



An Analysis Of Gender Inequality In India

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Abstract

India is the fastest growing large economy and is the fifth largest economy in the world. However, India's economic growth is still restricted by rampant gender inequality. Gender inequality refers to disparity between men and women in the use of available resources, opportunities and power in social institutions. India is also the one of the youngest economies in the world. While most of the countries are ageing, India is still young. This opens the window of opportunity for India become a key leader in the global economy. But this is possible only through enhancing women's opportunities and their contributions to the Indian economy. Thus, gender inequality is not only a social problem affecting individuals but also an economic problem affecting the entire economy. It is to be noted that gender inequality consumes a significant share of India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) potential. This study aims to examine the impact of gender inequality in education, health, employment and political participation. The trends of gender inequality in these areas are analysed and suggestive measures are also put forward in this research.

Key words: Gender inequality, gross domestic product (GDP), education, health, employment, political participation.

INTRODUCTION

In India, Gender inequality is prevailing in various areas including employment, health, education and political participation. India's rank slipped down from 108 in 2018 to 112 in 2019-20 in Global Gender Gap Index, published by World Economic Forum (WEF). Gender Gap index is calculated in four key areas – education, economy, health and politics. India is ranked below China (106), Sri Lanka (102), Nepal (101) and Bangladesh (50).

Gender inequality affects not only individuals but also the entire economy. It impact India's sex ratio, women's health and their survival, their educational attainment and the entire economic condition of the country. In the past decade, while India's gross domestic product (GDP) has increased by 6%, there has been a huge cut in female labour force participation from 34% to 27%. According to International Labour Organisation (ILO), gender wage gap is highest in India where women are paid 34% less than men. Crimes against women has been burgeoning, especially brutal crimes like rapes, dowry deaths and honour killings.

When women are denied equality rights, the potential of half the population in building prosperous economies are wasted. Equal access to education, decent work and representation in political and economic decision making processes are fundamental human rights. According to UN Women report, in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries, half of the economic growth over the past 50 years is attributed to girls having better access to education, as well as increases in the number of years of schooling between girls and boys. The economic impact of achieving gender equality in India is estimated to be US\$700 billion of added GDP by 2025. According to the IMF study report, increasing participation of women in the workforce to the same level as that of men will increase India's GDP by 27 percent. Investing in women empowerment will also help to achieve Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals- Gender Equality.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the impact of gender inequality in India
2. To analyse the trends of gender inequality
3. To suggest measures to reduce gender inequality

GENDER INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION

Education is a significant factor to ensure gender equality and empowerment. According to Census of India 2011, only 65% of females can read and write while 82% of males are literates (Fig.1). This point to the gender disparity in education in India. Only Kerala and Mizoram have approached universal female literacy rates. In rural India, girls continue to be less educated than the boys. Due to traditional and patriarchal mindset, sons are considered as more useful and hence are educated. Females are supposed to do household works and help out on agricultural farms at home and these activities require no formal education. It is true that female literacy rate has improved from 54% in 2001 but there is still a long way to go in order to achieve equality.

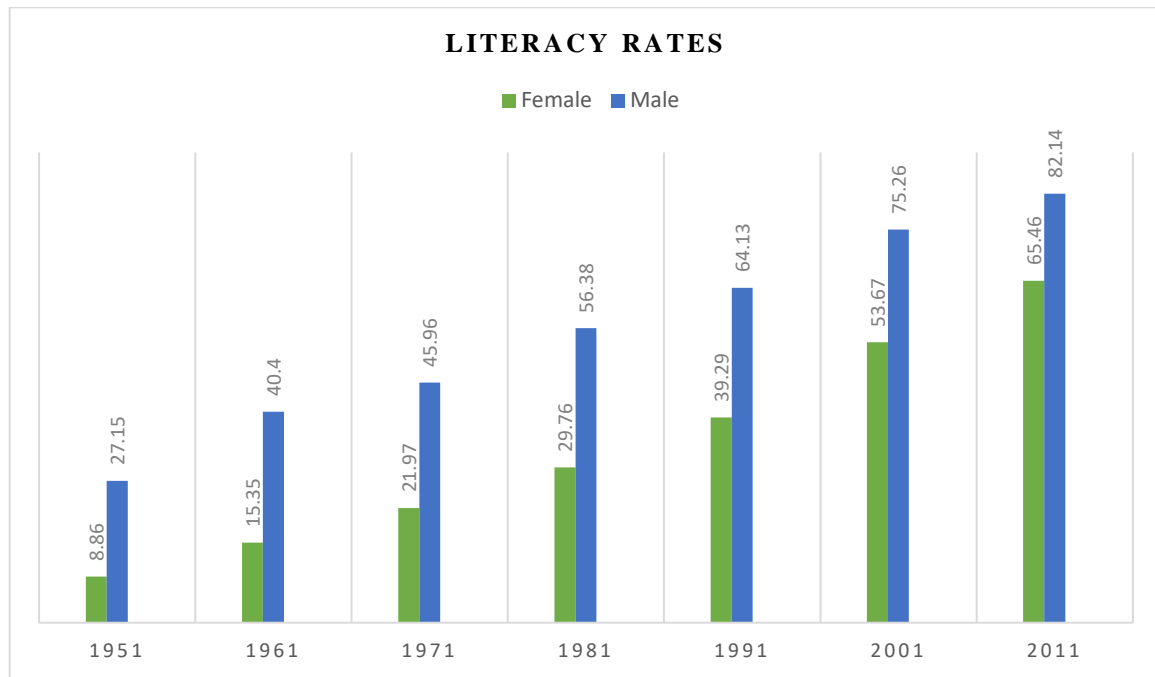


Fig.1. Source: Data compiled from Census 2011

Gender Parity Index in primary, secondary and tertiary education is the ratio of the number of female students enrolled at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education to the number of male students in each level. The gender parity index which was 0.76 in 1991 is 1 now for primary schooling. This means that in 1991 for every 100 boys in primary schools there were 76 girls, and now there are 100, i.e. complete parity. Enrolment has increased from about 65-70% to 99%. For secondary schools, the gender parity index has gone from 0.6 to 0.9 and for higher education, there is a rise from 0.54 to 0.8 in the same period. This reflect that with respect to enrolment, there is nearly complete parity in primary schooling and gender inequality still exists in secondary and higher education though the disparity has declined. However, of the enrolled students, many of the girls drop out compared to boys. Female students are spending less years in school than the male students. The mean years of schooling for girls is 4.7 years, whereas for males, it is 8.2 years. Girls often drop out after they reach puberty and their education is cut short. Of the 130 million 6 to 11 year-old children not in school, 60% are girls. Only 59% of primary school students reach grade five. Between 2006 and 2010, only 26% of girls completed secondary education, compared to 50% of boys. The exclusion of women is even greater at higher levels of education and professional training. This inequality between males and females is more striking among lower-income families.

Per 1000 distribution of persons (aged 5 years and above) by completed level of education

Level of Education	Male	Female
Not Literate	165	320
Literate		
Without Schooling	7	6
Up to Primary	349	319
Upper Primary	168	134
Secondary	128	96
Higher Secondary	85	62
Diploma	17	8
Graduation	64	42
Post-graduation and above	18	14
All	1000	1000

Table 1. Source: Data compiled from NSS 71st Round 2014

Some of the obstacles to female education in India are inadequate school facilities, shortage of female teachers and gender bias in curriculum as majority of the female characters being depicted as weak and helpless vs. strong, adventurous, and intelligent men with high prestige jobs. According to UNICEF, poverty and cultural beliefs that cause discrimination against girls are also major factors behind gender inequality in education throughout India. Lack of sanitation in schools across the country is also a barrier to female education. In many schools, there aren't separate toilet facilities for girls. This push many girls to leave schooling altogether. Sexual harassment and violence also continue to be major constraining factors preventing parents from sending their daughters to school.

As noted by Mehrotra (2006), low levels of education significantly affect the health and nutritional status of women. For instance, in the case of India, he notes that chances of suffering from the diseases caused by malnutrition decrease steadily with increased levels of education.

GENDER INEQUALITY IN HEALTH

There exists gender disparity in accessing health care in India. Gender stereotypes also prevent women from voicing their health problems. Gender-based discrimination adversely affect women's health in India. Poor condition of women is revealed through availing nutritious food, prevalence of anaemia and nutritional status of women. Women's autonomy has been determined by 3 areas- financial control, decision making power and freedom of movement. Females with greater freedom of movement received higher level of antenatal care.

According to National Family Health Survey-3 (NFHS-3), 36 % women in India have chronic energy deficiency (CED) and 13% women are overweight. CED is more prevailing among rural women, illiterate women, women with low standard of living and women who don't consume proper nutritious food.

Discrimination against women in the allocation of food and healthcare within household is also a major factor for poor health condition of Indian women compared to men. According to NFHS-3, females consume less nutritious food than males. Many studies have found that men visit hospitals more frequently than women as the latter are entitled to lower share of household resources. There is also gender discrimination in the utilization of immunisation. It is also found that women under-report their illness due to cultural norms and gender expectations within the household.

Rural women's difficulty in accessing health services is also attributed to shortage of healthcare facilities nearby their home. Women have difficulty in travelling to far away hospitals. Moreover, two-third of the health workers in the country are men. In rural areas, only 6% of the doctors are women. Thus geographic bias within the current healthcare system also cause gender disparity in accessing health services.

Gender discrimination begins before birth as females are the most commonly aborted sex in India. Son preference has resulted in excessive female foeticide and infanticide in the country. Deaths of girls under 5 years of age is 18% higher than among boys. Estimates point out that "of the 15 million baby girls born in India each year, nearly 25% will not live to see their 15th birthday". Sex-selective abortion is also prevailing in India despite of laws made to eliminate such practises. All these factors led to low sex ratio as well as low and declining child sex ratio. Sex ratio refers to ratio of females per 1000 males in the population. It is an important social indicator to measure the extent of prevailing equity between men and women in a society at a given point of time. India's sex ratio has declined from 946 in 1951 to 940 in 2011 (Fig.2). It is below Sri Lanka, Nepal and Myanmar. Child sex ratio is defined as the number of females per 1000 males in the age group 0–6 years. In the census 2001, the child sex ratio of India was 927 which declined to 919 in the census 2011. This clearly shows the alarming face of gender inequality and its impact on the health and survival of women and girls in India.

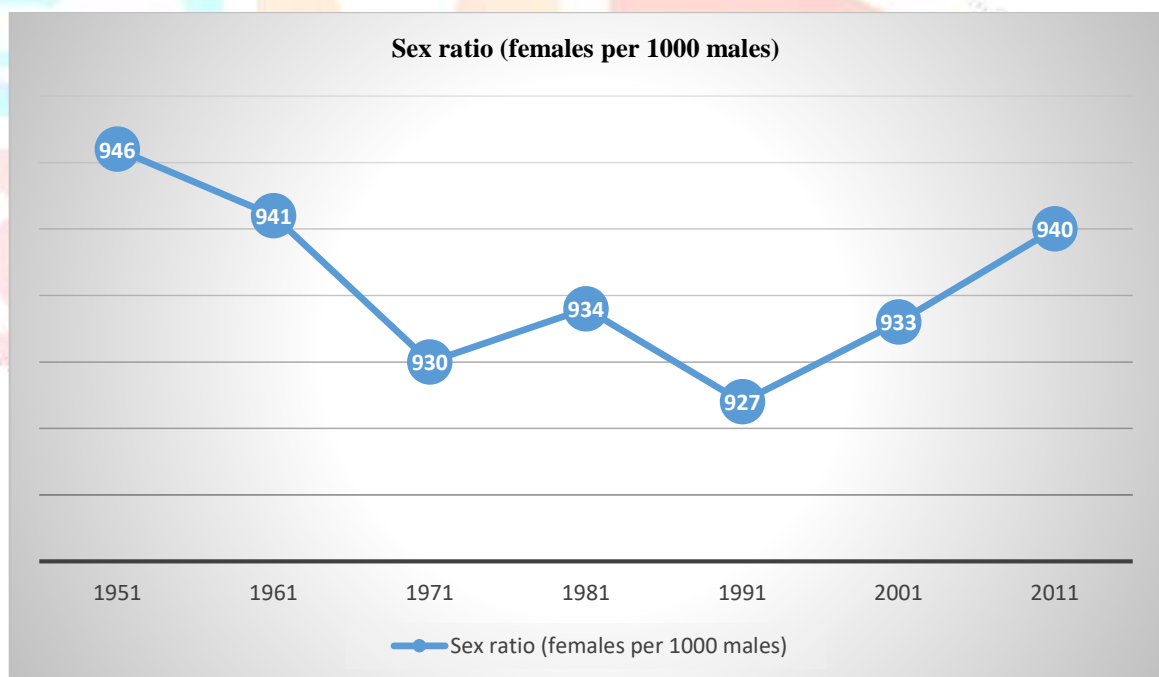


Fig.2. Source: Data compiled from Census 2011

GENDER INEQUALITY IN EMPLOYMENT

A country's economic development depends on participation of its women as they constitute around 50% of its human resources. However, in India, women's economic participation is poor in the last few years. There has been a huge decrease in the labour force participation of women and it was below world average. Even with the rapid economic growth, less than a quarter (23.6%) of Indian women aged 15 and above participated in the labour force in 2018 (compared to 78.6% of men). Also, more than half of the work done by women in India is unpaid, and almost all of it is informal and unprotected.

Women are not well represented in most sectors, including business leaders. Though they comprise almost 40% of agricultural labour, they control only 9% of land in India. Women also lacks access to formal financial system. Nearly half of India's women do not have a bank or savings accounts for their own use, and 60% of women have no valuable assets to their name. Thus, the share of Indian women's contribution to GDP is 17% which is much lower than the global average of 37%.

Moving to regional and demographic differences in the female workforce participation rate, rural women have higher participation rates than their urban counterparts. Also, married women, less educated women, and women from higher castes are less likely to participate in the labour market.

Female labour force participation (FLFP) rate is less than half that for men in both rural and urban areas. Secondly, while men's labour force participation (LFP) rates are the same in rural and urban areas, there is wide disparity by location in FLFP (24.8% rural and 14.7% urban) (Table 2). Thirdly, while men's LFP rates remained stable at 54 per 100 men during this period, the FLFP, except in 2004-05, has fallen. In 2011-12, FLFP had declined to 21.9 per 100 women from 28.4 in 1993-94. The decline was reflected across all caste groups. For Scheduled Tribe (ST) women in rural areas FLFP declined from 48% to 36%, and among Scheduled Castes (SCs) from 35 to 26%. In urban areas, for ST women FLFP declined from 23 to 19% while for women from SCs it declined from 23 to 17%. The FLFP rate among SC/ST women was higher compared to other women as due to higher poverty levels, more women are compelled to work. Moreover, they face lesser social restrictions on mobility.

Workforce Participation Rate

Year	Rural		Urban	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
2000-2001	28.7	54.4	14.0	53.1
2001-2002	31.4	54.6	13.9	55.3
2002	28.1	54.6	14.0	53.4
2004-05	32.7	54.6	16.6	54.9
2005-06	31.0	54.9	14.3	54.0
2007-08	28.9	54.8	13.8	55.4
2009-10	26.1	54.7	13.8	54.3
2011-12	24.8	54.3	14.7	54.6

Table 2. Source: Data compiled from Census 2011

Another impact of gender inequality in employment in India is gender pay gap. Gender pay gap is the average difference between the remuneration received by working men and women. According to the latest Monster Salary Index survey, the current gender pay gap in India stands at 19%, where men (Rs 242.49) earned Rs 46.19 more in comparison to women (Rs 196.3). The data shows gender pay difference widening with higher skill level - while there is no gender pay gap in semi-skilled work, the gap touches 20% for skilled women and 30% for highly skilled occupations. The gap increases with experience and is highest at 15% in favour of men for talent with 10 and more years of experience.

Unemployment and underemployment rates are higher among women than among men. The same is true of educated women. Among tertiary education graduates "the rate of unemployment was less than 9% for men but 27% for women". Lower literacy rates have resulted in fewer women in employment categories which require higher educational and professional training. Tamil Nadu Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra show much "higher rates of work participation than the major northern and eastern states". Nationally, women only make up 18% of the formal sector and only 9.2% of employed women hold full-time positions, compared to 18% of employed men.

There are a number of reasons for this, ranging from a lack of jobs growth in female-friendly sectors such as manufacturing; more women staying in education for longer, and the cultural expectations that married women should not go for work and prioritize household work and care work. Another factor keeping women out of the workforce is the wider problem of violence against women. Male preference and consequently low care for females leads to inadequate health and education opportunities, from a very young age. Improper nutrition and lack of education impede women's participation in the work force.

Women's employment is critical for enhancing efficiency and productivity of the economy, as well as for the innate reason of women's empowerment. According to Lewis (1954), the transfer of women's work from household to commercial employment is one of the most notable features of economic development.

GENDER INEQUALITY IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation of women can be measured in three different dimensions: their participation as a voter, their participation as an elected representative and their participation in the actual decision making process. India's first elections were held during 1951-52 period. However, the state of representation of women in the country's decision making process continues to be dismal. Until now, India has had only one prime minister and one female president. 18 states of India, i.e more than half of the total number of Indian states have never had a female chief minister. There are only 78 women members, constituting 14.4% of the total members in Lok Sabha. In case of Rajya Sabha, there are only 22 women members, which is barely 10.3% of its total number of members. According to a report by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch (NEW), there are only 9% women MLAs and MPs across the country in 2019. Out of the total 29 states in India, 7 states had no female representation in the Parliament. The seven states are Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim.

India has witnessed increase in the representation of women in the parliament from 4.4% in the first Lok Sabha election to 14.4% in the 17th Lok Sabha election (Fig.3). Nonetheless, the participation of women in politics is still unsatisfactory as they do not constitute even half the number of male members in the parliament. While 2019 Lok Sabha elections witnessed the highest number of women candidates securing seats in the lower house of the Parliament, equal representation of women in Parliament still has a long way to go. According to the data released by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, India is ranked 98th in women's participation in politics. This shows that with regard to female participation in politics, India lags behind many countries, including our neighbours Pakistan and Nepal.

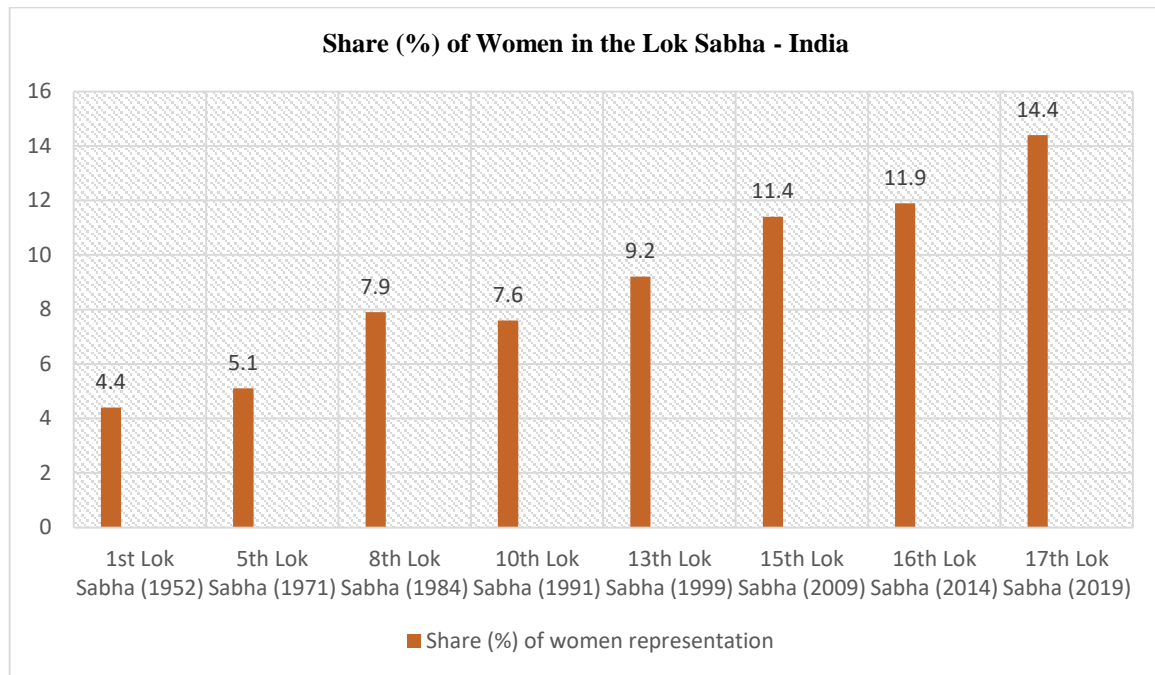


Fig.3. Source: Data compiled from the website of Parliament of India

A study has found that while there is indeed a revival at the grassroots level, the representation of women is still very minor at higher levels of decision-making. Despite all the economic and social structural hurdles, some organized and unorganized women's groups are taking initiatives in political and social fields.

The 73rd and the 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 which provided for reservation for women in one-third of positions in local institutions at all levels, have been a major step towards the political empowerment of women. 175 district panchayats, more than 2000 block panchayats and about 85000 gram panchayats are headed by women. Some states, such as Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh, have more women members than the statutory 33% of all seats. It is also found that the southern states perform better in promoting leadership among women compared to the northern states. In some states there are all-female Panchayats doing commendable work, especially in the field of primary education.

Despite of the fact that the new Panchayati Raj institutions have brought women into local governance institutions, political empowerment is unable to flourish because of male-dominated political process, institutions, social structures and norms. Women's representation remains extremely limited at higher institutional and decision-making levels. In contrast to this large gender gap in candidacy, there is no gender gap in voting in India, with women turning out to vote at the same rates as men in state and national elections after 2010.

There are many impediments for political participation of women in India. The major challenges are sexual abuse and discrimination. Though Dalit women are given reservation, they are forced to stand out from elections by threats of violence. The second major challenge is illiteracy. Many women in India are unaware about their rights and laws. They also have little knowledge about the macro level problems of the economy resulting in other people making their decisions for them. Thus even though women vote, their decision is widely dominated by the male population. Lack of confidence and finance were the other major deterring factors that prevented women from entering politics. The economic survey for 2017-18 mentions that factors such as domestic responsibilities, prevailing cultural attitudes regarding roles of women in society and lack of support from family were among main reasons that prevented them from entering politics.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. Gender inequality in literacy and education is declining but far more to go for achieving parity. Enrolment rate at primary education level is the only area where gender parity has achieved. There is also falling trend in gender inequality in enrolment at secondary and higher education. Gender disparity is increasing at higher levels and is the highest at higher education level. Though gender disparity in enrolment rate is largely narrowing, the gap between men and women is higher with regard to completion of education at different levels.
2. Sex ratio is an area where gender gap has widened compared to 1951. But sex ratio started improving since 1991. But child sex ratio is still worsening in India.
3. There is disparity between men and women in work force participation rate both in rural and urban areas and it is greater in urban areas. Female labour force participation rate is more in rural areas compared to urban areas. The labour force participation rate of women varies in rural and urban areas while that of men is almost same in both.
4. Political participation of women is continuously increasing but still it is not even half the participation rate of men.

SUGGESTIONS

While it is significant to increase representation of women in the public spheres, an attitudinal shift is essential for women to be considered as equal within their homes and in broader society. Educating Indian children from an early age about the importance of gender equality could be a meaningful start in that direction.

Moreover, girls and boys should be treated equally and be given equal opportunities to explore their capabilities. Social campaigns and advertisements can be used to enhance the awareness about gender equality. Government schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao is

implemented on this direction. This will help to improve female literacy rate and education qualification. Government shall collaborate with private sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to ensure infrastructure facilities for increasing education among girls. Availability of quality education within the neighbourhood especially in rural areas and ensuring safer and cheaper transportation of children from home to school and back can help girls from remote areas and from marginal families, differently abled girls to access education facilities. Separate clean toilets for girls and availability of water in schools are also essential to reduce gender inequality in education. Also, increasing the number of well-qualified female teachers in schools will prompt parents to send their daughters to schools.

With regard to health, gender equality is quintessential not only for the physical and mental well-being of women but also for their children. This will also determine the health of the future generation. Providing cash incentives on birth of girl child as implemented through Balika Samridhi Yojana will help to reduce female foeticide, infanticide thereby improving the sex ratio. Increasing awareness about the correlation of mother's health and child's health and the need to allocate food and resources equally to boys and girls are required to improve healthcare among women and girls. Accessibility to cheaper, nearer and quality healthcare facilities will help to improve women's health. Provision of free nutritious food through anganwadis and schools can help to arrest malnutrition among girls. It is also significant to increase the number of female doctors, particularly in rural areas. Entrance coaching and scholarships can be given to girls in order to incentivise them to choose medical education for higher studies.

Moving to female participation in work, the involvement of private sector and business community will be crucial to bridge the gap between skills and jobs and enable access to decent work for women. Vocational and technical training, life skills and financial literacy programmes for women to help them develop marketable skills and better decision-making abilities can be undertaken through the cooperation of industry. Women entrepreneurs can be promoted by providing them easy access to cheaper credit and by bringing their goods and services into supply chains. It is equally significant to invest in women's security against violence at home and in public spaces, and take steps to ensure their mobility through inclusive transport. Changing social norms about gender equity and women's work is paramount, and awareness programmes and affirmative action policies may help to eliminate gender stereotypes. The 2017 Maternity Benefit Act which increased paid maternity leave may persuade women to not to leave their job after motherhood. Enhancing women-friendly quality job opportunities and guaranteeing gender wage parity will also boost female labour force participation rate in India.

Finally, India cannot be politically empowered until it has equal representation of men and women in both the houses. This alone will not solve the problem which also need a change in our ideology about women leadership. The competency of women candidates can be developed through political mentoring and training programmes which prepare them for political work and enhance their political skills. State funding of initiatives promoting women's participation in political parties. These initiatives hold seminars, training events, lobby to get more women elected, and provide networks for women politicians. A law can be introduced mandating all registered political parties to nominate a certain proportion of women party candidates in the elections. There is also need to reduce violence against women in politics in order to promote women leadership. In this regard, it may be helpful to establish an emergency telephone system for women candidates and voters to call if they experience threats and a tracking system to monitor police response to calls. Similarly, regular reliable data on women's representation is necessary to track progress and identify challenges and successes. Media Collaboration can also be beneficial in increasing political participation of females. Ensuring good coverage in the media, whether in television, radio, social media, digital or print media, increases the impact of awareness-raising. Use public service announcements, television programs, radio shows to spur public dialogue about women's empowerment, training, and promoting positive images of women leaders. Also voter education programmes to women and men citizens, including why women should vote and how family support for household and child care responsibilities can help women be active in politics will be helpful in improving awareness about the necessity of increasing political participation of women.

CONCLUSION

Gender inequality can be seen in multiple areas of the Indian economy. The study found that gender inequality in India is declining in most of the areas except in child sex ratio but there is still a long way to go. Females spend greater proportion of their income on their family and the financially independent women boost demand, have healthier and better educated children, and raise human development levels. Gender equality is a precondition for overcoming major challenges of Indian economy including reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development. Reaching gender parity would have a bigger impact in India than in any other region in the world. India's youthful demographic will add 234 million workers to the labour force by 2027. India's labour force will soon become the largest in the world. By 2027 the working-age population in India will be almost 20% (18.6%) of the entire global labour force. However, in order to achieve this, it is imperative to utilize the potential of women in India.

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