India@2047, women empowerment, sociological perspective, inclusive development

## 1. Introduction

India stands at a critical juncture in its socio-economic evolution as it envisions a transformative future through the India@2047 initiative—a long-term roadmap marking 100 years of independence. Among the multiple pillars proposed for this vision, gender equality is a core element, recognized as essential for inclusive development, social justice and sustainable progress. While legal frameworks and government schemes have made significant strides toward women's empowerment, gender disparities persist across education, employment, healthcare, political participation and everyday life.

Sociology, as a discipline, emphasizes the structured and systemic nature of inequality, including the embedded patriarchal norms that govern gender relations in India. Women, especially those belonging to marginalized castes, classes and rural areas, face dual and triple burdens of oppression. Their lack of access to resources, decision-making power and mobility is rooted not just in economic deprivation but in deep-seated cultural and institutional structures.

This paper seeks to explore the theme of "**Gender Equality as a Pillar of India@2047**" from a sociological lens. It investigates how social structures—such as the family, education, religion, economy and the state—construct, maintain and in some cases, challenge gender hierarchies. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as feminist theory, intersectionality and functionalism, the paper examines how structural changes can empower women and girls as agents of transformation.

Furthermore, it interrogates current policy interventions and social reforms aimed at achieving gender parity, including their sociological effectiveness and limitations. The paper also integrates real-life case studies and empirical findings

from sources like the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), Census 2011 and 2021 projections and NITI Aayog reports.

The central argument is that **gender equality is not merely a policy goal but a sociological necessity** for the realization of a vibrant and equitable India. True development cannot be achieved unless women and girls—half of the population—are fully integrated into all spheres of social, economic and political life.

## 2. Literature Review

### Gender Inequality in Sociological Discourse

Sociology has long examined gender as a social construct that organizes power, access and agency in both public and private spheres. Foundational feminist thinkers such as **Simone de Beauvoir (1949)** argued that women are not born but rather "made" by patriarchal structures. In the Indian context, **Leela Dube** and **Vandana Shiva** emphasized how caste, class, and religion intersect with gender to create complex systems of disadvantage.

The **structural-functional approach** suggests that gender roles were historically functional for society's stability but now pose barriers to modernization. **Conflict theory**, especially feminist variations, critiques the male-dominated structures of power that perpetuate inequality. Scholars like **Sylvia Walby (1990)** introduced the concept of "**patriarchal regimes**", wherein institutions like family, work, and the state perpetuate male dominance.

According to **Connell's (2005)** theory of gender relations, hegemonic masculinity dominates social interactions, marginalizing women and non-conforming genders. In India, these theories find resonance in realities such as **son preference, dowry and women's limited property rights**.

### Empirical Findings

According to the **Global Gender Gap Report 2024** by the World Economic Forum, India ranks 127 out of 146 countries, highlighting gaps in political empowerment and economic participation. **NFHS-5 (2019–21)** data shows:

- Only **25% of Indian women** participate in the labour force.
- **One in three women** (ages 18–49) experiences spousal violence.
- Female literacy stands at **70.3%**, significantly behind male literacy (84.7%).

Sociologist **Patricia Uberoi** (1993) noted that **kinship and family systems in South Asia** deeply influence women's mobility and autonomy. Despite policy interventions, cultural norms often override legal rights.

### Current Scenario and Sociological Challenges

#### Education: A Critical Gap

While India has improved girl-child enrolment under schemes like **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao**, dropout rates among girls—especially in rural and tribal regions—remain high. Factors include:

- Lack of menstrual hygiene facilities
- Early marriage
- Gender-based violence in and around schools

#### Case Study 1: The Kishori Shakti Yojana (Madhya Pradesh)

This adolescent girls' program improved school retention through nutrition, health awareness and vocational skills. An evaluation by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (2020) showed a **22% improvement in retention rates** and a **30% rise in menstrual hygiene practices** in targeted districts.

#### Economic Participation and Unpaid Labour

Women contribute significantly to India's economy through unpaid domestic and agricultural labour, yet their work remains invisible. **NSSO data (2019)** estimates that over **60% of rural women** are engaged in unpaid farm labour.

Women entrepreneurs face hurdles like:

- Lack of collateral for loans
- Gender bias in markets
- Limited digital and financial literacy

#### Case Study 2: Lijjat Papad (Gujarat/Maharashtra)

Founded by 7 women in 1959, the cooperative has empowered **over 45,000 women**, offering not just income but a voice in family and community decisions.

#### Political Representation: Numbers Without Power?

While India has over **1.5 million elected women representatives** at the Panchayati Raj level (thanks to the 73rd Amendment), many are "proxy leaders" controlled by male relatives.

#### Case Study 3: Chhavi Rajawat (Rajasthan)

The youngest woman sarpanch in India, she holds an MBA and uses digital governance and eco-friendly methods to develop her village Soda, representing a **break from patriarchal patterns**.

### Violence Against Women and Girls

Violence remains both a cause and consequence of gender inequality. Despite **laws like the POCSO Act**, the conviction rate is low and many cases go unreported.

The **Delhi gang rape of 2012** led to the **Justice Verma Committee Report**, which reformed rape laws and emphasized sensitization of the police and judiciary. Yet, implementation gaps persist.

### 3. Policy Frameworks and Government Interventions

The Indian state has initiated several **policy interventions** to empower women and reduce gender inequality. These efforts operate across education, health, labour and governance sectors. However, their effectiveness depends not only on legal implementation but also on the dismantling of socio-cultural barriers.

#### 1) Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP)

Launched in 2015, BBBP aims to prevent female foeticide and improve the sex ratio and educational outcomes for girls. While it has increased awareness, audits (NITI Aayog, 2021) reveal **fund diversion** and **lack of accountability** in several districts.

**Sociological Lens:** The campaign challenges **patriarchal kinship systems** that value sons over daughters. However, it must work in tandem with reforms in health services, dowry practices and legal enforcement.

#### 2) Reservation for Women in Panchayati Raj

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1992) mandates **33% reservation for women** in rural local governance. Some states like Bihar and Rajasthan have extended this to 50%.

**Impact:** Studies by **Nirmala Buch (2003)** and the **UNDP (2014)** suggest that women leaders improved access to drinking water, health services, and sanitation more than their male counterparts.

**Critique:** Many female sarpanches face control by male relatives, reflecting the persistence of **patrilineal authority**.

#### 3) Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017

This act increased paid maternity leave to **26 weeks** and mandated crèche facilities in workplaces with 50+ employees.

**Reality Check:** Data from **PLFS (2022)** show that only 9% of working women benefit, as most are in the **informal sector**, highlighting the **class divide within gender inequality**.

#### 4) Stand Up India & Mudra Yojana

These schemes encourage women entrepreneurship by offering collateral-free loans. Yet, **less than 20% of beneficiaries** under Mudra are female entrepreneurs (RBI, 2023).

**Barrier:** Lack of access to markets, digital tools, and financial literacy continues to exclude women from the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

#### Vision for India@2047

To realize the goals of **India@2047**, gender equality must be approached as a **cross-cutting issue** across all pillars of development.

##### 1) From Tokenism to Transformation in Governance

By 2047, India should aim for **50% representation of women** in Parliament and State Assemblies through constitutional amendments, ensuring not just presence but **participation** in decision-making.

##### 2) Gendered Budgeting

Introduce **gender-responsive budgeting** in all government departments, ensuring targeted investments in education, skill development and reproductive health.

##### 3) Sociological Framework: This aligns with intersectionality, ensuring benefits reach Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim, and LGBTQ+ women who are otherwise marginalized.

##### 4) Feminist Education Models

Curricula should include **gender studies, consent education and body autonomy**, transforming schools into **sites of social reform** rather than just academic instruction.

##### 5) Safe Cities and Villages

By 2047, India must ensure all public spaces—urban and rural—are **gender-inclusive**, through infrastructure (lighting, CCTV, women-friendly transport), sensitized policing and participatory urban design.

##### 6) Workforce Equality and Recognition of Unpaid Labor

Policies must incentivize:

- Employer diversity
- Recognition of unpaid care work in GDP
- Gender audits in private and public sector

The **2030 SDG Goal 5** provides a strong framework to align with these changes before 2047.

##### 1) Mandatory Gender Sensitization Training

Across schools, universities, police, judiciary and Panchayati Raj institutions to dismantle structural sexism.

##### 2) Universal Basic Income for Women

Especially for widows, single mothers and rural women engaged in unpaid labour.

##### 3) Digital Access and Financial Inclusion

Subsidize smartphones and internet access for rural women. Promote fintech and micro-credit education.

##### 4) Gender-Based Data Collection

Disaggregated data on education, labour, violence and health must be made publicly accessible for policy evaluation and social accountability.

##### 5) Community Engagement

Utilize **anganwadis, SHGs and local NGOs** to embed gender equality in local narratives and customs.

#### 4. Conclusion

The realization of a **Vibrant India@2047** cannot occur without dismantling the deep-rooted gender hierarchies that

constrain half of the population. As shown through sociological analysis, gender inequality is not merely an economic or educational issue, but a **systemic structure embedded in culture, institutions and everyday life**.

Empowering women and girls are not only a moral and constitutional obligation but a strategic imperative for national growth. From increasing female labour force participation to transforming governance and reclaiming bodily autonomy, gender equality intersects with every development indicator.

Case studies from across India show that when women are empowered—through education, enterprise, or politics—they uplift not only themselves but entire communities. However, these transformations need **sustained institutional support, cultural change and inclusive policy frameworks**.

By adopting a **sociological and intersectional approach**, India can move beyond token reforms to a society where women and girls thrive as equal partners. Only then will India@2047 truly reflect the vision of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity enshrined in its Constitution.

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