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## Gender Inequality in the Indian Workplace

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### ABSTRACT

Gender discrimination in the workplace is still a major issue around the world, and India is no different. Even though policies, laws, and public attitudes have advanced, women in India still face hindrances to equality in the workplace. This paper examines the causes of gender discrimination in India's working life, the impact on women, and the hurdles in enacting corrective policies. The discussion examines institutional, social, and economic determinants, as well as the influence of legislation, company culture, and societal norms. Lastly, the paper concludes with suggestions for transcending these obstacles and creating a more inclusive and equitable work environment.

### 1. Introduction

Gender disparities in the labor market continue to be a persisting issue in India, even as progress is made in gender equality in all spheres of social life. Women are underrepresented in managerial positions, frequently subject to discriminatory practices in recruitment, wage differentials, and most disproportionately targeted by workplace harassment. In the Indian context, in which cultural conventions regarding gender roles and family duties continue to hold sway, such inequalities are embedded. This paper attempts to examine the cause, effect, and possible cures of gender inequality in Indian workplaces, touching on cultural belief, legislation, and work patterns.

### 2. Societal Norms and Historical Context

India's patriarchal culture has for long determined the opportunities and roles accorded to women. Women's role within Indian society has been shaped by religious doctrine, colonialism, and conventional gender roles, historically. India's Constitution, passed in 1950, promises equality before the law, but the entrenched societal attitudes towards gender roles have frustrated real advancement towards equality in the workplace. Indian women have historically been expected to place family above career, resulting in breaks in their careers and professional development.

### 3. Gender Disparities in Employment

#### 3.1 Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR)

The most glaring signs of gender inequality are a low Female Labor Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) in India. The female LFPR in India is around 21%, and that of men is around 70% according to the World Bank as of 2021. This difference is largely because of society's expectations, where women are only expected to take care of children and domestics.

#### 3.2 Leadership Representation Shortfalls

Women are woefully underrepresented in leadership positions within industries in India. In a 2020 report on India by McKinsey, only 26% of the managerial positions in India are occupied by women, and the representation of women in senior leadership positions is even less. The glass ceiling effect, a term used to describe the intangible walls that keep women from accessing the top tiers of professional hierarchy, still exists in India.

#### 3.3 Gender Pay Gap

The wage gap based on gender continues to be a major challenge in Indian work environments. Research indicates that women in India receive 20-30% lower pay compared to their male peers for the same job. According to a report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), though women in India are better educated and qualified now than at any time in the past, they continue to be paid lower salaries than men because of deep-seated perceptions of their ability and expectations based on gender.

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## 4. Causes of Gender Inequality in the Indian Workplace

### 4.1 Societal and Cultural Norms

In India, societal attitudes still largely reflect patriarchal values, which influence both public and private sector workplaces. Women often face discrimination based on the perception that they will be unable to prioritize their work due to domestic responsibilities. This leads to biases in hiring and promotions, particularly in industries that require long working hours or frequent travel.

### 4.2 Workplace Harassment

Sexual and non-sexual harassment in the workplace continues to be a pressing issue. Even after the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013) was passed, cases of harassment continue to be underreported on account of fear of reprisal, social stigma, and insufficient support mechanisms. The 2020 Indian National Bar Association survey concluded that 69% of women working in Indian workplaces had been subjected to some kind of harassment.

### 4.3 Shortage of Gender-Sensitive Policies

Most Indian working places still do not have policies that positively foster gender equality. While some of the larger companies have adopted practices like maternity leave, flexible working hours, and diversity initiatives, these are often absent in smaller enterprises and informal sectors. Additionally, career development of women is hampered through an absence of mentorship and networking.

### 4.4 Educational and Skill Gaps

Though education level among Indian women has been improving, women have been kept short of some of the vocational training and higher studies, especially in the area of engineering, technology, and management. Lack of access to technical education and skill development keeps women below representation level in industries that have high growth potential, including Information Technology (IT), engineering, and the financial sector.

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## 5. Legal Framework and Government Initiatives

India has brought forth several legal reforms to counter gender disparity at the workplace, but the enforcement of these laws is inconsistent

### 5.1 The Equal Remuneration Act (1976)

The Equal Remuneration Act enforces equal pay for equal work, and discrimination on the basis of gender in remuneration is forbidden. The implementation of this law has been poor, and wage discrimination still exists.

### 5.2 The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (2013)

This act to prevent sexual harassment in work places has raised awareness about the issue, but enforcement is patchy. Most small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are not aware of the law and its provisions, and most women are reluctant to report harassment for fear of being stigmatized or losing their jobs.

### 5.3 Maternity Benefits (Amendment) Act (2017)

The Maternity Benefits Act was amended in 2017 to provide 26 weeks of paid maternity leave to women working in organizations that have 10 or more employees. Although a welcome step in the direction of helping working mothers, its take-up in the informal sector is low, and the cost burden on employers at times restricts its application.

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## 6. Corporate Culture and Gender Bias

Indian corporate culture usually has implicit gender biases that influence women's professional development. Some of the issues include:

### 6.1 Unconscious Bias

Men and women in management positions usually have unconscious biases that influence their decisions, with women being denied opportunities for promotions, challenging tasks, or leadership positions. This bias is particularly clear in male-dominated sectors.

## **6.2 Networking and Mentorship Gaps**

Networking and mentorship are significant components of career progress. Nevertheless, women are commonly denied informal networks and male mentors, who in most fields provide the tools required for professional progression.

## **6.3 Work-Life Balance Expectations**

In India, the anticipation that women should play primary caregiving roles is an unfair imposition on their professional lives. The absence of flexible work schedules or telecommuting opportunities further hinders women's capacity to combine work and family life, leading to career stalling or job exit.

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## **7. Case Studies of Gender Equality Initiatives**

### **7.1 Infosys**

Infosys, a top Indian IT firm, has taken major leaps towards fostering gender equality in the workplace. The company has introduced several programs like the 'Women's Leadership Development Program' and has achieved diversity goals for senior managerial positions. In 2020, Infosys reported that 36% of its employees are female, and it continues to seek higher numbers.

### **7.2 ICICI Bank**

ICICI Bank has a strong diversity and inclusion strategy, with a special emphasis on promoting women's participation in top management. The bank has implemented flexible work timings and a gender-inclusive leave policy, with the aim of making it a more inclusive and supportive workplace for women employees.

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## **8. Recommendations for Alleviating Gender Inequality**

In order to alleviate gender inequality in the workplace in India, a number of steps can be taken:

### **8.1 Foster Gender Sensitivity Training**

Regular gender sensitivity training should be invested in by workplaces for both employers and employees to remove unconscious biases.

### **8.2 Enhance Representation at Leadership Positions**

Corporate India needs to actively strive to enhance women's representation at leadership positions through diversity quotas, leadership training, and mentorship programs.

### **8.3 Flexible Work Arrangements**

Promoting flexible working hours and remote work opportunities will enable women to balance family and career commitments efficiently.

### **8.4 Strengthen Enforcement of Laws**

There are laws such as the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act and Equal Remuneration Act, but enforcement needs to be strengthened. The employers must be made responsible for compliance with such laws.

### **8.5 Assistance to Women in Informal Sectors**

Policy schemes must be extended to cover women employed in the informal economy, who bear the major part of gender discrimination but are not protected by the law.

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## **9. Conclusion**

Inequality between the genders in the Indian workplace is a complex phenomenon fueled by culture, legal loopholes, and organizational practices. Though some steps have been taken, much work is left to overcome the deeply entrenched barriers to women's progress in the working world. Redressing these imbalances needs to be done by a combined effort of the government, private enterprise, and society to establish an inclusive, equitable, and enabling workplace culture for both genders. By reinforcing legal safeguards, introducing gender-friendly policies, and creating a culture of inclusivity, India can make tangible headway in bridging the gender gap in the workplace.

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