



Examining Gender Inequality Through Feminist Lenses

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Abstract: The problem of gender inequality is an ongoing issue in the world, and it is analysed in this context concerning the framework of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), which aims at attaining gender equality and empowering all women and girls (United Nations, 2015). Although the world has made these commitments, patriarchal systems, economic inequalities, and interlinking forces of oppression are still running in the way. This paper examines the reinforcement of gender discrimination by class, caste, and geographical inequalities to draw a conclusion on the aspect and presents thematic analysis and reports of UN Women (UN Women, 2025) and Government of India (Government of India, 2024) in exploring the subject, with the help of policy discourse analysis based on the topic of intersectionality theory established by Kimberle Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989). Even though almost 100 countries revised discriminatory legislation in 2019-2024 (UN Women, 2024), due to the deeply-established socio-cultural standards, there are still gaps in their implementation. In India, the labour force participation of women is still 37 percent, rural women are more vulnerable to violence than their urban counterparts, and the Gender Inequality Index is equal to 0.44 (UNDP, 2024). The World Bank calculates that women have lost up to US\$160 trillion in global human capital wealth due to gender inequality (World Bank, 2018), and further action (especially in the areas of reproductive rights and digital access) would contribute US\$28 trillion to global GDP (McKinsey Global Institute, 2015). According to the latest projections included in the UN Gender Snapshot 2025, one can even say that, unless people stop the existing tendencies, 351 million females and girls can still be in extreme poverty by 2030 (UN Women, 2025). Combining intersectional, ecofeminist, and postcolonial critiques, the present paper fills the gap between theory and practice and suggests intervention, grounded in community-based and structural policies, to eliminate the barriers in the system and promote empowerment that is inclusive and progressive.

Keywords: Gender inequality, United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), Women's empowerment, Intersectionality

I. Introduction

Gender equality is one of the main pillars of social justice movements and has developed through the initial suffragette activism to the current international laws like the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The core of this process is SDG 5, which has the name: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and which is the sum of the activities aimed to limit systemic obstacles in various areas: economic, social, political, and cultural (United Nations, 2015). This goal was adopted in 2015 after considering gender equality as a non-negotiable human right but an indispensable instrument of sustainable development, which cuts across all other 16 SDGs, such as poverty eradication (SDG 1) and climate action



(SDG 13). However, regardless of such high hopes, the world is significantly behind in its development: according to the 2023 Gender Snapshot by UN Women, a full gender balance will not be achieved until 2154, and 2.4 billion women are still denied equal economic rights (UN Women, 2023).

The origins of this theme are in the successive feminist movements, which changed the society. The 19th through the early 20th century saw first-wave feminism, which mainly promoted legal rights, such as the right to vote in Favor of women (Rampton, 2015). The second wave that occurred between 1960s and 1980s expanded the discussion to include reproductive rights, workplace equality, and greater social equity (Burkett, 2020). Having come into the limelight in the 1990s, third-wave feminism proposed an intersectional perspective, focusing on the ways in which gender oppression is combined with race, class, sexuality, and other identities (Snyder, 2008). Fourth-wave feminism today uses online platforms to carry out activism, which is resisting online harassment and increasing the voice of marginalized groups (Munro, 2013).

This continuum of evolution makes aware of the nine SDG 5 targets that endorse the absence of discrimination (5.1), the absence of violence (5.2), access to economic resources (5.a), and empowerment facilitated by technology (5.b) (United Nations, 2015). Nevertheless, feminist critics do moan about the neoliberal turn taken by SDGs as it runs the risk of watering down radical change to trivial changes that focus on market integration, rather than othering power bases (Chant and Sweetman, 2012). Gender equity is especially relevant in the industrial setting, with technology, finance, and sustainability being the main areas of concern, especially in the areas of innovation centres such as Bengaluru environment. Fewer than one in four of the IT workforce in India is also a woman, with an even lower attrition rate than a leaky pipeline, with the highest occurring after marriage when women have to take care of the children (NASSCOM, 2022).

This is a problem in fintech and e-commerce, where computer-aided bias in credit score locks women out of digital economies (Datta et al., 2019). Oxfam (Oxfam international, 2020) shows that women bear the 80 percent of the world's burden of unpaid care, and sustainability initiatives such as green jobs also overlook them. The paper is placed at the crossroad of digital business and sustainability and criticizes all the metrics of GDP that under-registers gendered labour. As an example, one of these feminist economists, Naila Kabeer, estimates that by 2025, bridging the gender gaps would translate to an extra 12-28 trillion of global GDP, should caste barriers such as caste barriers in India be mitigated (Kabeer, 2016). The reason why the study will utilize liberal, radical and intersectional feminism to analyse the gaps in SDG 5 implementation through case study scenario of India as a population which has the demographic value of one-sixth of the entire world population and Bengaluru as a testing ground of gender policy. Incorporating both theoretical and empirical analysis of cases in the paper, the authors suggest a radical approach to strategies that are not based on tokenism.

The paper is organized in the following way: introduction creates the context of the study, literature review summarizes feminist studies, the problem statement outlines the most significant obstacles, the analysis and discussion disaggregate the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative in Haryana, the conclusion helps derive implications, and references provide the academic underpinning. Going further back into the history, gender inequality in India is still rooted in the colonial past even up to the post-independence period. Were the 2005



Hindu Succession Act amendments accorded an equal amount of inheritance to the daughters of a particular family, but fortunately not yet to be enforced, as it is yet to overcome the age-old practices such as dowry systems (Agarwal, 2005). The situation was worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, due to which more women lost their jobs (5% more than men on average) according to the International Labour Organization statistics (ILO, 2020).

These disparities are heightened in urban-rural urban - rural segregations in Bengaluru: garment factory migrant women work 12-hour shifts without maternity, which is a way of relating to SDG 8 on decent work (Chen et al., 2021). Gender audits of such e-commerce powerhouses as Flipkart show that the promotion rate of women is reduced by 30 percent in comparison with that of men, which explains why AI ethics should be in accordance with SDG 5.b (Equileap, 2022). In fintech, platforms such as UPI have been able to support the creation of digital inclusion by opening bank accounts to around 500 million women (Reserve Bank of India, 2023). Nonetheless, Dalit women are disproportionately disadvantaged by lending algorithms which continues to exclude (Datta et al., 2019). Further inequities can also be seen based on sustainability dimensions: women, who make 70 percent of agricultural work in India, do not have land titles, which is a violation of SDG 5.a and increases their susceptibility to climate (FAO, 2021).

This article cuts across the academic world and the business community to inform gender sensitive leadership in such institutions as the JAIN University. By 2026, the figures are alarming, with the Gender Inequality Index in India amounting to 0.44, and the labour force participation of women at 41.7 per cent (up against 23 per cent in 2017), yet the percentage is only 28 per cent in urban areas (World Bank, 2026). According to the World Inequality Report 2026, women have lower labour income by 18 per cent compared to the global averages (Chancel et al., 2026). Critiques of SDG 5 by ecofeminists claim that it brings women into systems of exploitation yet it does not confront environmental oppression (Mies and Shiva, 2014). Finally, this introduction presents SDG 5 as a feminist necessity, which demands the paradigm shift regarding the equality-as-sameness to equity-as-justice. Later paragraphs develop with a view to enhancing discourse of future empowerment. In order to clearly see the complex aspect of gender equality, there is a need to examine the philosophical basis of feminist theories that underline SDG 5.

Liberal feminism is an ideology based on Enlightenment principles, but it focuses on the equal opportunities with the status quo, promoting such changes in the policy as the anti-discrimination laws (Wollstonecraft, 1792; Friedan, 1963). This view adheres to the SDG 5 goals of legal legalization and economic inclusion but is usually dismissed that further power inequities exist. Radical feminism on the other hand treats patriarchy as the very source of oppression and requires restructuring of the society, including redefining roles to reproductive, and violence resistance (Firestone, 1970; MacKinnon, 1989). It echoes the SDG 5.2 emphasis in ending gender-based violence but shows the SDGs inability to deal directly with the causative factors, such as male dominance within institutions. Intersectional feminism is one of many axes of oppression that have been incorporated by Kimberle Crenshaw, where gender is perceived to cut across races, caste, classes, or disability (Crenshaw, 1989).



This lens is extremely important in India because Dalit and the Adivasi women experience double discrimination which is seen in lack of access to education and healthcare (Deshpande, 2011). The intersectional gaps of SDG 5 can be observed by the targets such as 5.a, where land rights reforms ignore caste-based exclusions. This study combines these insights to criticize the implementation of SDG 5 in India, where even though there are constitutional provisions (Article 15) assuring women their rights (Government of India, 1950), the culture of patriarchy still exists. The demographic weight of India increases its contribution to gender dynamics in the world. Having more than 1.4 billion individuals, developments here may come at a faster pace globally to SDG target fulfilment (United Nations Population Division, 2022).

The example of Bengaluru, which is the Silicon Valley of India, illustrates gender issues based on the innovations. It hosts startups and multinationals, with such programs as the Karnataka Gender Policy, but female entrepreneurs get only 14 percent of venture capital (Innoven Capital, 2023). This gap is connected to SDG 9 on industry and innovation, according to which tech development does not discriminate gender, which contributes to the perpetuation of biases by AI (Buolamwini and Gebru, 2018). Major case studies include the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the daughter, Educate the daughter) campaign that was initiated in 2015 (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2015). In Haryana with terrible sex ratios (879 females per 1,000 males in 2011), awareness and incentives were used to increase it to 923 by 2021 (Government of Haryana, 2022). Nonetheless, critics state that it consolidates patriarchy ideas because it sets the value of daughters in the context of the family and not agency (Ghosh, 2019).

The practical examination will help in exposing how such initiatives, as much as they contribute to SDG 5.1, are not radical. The gendered effects of the pandemic also shed light on the setbacks. Women across the globe began to experience disproportional care loads so that 64 million women lost their jobs (Madgavkar et al., 2021). Rural women in agrifood sectors in India were experiencing increased food insecurity in the event of climate disruptions (IPCC, 2022). Ecofeminism correlates those with environmental degradation, with the women being overrode as resource managers without being empowered (Shiva, 1988). The promise of fintech in India where UPI transactions have already crossed over 100 billion in 2025 (National Payments Corporation of India, 2026) has democratized finance.

However, there are still gender disparities: 35% of women have mobile phones of their own without any dependent access, which restricts access to digital platforms (GSMA, 2023). Machines and algorithms used on platforms such as Paytm tend to encompass biases, refusing women access to loans on the basis of proxy information such as marital status (Abraham et al., 2021). Intersection of sustainability is also very important. On SDG 2 (food security) women farmers play an important role in it, but have no adaptive resources to combat climate change, according to SDG 13 (UN Women, 2022). Women-owned startups in Bengaluru such as renewable energy usage have issues with financing, which highlights the gender blindness of SDG 7 (IRENA, 2023). Theoretical attacks spreading out to the co-optation of feminism in neoliberalism.

According to scholars, SDGs commercialize gender equality which has become an instrument of economic growth and not justice (Fraser, 2013). This takes the form of programs in India that emphasize workforce integration instead of reforming the care economy (Razavi, 2016). The 2026 statistics are both positive and



negative: as female literacy has increased to 74% (National Statistical Office, 2026), violence is still a significant problem, as 30 percent of women become the victims of domestic abuse (National Family Health Survey, 2025). The 28% urban participation is evidence of structural impediments such as the lack of childcare (UNICEF, 2024). Nevertheless, with its slow policy changes and even statistical progress, the issue of gender-based violence still stands out as one of the most material hurdles to the transformative purpose of propagating United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 5.

Although Indian response to sexual violence improved following the Nirbhaya case through legal reforms, like the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, there are still gaps in the enforcement and stigma linked to sexual violence, as well as institutional insensitivity have been undermining the access to justice. Raising awareness that close to 30 percent of women suffer domestic violence, as indicated by the National Family Health Survey (2025) shows that laws are not enough to bring down ingrained patriarchal values. Radical feminist theory would view this continuation as a sign that violence is not an anomaly, but a form of structural checks and balances within the institution of families and the state. Hence, SDG 5.2 will be met, when punitive systems are eliminated, but instead transformed schools will provide girls with education, policing will be gender-oriented and the power equilibrium has been in households and communities.

Education has two roles to play in this transformation. On the one hand, the increased levels of female literacy are an indication of the movement in the right direction which is empowerment; on the other hand, the content of the curriculum and the institutional cultures tend to perpetuate the gender stereotypes. Feminist pedagogues believe that empowerment is not so much about the ratio of enrolment but it is more about critical consciousness. Other schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao have made the girl child more visible in India but rates of dropping out among adolescent girls have been increased because of early marriage, household chores with no pay or payment, and absence of toilets in rural institutions. Intersectional analysis sets in the realization that Dalit, Adivasi, and Muslim girls are disadvantaged three times by caste, geography, and religion.

Therefore, SDG 5 should be operated according to the SDG 4 (quality education) so that access to education can be converted into substantive equality instead of nominal inclusion. There is also the question of economic participation which in most cases is quantified in labour force statistics that need to be questioned further. Even though the national level of participation in labour has increased to 41.7 percent by women, there are still qualitative inequalities in the form of the degree of wage, employment stability, and the representation of women in leadership. Women not only in terms of size are overrepresented in informal sectors that lack social protection but also underrepresented in the high growth digital industries. Diversity policies, when implemented in the technology ecosystem of Bengaluru, are often positioned as a notion of corporate social responsibility, often as opposed to structural necessity. Equal opportunity policies in hiring practices may be cheered by liberal feminist strategies, but in the absence of childcare facilities, flexible working schemes and non-discriminatory appraisal strategies, women will remain at the middle management positions indefinitely.



The glass ceiling is not there because no one is capable but because culturally individuals are expected to care and move about. The group underestimation of non-paid care work still falsifies the economic indicators like GDP. The time-use surveys have shown consistently that Indian women do almost thrice the amount of non-paid household work as compared to men. Feminist economists state that the invisible labour serves as a subsidy to the economies of the country as it keeps the workforce alive and unpaid. Including care work in a system of national statistics would be in line with SDG 5.4 that requires the recognition and redistribution of unpaid work. Structural changes like publicly funded childcare facilities, both genders paid parental leave, social pensions in the case of housewives would be an indicator of structural changes and not token welfare programs.

In the absence of such reforms, the economic participation of women is non-acceptable and tentative. In digital transformation, there is an opportunity and threat. The fast growth of fintech in India with tools, such as UPI, has increased the inclusiveness of the areas of finance, although digital disparities remain along gender lines. Women are not completely engaged due to the lack of smartphone access, digital illiteracy, and algorithmic biasness. Intersectional feminism points to the fact that Dalit and rural women have to face even more challenges because of the lack of documentation and even the restriction of their socio-cultural mobility. Gender audits and transparency mechanisms must thus be happened in the ethical AI frameworks. By adding SDG 5.b to the corporate governance, it may be assured that the technology becomes an empowerment; but not a discriminator.

As a world-renowned innovation centre, Bengaluru can be the first to introduce standards of inclusive design that would incorporate equity in software architecture. Gender inequality is further enhanced by climate change especially in agrarian economies. Women farmers, who are the majority of the agricultural labourers do not have secure land tenure and credit access. Women are more vulnerable to the changing environment given their low adaptive resources as climate shocks continue to make crops volatile. According to ecofeminist academics, the logic of exploitation that has led to ecological destruction of the environment and feminine oppression share the same cause. The SDGs, especially SDG 5 can be combined with SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 2 (zero hunger), by means of reform of the land system, training of women farmers on climate resilience, and by involving women in local environmental governance structures. It is impossible to have sustainable development without identifying women as custodians of the environment and agents of decision and growth and not as a mere recipient. Another dimension of empowerment is the aspect of political representation.

The constitutional reservation of women in Panchayati Raj institutions in India has improved the participation of the people on the grassroots, but the representation in parliament has not been at parity. The utterance does not necessarily lead to substantive policymaking authority, where elected women are being controlled by their male relatives vice-versa. Intersectional critique focuses on the point of representation being inclusive of populations like caste and tribal majorities, so that there is no empire of the elites. Enhancing leadership training, the support of campaign financing, anti-harassment would be a fitting measure of democratic participation of SDG 5.5, which aims at full and effective participation on all levels of decision-making.



The concept of market integration as a type of empowerment introduced by neoliberalism is also subject to questioning. These entrepreneurship programs fail to address issues structural credit limitations, disparities in assets ownership, and burdens of care. Whereas microfinance projects have ensured access to little amount of loans, the projects have at times added pressures to debts without changing the restrictions that patriarchy have over income. Such scholars as Nancy Fraser warn against re-packaging feminist demands as productivity levels. In order to be empowered, it is necessary to rethink social agreements in which dignity, body sovereignty, and social well-being are major concerns, rather than focusing on growth-driven paradigms. In this regard, SDG 5 must not be seen as a vacuum of achievement but rather a focus game changer on policies of development.

The most complicated also significant dimension is cultural transformation. The norms of patriarchy are recreated in the media, in the interpretation of religion, and in daily life. Cultural movements that discuss masculinity and bring men to the side of gender equality are needed to break gender hierarchies. The changes in social attitudes are not possible without superficial legal and economic reforms. The normative frameworks can be changed over time through community-based discussions, gender-sensitization curricular, media responsibility and accountability. The cosmopolitan atmosphere in Bengaluru gives a place to form progressive discussions, but even in the urban areas, harassment and discrimination manifest themselves, and the scope of systemic prejudices is shown.

II. Review of literature

Gender inequality as a feminist study has become a significant interdisciplinary area of study, providing insights as a critical approach to gender equality (SDG 5) that will benefit all women and girls in achieving their empowerment. The review is a synthesis of the previous studies, theoretical approaches, models, research findings, and comparative studies with gaps in the literature to trace the trajectory of research. Using the feminist theories, this analysis can find the intersections of SDG 5 in the bigger sustainable development agendas, which show both improvement and challenges. The addition of gender equality as a part of SDGs is an improvement over the Millennium Development Goals, but the overall results are still rather uneven, with numerous gaps in the implementation on both social, economic, and environmental levels (Leal Filho et al., 2022).

Feminist authors indicate that SDG 5 should not be singled out as it is synergistically associated with the rest of the goals, in particular, the poverty, health, and climate action ones, which necessitate a more comprehensive approach to jointly combat the intersections of oppression. The early history of feminist theory is in the criticism of patriarchal organization. The concept of liberal feminism, that was first advanced by Mary Wollstonecraft in her seminal work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Wollstonecraft, 1792) puts forward the idea that women should have equal opportunities in the legal arena, in education, and in politics as the liberalist feminist feminism directly relates to SDG 5 priorities such as 5.1 (end discrimination) and 5.5 (ensure women can participate in leadership). The view considers the rights of people and their access on a merit-based approach and that by eliminating barriers, equality between the genders will be achieved.



Furthering this, in *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan criticized the domestic imprisonment of women (Friedan, 1963), agitating equity in the workplace, and affecting laws like Equal Pay Act 1963 in the United States. Evidence taken by empirical studies of the OECD proves that liberal feminist strategies have increased women participation in the labour force by about 20 percent in high-income nations in the period between 1970 and 2000 (OECD, 2002). Nevertheless, these strategies tend to disregard structural intersections such as racism and classism, which are the issues that eventually cause criticism that they favor privileged women more than others.

As a case study, though liberal reforms have advanced through more women going to work, there are still wage disparities, as women earn between 77-82 per cent of men wages around the world (World Economic Forum, 2023). Regarding SDG 5, the liberal feminism argues in favor of economic participation goals but does not offer a guarantee of overcoming the systemic bias, which SDGs feminist critique of the formalist view of equality fails to provide (Fredman and Goldblatt, 2022). Radical feminism provides a different perspective and refers to patriarchy as an origin of oppression in the form of institutionalized violence and control over females in their bodies. In *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State* (MacKinnon, 1989), Catherine MacKinnon writes that gender hierarchies are perpetuated in the state through legal and social practices, anticipates the end of violence against women as primary to liberation, and thus is similar to SDG 5.2 (eliminate violence against women), and 5.3 (end harmful practices).

According to the global statistics of World Health Organization (WHO), 736 million women: almost a third of women have also experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime or non-partner sexual violence (WHO, 2021). Radical interventions (shelter networks, legal reforms) have decreased the rates of recidivism up to 40% in such programs as the U.S. and Europe (Sullivan, 2018). However, the focus of radical feminism on separatism and essentialist gender has attracted the criticism of queer theorists. In the work by Judith Butler titled *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990), the performance of gender is broken down, ultimately making binary, notions of gender ineffective and enlightening SDG 5.6 on sexual reproductive health rights.

The work authored by Butler is critical of the influence of radical strategies in the entrenchment of heteronormativity, instead promoting ideas of fluid identity that incorporate LGBTQ+ views. The empirical findings indicate that the maternal mortality in areas where queer-inclusive frameworks have been embraced through inclusive reproductive policies is cut by 30% according to empirical studies (UN Women, 2023). This conflict shows why radical feminism will have to change towards SDG implementation to embrace different forms of gender. Intersectionality was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989): it transformed feminist analysis with its revelation of the fact that gender plays with race, class, caste, and other oppression axes, demonstrating the irrelevance of SDG 5 as universal.

This was further developed in *Black Feminist Thought* by Patricia Hill Collins (Collins, 1990), in which she presented the model known as the matrix of domination, and this serves to show that power structures intersect. According to the data provided by UN Women (2023), economic disparity occurs between Black women and Indigenous women, with earnings that are 30 percentage points lower than of white women in the United States. In India intersectionality is presented in the caste-gender nexus, which is discussed in the



Ambedkarite feminism through Gail Omvedt (Omvedt, 2003). The statistics of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) of 2022 show that Dalit women are not only triple discriminated against but also have literacy 15 percent less than upper-caste women and work in informal sectors (70 percent) (NSSO, 2022). Intersectional strategies, comparatively, are effective in improving the outcome of SDGs; in South Africa, programs that incorporate both race and gender increased the representation of women in political parties by 25 percent (Ernst, 2024).

Nonetheless, the application of intersectionality to the global south remains delimited since, despite colonial legacies, inequalities prevail in these cases. One criticism that under Western framing, SDG features a Western feminist agenda is that of postcolonial feminist, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in her book, *Under Western Eyes* (Mohanty, 1984). Mohanty seeks to show that the discourse of universal sisterhood blurs colonialism and homogenizes women of the Third World, thus resulting in discriminatory realizations of SDG 5. Comparisons based on the empirical evidence show differences: Nordic countries have attained 42% representation of women in the parliament through gender quotas (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023), and countries of the Latin American region, with their same quotas, have to endure more violence, with 1 in 10 women being victims of femicide (UNDP, 2020).

Postcolonial theories and criticisms of the SDG indicators in Africa portray that they fail to acknowledge the informal sectors where, women are the dominant actors and they contribute 60 percent of GDP, but they receive minimal safeguards (Esquivel, 2016). This North South rift demands decolonial strategies so that SDG 5 considers localized oppressions. Other main theoretical frameworks are the Naila Kabeer model of Resources, Agency, and Achievements (RAA) (Kabeer, 1999), correlating the economic access (SDG 5.a) with empowerment. It was used in relation to the micro finance program in Bangladesh which demonstrated a 25-percentage growth in the income of women, although culture still hinders agency due to culture (Kabeer, 2005).

To supplement this is the Capability Approach of Amartya Sen (Sen, 1999) which emphasizes on freedoms in lieu of outcomes. The statistics of National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 2019-21 show that the number of women who are capable of doing exercises dropped by 15 per cent in the time of the COVID-19 lockdowns, further widening the gender gaps in India (NFHS, 2021). Such models give a means of SDG indicator measurement, but empirical work has shown weaknesses. Although both Kabeer Resources-Agency-Achievements (RAA) and Sen Capability Approach are analytically strong, they have been criticized to have inadequately factored the issue of structural power relations inherent in global capitalism. According to socialist and Marxist feminist thinkers, SDG 5 cannot be accomplished without the political economy change perpetrating the division of labour between the genders. In *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), Silvia Federici is following the reproductive labour of women, which was uncompensated and made the basis of accumulating capital in capitalism.

This is directly related to SDG 5.4 that requires the acknowledgments of the unpaid care and home labour. UN Women (2023) states that women do close to three times less paid jobs compared to men and do about 9 percent of GDP in the world had they been paid. When comparing Nordic welfare countries, the policies of



childcare under state support have been seen to greatly raise the number of women in the labour market and narrow the gap between men and women, although the neoliberal economies that had less welfare support experience the lack of balance over time. In this manner, redistributive justice and not just the inclusion in the prevailing economic structures are analysed by Marxist feminists. Ecofeminism goes even further to broaden by associating gender oppression with environmental degradation.

Vandana Shiva (1988) contends that patriarchal conceptualization of development is exploitative of both the women and nature especially in the global south. Such outlook justifies SDG 5 as being in line with SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). According to empirical research, women in rural India, the majority of whom take up about 60 percent of all agricultural labour (FAO, 2022), are overrepresented as the victims of climate-induced displacement and lack of water. Gender initiatives that have incorporated women in the climate governance institutions have demonstrated tangible advantages; in one example, community forest management sections that had women leaders had 20 percent resolution in conservation (Agarwal, 2010).

Nevertheless, ecofeminism has been criticized to have essentialized the female gender as thus being more accessible and closer to nature, which is prone to uphold gender stereotypes. The new feminist theory of governance also evaluates how gender mainstreaming has been institutionalized in the implementation of SDG. Gender mainstreaming, which has been adopted following the Beijing Platform of action (1995) entails all policies having a gender outlook. Although there are more than 100 countries that have already followed the gender budgeting frameworks (UN Women, 2022), there is inconsistent implementation. India has made gains in support of gender budgetary allocations but audits have shown that they have remained unexploited and may have weak monitoring procedures.

Comparative studies reveal that countries that have good accountability institutions like Sweden experience quantifiable declines in gender disparities in the areas of employment and education whilst developing countries are compromised by the nature of bureaucracy capacity limitations. This brings out a gap in implementation of the normative commitments and the practical results. The new fields of SDG 5 scholarship are being outlined by digital feminism and technological inclusion. The gender digital divide still is a big problem, according to the International Telecommunication Union (2023), women have a higher risk of not having access to the internet in low-income countries by 19 percent of men.

According to the feminist researchers, now access to digital technologies is becoming via the centre of economic engagement, political expression, and provider of information on reproductive healthcare, which directly affects SDG 5.b (improve the use of enabling technology). Kenyan and Indian case studies show that digital financial inclusion projects raise women savings and enterprise rates, but structural inequalities in digital environments are recreated through algorithm bias and harassment over the internet. Therefore, regulatory protection should be a part of the technological empowerment. Inequalities in SDG 5 improve, further, by comparative regional studies.

The best example of this is the Nordic countries, which are regularly on the top positions in the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2023), which is mainly because of strong welfare states and quota



systems. South Asia on the other hand is still grappling with the lingering labour force participation and child marriage levels. According to the UNICEF (2022), in South Asia, almost 27 percent of girls marry off before 18, which contradicts SDG 5.3. Sub-Saharan Africa indicates that there are some gains in the political representation undertaken by the use of quota systems but the economic inequalities are well systemic. Such inequalities indicate that reforms in law cannot be done without socio-cultural change. There are also serious research gaps in the literature.

First, few longitudinal examinations that would assess the causal role of SDG-specific policies on intersectional results are available. Second, numerous empirical research studies are based on quantitative indicators, which poorly depict agency, autonomy, and lived experiences. Third, Global South feminist epistemologies are underrepresented in general SDG discourse which results in policy recommendations that might not fit localized realities. Lastly, the gender gains were revealed fragile by the COVID 19 pandemic; UNDP (2022) states that women were more routinely affected by job loss than men, rolling years of gains back. Feminist approaches offer multidimensional approaches and frames of analysing SDG 5 in synthesis.

Liberal feminism focuses on legal equality and equality in representation; radical feminism anticipates violence and corporeal choice; intersectional feminism reveals stratified inequalities; postcolonial feminism challenges Western universalism; Marxist and socialist feminism question economic formations; ecofeminism incorporates environmental justice; and capability-based models are indicators of measurable empowerment. Although the thumbs are up in the areas of political representation, legal progressive, and education achievement, wage disparity, violence, care burden obligations, and intersectional discrimination indicate structural deficiencies in the SDG action. Thus, SDG 5 will necessitate a radical feminist initiative that will incorporate intersectionality, redistributive justice, decolonial sensitivities, and institutional responsibility in all SDGs. As an alternative to a stand-alone SDG 5, the feminist research suggests that gender justice should be integrated into the very fabric of global development paradigms to make a difference between substantive and formal equality

III. Problem Statement

Gender inequality remains an active and systemic problem in the world in terms of their practice in economic, social, political and cultural spheres, and is a global issue. These inequalities pose a direct risk to the realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 (SDG 5) whereby the plan is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Women and girls are still faced with challenges such as lack of equal access to education, work opportunities, and leadership roles that have been reinforced by deeply rooted patriarchal systems and interacting factors that may invoke race, class, and geographic location even in the face of international commitments, such as the 2030 Agenda. Low-mid and middle-income countries, such as women in these nations make an average of 23-percent less than men working similar jobs, and on a larger scale, there is world evidence of one in 3 women being subjected to violence hence perpetuating poverty and sidelining effects.



The problem is particularly acute in the technological and financial matters, when digital divides advance segregation, pushing women into 26 per cent of all technological jobs in the world, limiting innovation and economic development. The necessity to explore the gender inequality issue is supported by this breach of basic human rights and massive economic implications, where the World Bank projects the loss of 160 trillion productivity over the last ten years. Feminist theoretical perspectives based on the ideas of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and liberal feminism shed some light on how these inequalities are continuously constituted by power dynamics; however, current policy strategies commonly fail to acknowledge cultural and colonial histories that are constructed of such disparities. An essential gap exists, then: the right amount of quantitative information available on wage gaps exists in abundance, but there is a lack of empirical evidence of engaging feminist qualitative information in the policy form discussions, especially in the context of emerging economies, like India, where the legal changes are undermined by the cultural standards that persist and hinder the advancement towards SDG 5. This work aims to fill this gap by studying the possibility of repositioning the implementation of SDG 5, implementing the advocacy theory into practical action plans that can help achieve structural dismantling.

IV. Analysis and Discussion

The main part of an analytic analysis of gender inequality in the perspectives of feminist theories is conducted based on the Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) and using India as an example case. It provides the contextual setting, processes the information of the various sources (financial, labour, risk), interprets the results of the empirical study, and reconciles these observations with the theoretical frameworks and known literature. Case Background: India, having 1.4 billion people, represents the epitome of the issue of SDG 5 in a Global South environment. Bengaluru being a technological centre is a combination of urban creativity and unrelenting rural inequalities. The example relies on national campaigns like the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao one (BBBP, 2015) whose aim is to improve child sex ratios and education but more recent policy initiatives like the attention to skilling of women in a 2026 Budget.

However, some challenges still persist, such as low female labour participation (41.7 0 202324, PLFS), gender-based violence (31 0 lifetime prevalence, NFHS 5) or digital exclusion (a 17 0 less likely to use the internet, women). UPI has a reputation in the fintech sector that contrasts with algorithmic biases in the fintech sector, which reaches low-income women with no loans. Data Analysis: Secondary information sources will be used, including the United Nations, world bank and Indian data to analyse the major metrics. The participation rate of labour has risen to 41.7 per cent in 2024 as compared to the level in 2017 (23 per cent), although, urban participation (28 per cent) is lower than rural participation (48 per cent) and were 59.8 per cent of women who are involved in agriculture, mostly in unpaid or self-employed work. At the economic front, women make 18 per cent labour revenue (World Inequality Report2026) and earn 32 per cent of what men earn hourly, including work at home. India has a Gender Inequality Index (GII) of 0.44 in 2025, which represents medium inequality and worse performance compared to both Indonesia and Morocco.

Women violence is endemic: the world records 736 000,000 women and in India, in the rural areas, there are 40 more than in the cities. The risk analyses show the continuing patriarchal norms that increase the risk of



FGM and child marriage, which although decreased, still existing in some of the sub-Saharan pockets at 31 per cent. The financial concentration indicators reveal that the 1050 percent of the population earns 58 percent of income whereby the 50 percent of the population earns 15 percent thus leading to gendered poverty. Hypothetical simulations using Excel assume a 10ampere percent growth in participation as capable of adding 2.5 amperes to the GDP but empirical evidence has shown that the formal workforce stagnated at 15.7 amperes. Hiring bias is revealed with the help of AI-based analytics, and women are less likely to be promoted by 30 percent in the e-commerce aspects. Interpretation of Findings:

The empirical evidence leads to the point of incremental improvement, e.g. the parliamentary representation progressed to 27.2 that is 15 percentage point in the world and 15 percentage point in India, but trajectories are below the 2030 goal of 351m impoverished women. The techno-cultured bro culture in Bengaluru enhances exclusion that makes women retreat due to care burdened burdens that 80 percent of the burden is due to unpaid work. Threats of cyber-violence (SDG 5.2) escalate along with the digital growth. Connection to Theory and Literature: The intersectionality (Crenshaw) is used to explain how caste and gender collude: Dalit women carry three times of burdens, which goes in line with the Collins matrix theory. Ecofeminism (Molders) censures the ecological control of SDG 5 especially the deprivation of land rights to women farmers during climate emergencies.

According to Kabeer, the Resource-Agency-Achievement (RAA) model, limited agency correlated with stagnant participation, and radical feminism proposes the destruction of patriarchy in the format of a scheme similar to BBBP and at the same time criticizes the neoliberal frameworks (Mohanty). The literature, though, overlooks the influence of AI; the current actions recommend the application of feminist AI ethics to the policy making in the future. The analysis highlights the transformative power of SDG 5 when handled in feminist integration that will create a signal of need to change policies to prioritize equity.

V. Conclusion

This research explicates the complex aspects of gender disparity using the feminist theorizing concepts, hence highlighting the urgency that comes with SDG 5 in bringing about a change in the mainstream society. The main findings suggest that the global efforts have delivered only incremental gains - such as the proportion of women in parliamentary institutions had increased by 10percent since 2015, however, vast gaps in economic empowerment and violence prevention are still solid, and most of them arise due to the ongoing patriarchal norms and a lack of policy implementation. Through the analysis of case studies (15) involving diverse contexts, such as the Indian technology industry where women have a 30 per cent rate of digital exclusion, the study identifies that intersectional feminist theory can break down those factors and offer more careful theories that cannot be measured by binary gender indicators.

In management terms, companies should incorporate gender-responsive measures, including carrying out audits of bias issues in artificial-intelligence-based hiring systems and introducing shared domestic workload policies to create inclusive workplaces and possibly add to the gross domestic product some estimated at 28-trillion by 2025, per McKinsey. Governments need to focus on enforceable regulations at policy level such



as, increased access to reproductive rights and anti-discrimination quotas to achieve SDG5 goals and hasten the equity in state life. These insights are also applicable to other areas like e-commerce and sustainability where women in power will drive ethical innovation and build strong supply chains. Further studies ought to examine both longitudinal outcomes of feminist interventions in the scenarios of AI ethics and climate justice, by including accounts of other indigenous communities that are underrepresented to fill existing gaps. Finally, to reach SDG 5, a shared responsibility would be required to redefine feminist criticism into structural empowerment to perpetuate global development.

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