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# Gender Equity in STEM Education: Trends, Barriers, and Transformative Strategies

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Women have been an integral part of India's culture and society since ancient times. However, in the modern era, they have often not received the status and treatment they deserve, and this has remained a matter of concern for many years. Although there has been measurable progress over the past decades, the world is still not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. Women and girls constitute half of the global population—and therefore half of its potential—yet gender inequality continues to persist worldwide, including in India, slowing the pace of social progress.

In recent years, India has witnessed several encouraging developments in efforts to empower women. The government has introduced a range of programmes and policies aimed at improving women's health, education, and economic opportunities. Women's participation in the workforce has increased, and many have attained prominent positions in politics, business, science, and entertainment. Despite these gains, significant challenges remain. Women in India continue to lag behind men on several socio-economic indicators, even after notable improvements since Independence. They still face discrimination, exploitation, and various forms of oppression.

Educational disparity remains a major concern. Female literacy, although steadily improving, has historically been lower than male literacy, and a smaller proportion of women pursue higher education. While girls often perform on par with boys at the school level, dropout rates among girls remain higher due to socio-economic factors such as parental preference for investing more in sons' education than daughters'. Women are also underrepresented in highly paid and high-value occupations. When both paid and unpaid work are considered, Indian women, on average, work longer hours than men. Although the Equal Remuneration Act mandates equal pay for equal work, wage disparities persist across sectors—from agriculture and manufacturing to sports and cinema—even when women perform the same tasks as men.

India has also struggled with the legacy of sex-selective practices that adversely affected the child sex ratio in earlier decades. Furthermore, many women continue to face harassment, exploitation, and violence in both domestic and public spaces. As UNESCO rightly emphasizes, gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world.

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