



# Gender Equality in India: Bridging the Gender Gap for Delivering Sustainable Development Goal

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## Abstract

The United Nation has adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in General Assembly Session held on 2015 which is a blueprint for sustainable living which each country need o achieve by 2030. These SDGs are interrelated and attainment of one can also help other goals to achieve. Gender equality is one of the critical issues for sustainable future which has been addressed by UN in SDG 5. It has four dimensions like provision of quality education, economic opportunities, health and survival issue and political participation empower women. The present study focuses on India's status on these four dimensions and also over all position in delivering SDG 5. Secondary data is used to understand India's position at all dimensions. The result indicates that though India is performing well, the gender gap in India has widened to 62.5% because of inadequate women's representation in politics, technical and leadership roles, decrease in women's labor force participation rate, poor healthcare, lagging female to male literacy ratio, income inequality.

**Keywords: Equality, Development, Goals, Sustainable, Women,**

## 1. Introduction:

Gender inequality is a critical economic challenge. In spite of decades of efforts in making women equal partners with men in the economy and society, the gap between them remains large.

Vigorous measures and policies undertaken by governments failed to end gender discriminations because of its deep root in society.

According to Andrew Mitchell<sup>1</sup>, “ the nations where women and girls are treated as inferior to men and boys, a vicious circle of limited education, poor employment opportunities, ill health, forced marriages and all too frequently violence and exploitation can be established and perpetuated. Focusing more support on girls offers an opportunity to replace that vicious cycle with a virtuous one that puts women at the heart of their families and their communities. As a result, women are able to bring in money to their families, get involved with local enterprises, and make sure their children are educated. These are vital agents of change”.

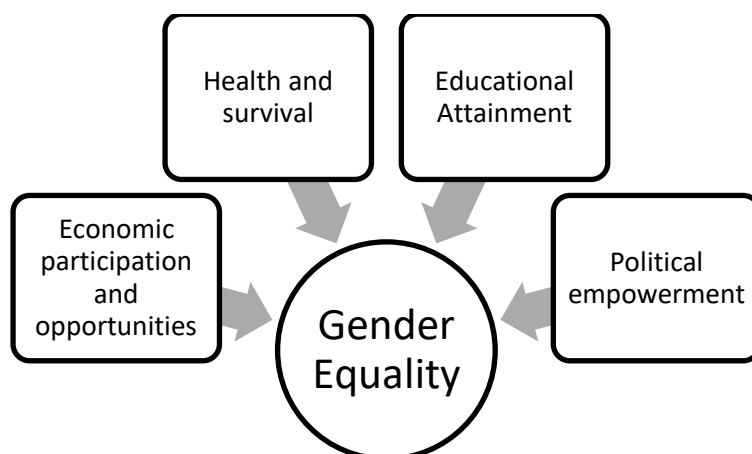
SDG 5 Gender Equality is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) originated in 2015 when United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the document titled "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". SDGs are the blueprint and a guiding force to achieve a better and sustainable future for all. The SDGs are universal means same for all nations whether they are developed, developing or the least developed.

Although SDGs are not legally binding for any nation, these are de-facto international obligations. The uniqueness of SDGs is its inter- relation and interdependence which requires comprehensive and participatory approaches. Countries are primarily bestowed responsibilities to devise and monitor the progress and achievement of goals at national level to head towards more equitable, peaceful, resilient, and prosperous by 2030.

SDG 5 is meant to eliminate all sort of discrimination against women and girls by providing them equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision making processes, essential for sustainable future.

McKinsey Global Institute (MGI)(2015) report<sup>2</sup>, "The power of parity: How advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth" reveals "If women-who account for half the world's working-age population—do not achieve their full economic potential, the global economy will suffer. While all types of inequality have economic consequences, can add \$12 trillion to global growth, we focus on the economic implications of lack of parity between men and women".

Another measure- the Global Gender Gap Index<sup>3</sup> was introduced by World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2006 to benchmark world's progress towards gender parity to make comparisons among countries gaps on four dimensions: economic opportunities, education, health and political empowerment.



The Global Gender Gap Report<sup>3</sup> 2021 (WEF) reveals "the health emergency and the related economic downturn have impacted women more severely than men, partially re-opening gaps that had already been closed. The Global Gender Gap score (based on the population-weighted average for each of the 156 countries included this year) in 2021 is 67.7% (when considering only the 107 countries covered

continuously from 2006 to 2021 it is 68.0%). This means that the remaining gap to close stands at 32.3%. On average, the gap has widened by almost 0.6 percentage points compared to the previous edition of the index. Out of the 153 countries and economies covered both this year and in 2020, 98 have improved their score while 55 have regressed or stalled”.

Education is one of the important factor which can help women to fight against all forms of discrimination but it should be addressed effectively with multi-perspective approach as Dr. Urvashi Sahni (2017)<sup>4</sup>, founder and chief executive of Study Hall Educational Foundation and author of “Reaching for the Sky: Empowering Girls Through Education”, in an article published by Brookings, said:

“Education, especially for girls living in poverty in countries like India, is an extremely complex undertaking: it requires a multi-perspective approach to be understood and addressed effectively. If we want education to mitigate the harm caused to the girl by nexus of poverty, violence, child labor, early marriage, abuse within and outside families, and lack of care and nutrition, then we need to look closely at the important perspectives of those who are most affected by the issues and problems—i.e., girls themselves, their parents and their teachers. As we get closer to daily lives, we better understand complex concepts of power, hegemony, difference, and equality. Large, complex social problems are played out in this mundaneness of daily life. While the macro perspective provides useful information, locating problems and solutions in larger social and economic structures, showing also the magnitude of the problem, such discussions are inadequate. Girls’ lives and voices get lost when research and arguments center on enrollment, dropout, completion, and achievement rates, even though the discussions are supposedly about them.”

### **Objective of the study:**

Gender equality, the fifth SDG is one of the important goal which itself has different dimensions and has potential to achieve other SD goals as all the goals are interrelated. The present study has been conducted with following objectives;

1. To study the global gender gap index and sub index.
2. To compare India with other Asian countries on various dimensions of gender gap index.
3. To examine the progress of women in attaining quality education in India.
4. To examine the progress of women in Economic participation and opportunities.
5. To examine the status of women in field of health and survival.
6. To examine the progress of women in field of political empowerment.

**LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Sustainable Development Goals 5 deals with gender equality aims to secure all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere.

The population of females in the world is estimated 3.905 billion, representing 49.58% of the total world population. Women equality is essential for the achievement of human rights but discriminations against them are prevalent all over the world. They get less opportunity to get education, access to health facilities, have less freedom to take decisions and less likely to be economically independent which can be an impediment for country's economic development.

Education is the stepping stone to empower women, improving their status within the family and develops the concept of participation thus reducing discrimination.

Research study by Lawrence et al<sup>5</sup> (2009) showed "compared to women of higher educational attainment, women of lower educational attainment had less control over their families' food choices, showed less support for attempts to eat healthy, fewer opportunities to observe and learn good food-related practices, more perceived environmental constraints, and more ambiguous beliefs about the consequences of eating a nutritious diet".

A report(2021)<sup>6</sup> published in Mint titled "How India fared in Global Gender Gap Report 2021" disclosed 62.5% widening of gender gap due to inadequate representation in politics, lacking of technical and leadership role, decreased participation in labor force, poor healthcare, less literacy and inequality in income. The report further revealed "it will take 135.6 years to bridge the gender gap worldwide and the pandemic has impacted women more severely than men. The gap is the widest on the political empowerment dimension with economic participation and opportunity being next in line. However, the gap on educational attainment and health and survival has been practically bridged"

Female literacy is negatively related with fertility rates, population growth rates, infant and child mortality rates and shows a positive association with female age at marriage, life expectancy, participation in modern sectors of the economy and above all with female enrolments (Usha Nayar<sup>7</sup>,2004).

Chibber B<sup>8</sup>. (2010) opines that lack of political and economic powers add to the subservient and unequal position of women.

According to World Bank<sup>9</sup> estimates, India is among the nations having lowest female labor force participation rates in the world which has worsened over a period of time resulting deep fall from 26% in 2005 to 20.3% in 2019.

Kingdon & Unni<sup>10</sup> (2001) use data from the different parts of the developed and developing countries and revealed high level of wage discrimination in the labor market.

The study conducted by Madheswaran & Attewell<sup>11</sup> (2007) revealed more pronounced occupational discrimination than wage discrimination among Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste social groups.

Many researchers like Blau & Kahn<sup>12</sup> (1994), Cotton<sup>13</sup> (1988), Neumark<sup>14</sup> (1988) Reimer & Schroder<sup>15</sup> (2006), Biltagy<sup>15</sup> (2014), reported that relatively low salaries for women is because of continued discrimination.

Tushar Agrwal<sup>16</sup> (2013) also studied gender and social groups wage discrimination in India and found large wage gap between gender groups and different social groups. Analysis disclosed “the wage differential between males and females was largely attributable to discrimination in the labor market. However, in case of social groups this gap was mostly due to differences in endowments”.

Another study conducted by Indrani Chkroborty and Achin Chakraborty<sup>17</sup> (2009) revealed narrowing of the overall earning differential between men and women.

Duraisamy & Duraisamy<sup>18</sup> (2016) examined the gender wage gap in India and concluded that “gender wage gap had declined over time across the wage distribution and there was evidence of convergence of productive characteristics of men and women”.

According to a report<sup>19</sup> published in The Economic Times, Indian women earn 19% less than men where men earn Rs249.49 which is Rs 46.19 more than women who earn Rs 196.3. The report further reveals the widening of gap with higher skill level which reaches 20% for skilled women and 30% for highly skilled occupations. It worsens with experience and is highest at 15% in favour of men for talent with 10 and more years of experience, showed the MSI index. “Sectoral analysis of the gender pay gap (GPG) showed that wage inequalities in favour of men are present in all the relevant sectors including IT/ITES services (26%); manufacturing (24%); healthcare, caring services and social work (21%). Financial services, banking and insurance is the only industry where men earn just 2% more”.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is based on secondary data collected through census report available on various websites of World Statistics, World Economic Forum United Nation Report and Indian government websites.

## DATA ANALYSIS:

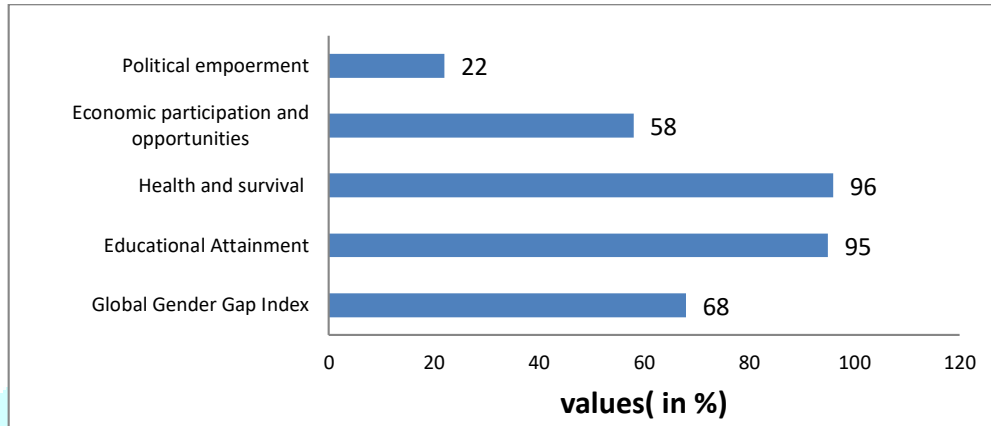
### 1. GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX AND SUB INDEX :

The Table No 1 shows overall Global Gender Gap Index and Global Gender Gap sub index on different dimensions of gender equality. On examining the Table it is found that overall Global Gender Gap score is 68% which reflects that still there is gap of 32% which need to be closed. It is remarkable that till now no country has achieved full gender parity. The top two countries (Iceland and Finland) are able to close 85% of their gap, and another seven countries (Lithuania, Namibia, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Rwanda and Ireland) have closed at least 80% of their gap. The Global Gender Gap score of India is 62.5. The same result is represented in Fig No 1.

**Table No 1- Global Gender Gap Score And Sub Index Score**

Dimensions	Values( in %)
Global Gender Gap Index (overall)	68
Educational Attainment	95
Health and survival	96
Economic participation and opportunities	58
Political empowerment	22

Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2021, WEF

**Fig No 1 -Global Gender Gap Score and Sub Index Score**

The overall global gender gap scores across the four main components (sub indexes) of the Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment is 58%, 95%, 96% and 22% respectively which suggest that the overall gap on political empowerment is too less need to be improved. However the situation in health and survival and educational attainment is satisfactory.

## **2. COMPARISON OF GENDER GAP INDEX OF INDIA WITH OTHER ASIAN COUNTRIES ON VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY:**

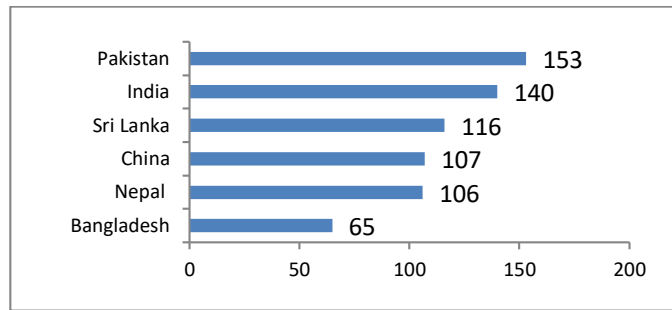
### **i. Ranking of Asian nations on Gender GAP Index (2021)**

Since the inception of the report in 2006, progress towards gender parity has advanced at different relative levels and speeds across the world. Table No 2 reveals ranking of India and other Asian countries on over all gender Gap. The table shows that India slipped 28 places and is one of the worst performers in south Asia. Now It secured 140 ranking which was 112 in 2006. The table also shows that Bangladesh, Nepal, China and Sri Lanka did fairly well than India.



**Ranking of Asian nations on Gender GAP Index (2021)****Table No 2**

Countries	Rank	Scores
Bangladesh	65	0.719
Nepal	106	0.683
China	107	0.682
Sri Lanka	116	0.670
India	140	0.625
Pakistan	153	0.556

**Fig No 2**

Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2021, WEF

**ii. Comparison of Ranking of Asian Nations on Global Gender Gap Sub Index 2021:**

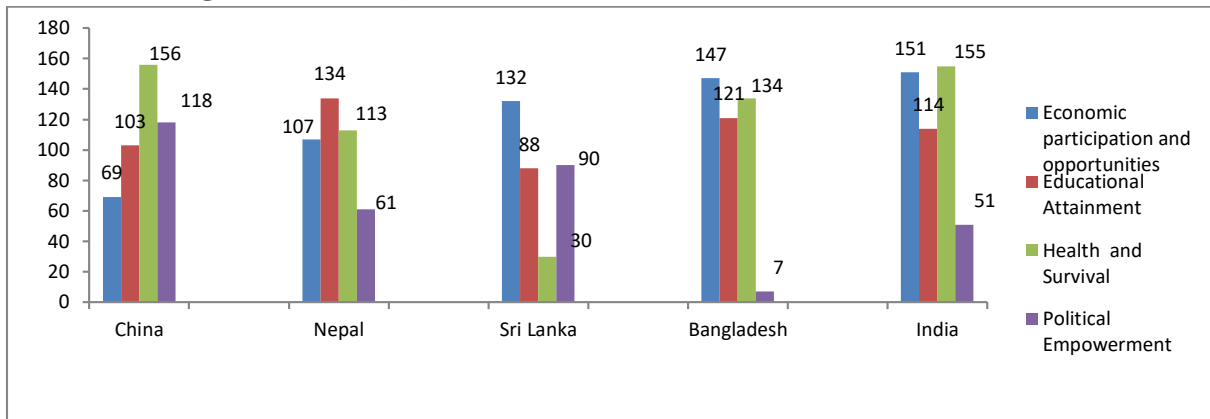
Table No 3 and Fig 3 deal with the comparison of India with other Asian nations on the basis of ranking on different parameters of gender equalities like social and economic participation, education, health and survival and political participation. Examining the table No 3 it can be concluded that China ranked highest on economic participation and opportunities and is at 69 positions followed by Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh ranking 107, 132 and 147 respectively. India ranked 151 out of 156 nations which is a miserable position. On educational aspect, India is a 114 position, trailing China and Sri Lanka who are at 103 and 88 rank respectively.

It is the third-worst performer among South Asian countries. The report states that the country fared the worst in political empowerment, regressing from 23.9% to 9.1%. Its ranking on the health and survival dimension is among the five worst performers. The economic participation and opportunity gap saw a decline of 3% compared to 2020, while on the educational attainment front India is in the 114th position. India rank on health and survival parameter is 155 followed b China which is a 156 position. However Sri Lanka scored beer position occupying 30th rank. As per as political participation is concerned Bangladesh ded fairly well snatching 7h position followed b India with 51 rank . Nepal ranked 61 and Sri Lanka 90 rank out of 156 countries.

**Table No 3 - Ranking of Asian nations on Gender GAP Sub Index (2021)**

S. No	Countries	Economic participation and opportunities	Educational Attainment	Health and Survival	Political Empowerment
1	China	69 ( Score- 0.701)	103 ( Score- 0.973)	156 ( Score- 0.935)	118 ( Score- 0.118)
1	Nepal	107 (Score-0.630)	134 (Score-0.895)	113 (Score-0.965)	61 (Score-0.241)
2	Sri Lanka	132 Score-0.547)	88 Score-0.988)	30 Score-0.980)	90 Score-0.167)
3	Bangladesh	147 (score-0.418	121 (score-0.951)	134 (score-0.962)	7 (score-0.546)
4	India	151 ( Score- 0.326)	114 ( Score- 0.962)	155 ( Score- 0.937)	51 ( Score- 0.276)

Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2021, WEF

**Fig No 3- Ranking of Asian nations on Gender GAP Sub Index (2021)**

### 3.PROGRESS OF WOMEN IN ATTAINING QUALITY EDUCATION IN INDIA.

Equipping girls with education can help them to fight against gender discrimination. The literacy rate of men and women in India and thus women –men disparity index has improved over period

**Table no 4 -Progress of women in attaining quality education in India**

Year	Male Literacy (%)	Female Literacy (%)	Women-men disparity index
1901	9.83	0.60	6.10
1911	10.56	1.05	9.94
1921	12.21	1.81	14.82
1931	15.59	2.93	18.79
1941	24.60	7.30	29.67
1951	27.15	8.86	32.62
1961	40.40	15.35	38.00
1971	45.96	21.97	47.41
1981	56.38	29.76	52.78
1991	64.13	39.29	61.27
2001	75.26	53.67	71.31
2011	80.89	65.64	79.91
2018	82.36	65.79	79.88
2019	84.7	70.3	83.03

Source: <http://mospi.nic.in>

of time which is being represented in table No 5. The table shows the improvement in female literacy which has increased from 1.05 % in 1901 to 70.3% in 2019. Similarly disparity index which is calculated by following formula:

Per cent literates in women

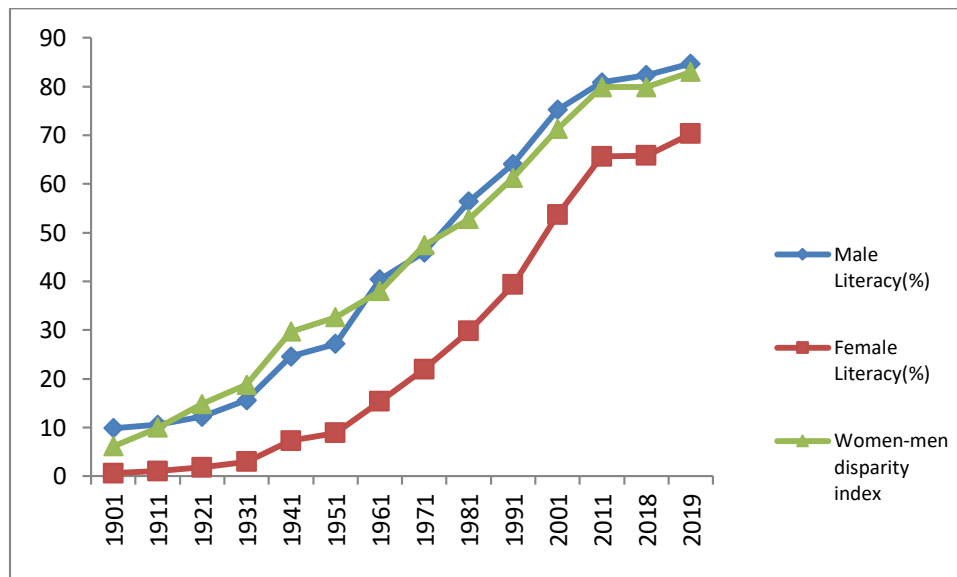
Women-men Disparity Index=\_\_\_\_\_x 100



## Per cent literates in men

The index shows that over period of time women literacy rises relative to men. If the value reaches to 100, then there will be no variation in literacy among women and men. “Any deviation from 100 is the measure of disparity between women and men literacy “(Bhujimali<sup>20</sup>, 2004). The table-3 showing the literacy of men and women is rising. And it is clear that the women literacy is faster than the men literacy indicating reduced disparity over a period of time.

**Fig No 4 -Progress of women in attaining quality education in India**



According to the report on United Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) 2019-20 for School Education in India, the Gross Enrolment Ratio and the Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) at all levels of school education has improved in comparison to 2018-19.

#### 4. PROGRESS OF WOMEN IN ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND OPPORTUNITIES

##### I. Labor Force Participation Rate

Labour force refers to the part of the population which supplies or offers to supply labour for pursuing economic activities for the production of goods and services and therefore, includes both ‘employed’ and ‘unemployed’ persons. Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) is defined as the percentage of population in the labour force.

Table no 5 shows the percentage of female labor force which shows that here is continuous decrease in the female participation which may be due to restrictive cultural norms regarding

**Table no 5: Labor Force Participation Rate**

Year	Labor force, female (%)
2009	23.70
2010	23.03
2011	22.11
2012	21.22
2013	21.01
2014	20.85
2015	20.65
2016	20.49
2017	20.34
2018	20.20
2019	20.31
2020	20.30

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/>

women's work, the gender wage gap, an increase in time spent for women continuing their education, and a lack of safety policies and flexible work offerings. (Aditi Ratho, 2020)

## II. Gender Pay Gap (GPG):

Gender wage inequality is a significant socioeconomic hindrance in developed as well as in developing countries

According to a report<sup>14</sup> published in The Economic Times, Indian women earn 19% less than men where men earn Rs249.49 which is Rs 46.19 more than women who earn Rs 196.3. The report further reveals the widening of gap with higher skill level which reaches 20% for skilled women and 30% for highly skilled occupations. It worsens with experience and is highest at 15% in favour of men for talent with 10 and more years of experience, showed the MSI index. "Sectoral analysis of the gender pay gap (GPG) showed that wage inequalities in favour of men are present in all the relevant sectors including IT/ITES services (26%); manufacturing (24%); healthcare, caring services and social work (21%). Financial services, banking and insurance is the only industry where men earn just 2% more".

## 5. WOMEN IN FIELD OF HEALTH AND SURVIVAL:

Sustainable Development Goal 5- the gender equality can be achieved only when girl child are able to survive which is reflected in sex ratio of country. The table No 6 shows the sex ratio of country which shows that it was 946 in 1951 and it decreased to 930 per thousand live birth in 1970 but it increased to 943 in 2011 census and in 2021 is reported 1020 in recent report which is overwhelming.

**Table no 6 – Sex Ratio**

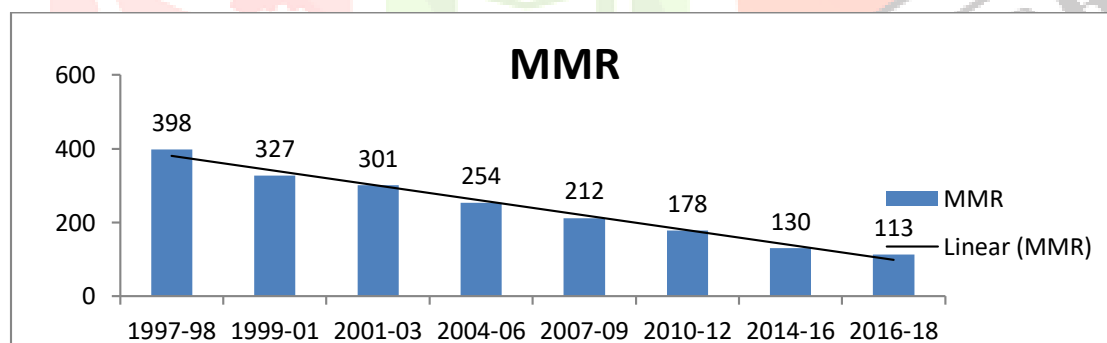
Year	Sex Ratio
1951	946
1961	941
1971	930
1981	934
1991	927
2001	933
2011	943
2021	1020

Source: Census India

Table No 7 deals with Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) which is decreasing every successive year showing better health facilities.

**Table no 7 – Maternal Mortality Rate and Life Expectancy  
Gender Wise**

Year	Maternal Mortality Rate
1997-98	398
1999-01	327
2001-03	301
2004-06	254
2007-09	212
2010-12	178
2014-16	130
2016-18	113

**Fig No 5 –Maternal Mortality Ratio in India**

## 6. PROGRESS OF WOMEN IN FIELD OF POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

Political participation is also one of the parameter o bridge he gender gap. The Table No 7 shows the number of candidates contesting in Lok Sabha election and the number of women MPs in parliament.

The Table reveals that though the number candidates contesting for lok sabha is increasing, its percentage to total candidates is very nominal. It increases from 2.96 in 1957 election to 5.76 in 1998 election and 8.77 in 2019 election. Similarly percentage of women MPs in parliament has also improved, reached 14.6 percent in 2019 election from 4.50 percent of 1957 election. As far as number of women ministers in parliament is concerned, the scenario is very pathetic as it is very low. The highest no of women minister are 14 in

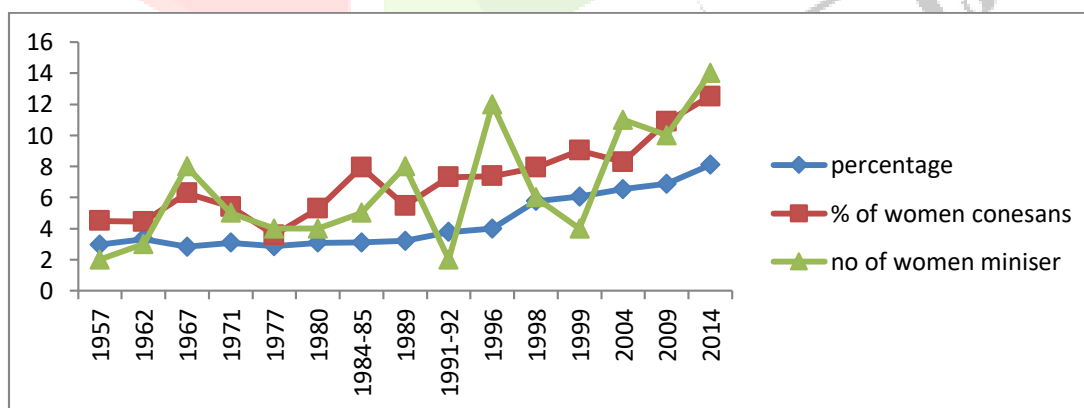
2014 which reduced to 10 in 2019 and is one of the cause of slippage of 28 position from 112 o 140 in gender equality index globally.

**Table No 8 -Political Participation of Women in Lok Sabha**

Year	Women Candidates	% of women Candidates	Number of women MPs	Percentage of Women MPs	No of women ministers in union council of minister
1957	45	2.96	22	4.50	2
1962	66	3.32	31	4.45	3
1967	67	2.82	29	6.28	8
1971	86	3.08	28	5.41	5
1977	70	2.87	19	3.58	4
1980	143	3.08	28	5.29	4
1984-85	171	3.10	43	7.95	5
1989	198	3.21	29	5.48	8
1991-92	330	3.77	39	7.30	2
1996	599	4.00	40	7.37	12
1998	274	5.76	43	7.92	6
1999	284	6.06	49	9.02	4
2004	355	6.53	45	8.29	11
2009	556	6.88	59	10.87	10
2014	668	8.09	66	12.51	14
2019	716	8.77	78	14.6	10

Source: Factly - from the statistical reports of the Election Commission of India.

**Fig No 6 –Percentage of women contestants ,MPs and women ministers in Lok Sabha**



Source: Factly - from the statistical reports of the Election Commission of India.

## CONCLUSIONS:

SDG 5 Gender Equality is essential for sustainable future of societies which can be achieved

Only through empowering women by providing quality education to girls irrespective of any worst condition, making them economically independent by allowing their equal participation at work place without any gender pay gap. The well being of women is one of the essential features as healthy women can not only take care of family but also the asset for society. Their political participation is equally important.

The present study has following conclusions:

1. The Global Gender Gap score of India is 62.5 it means that there is still 31.5 % gap needed to be addressed. The top countries are having gender gap score 95%. It means still a long way to go.
2. India is doing fairly well in the field of education and health as their scores are 95 and 96 but in field of political participation we are still lagging and the score is only 22%.
3. As far as quality educational attainment is concerned, India's performance is better than ever as female literacy improving which is also reflected in gender parity index. The Gross Enrollment Ratio is also improving at every level due which India is heading toward gender equality at one front.
4. In spite of labor law reforms for ensuring gender neutrality in workplaces, wide gap still persists in labor force participation and wage gap between male and female women focused government policies are required to come at par.
5. Fifth National Family Health Survey 2021 reveals that the proportion of women exceed men; there are 1020 women for 1000 men.
6. The share of women legislation in Lok Sabha has reached 14.39 % in 2019 election but is still worse than global average that is 24.6% and is still too far from 33% of women representation in politics.

**POLICY IMPLICATION:** Government has started several programs for women social protection and financial inclusion. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao has brought awareness and improved the efficiency of welfare services intended for girls. The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana is also providing the social protection through maternity benefits to women. Such type of initiatives is required from government front to ensure full participation of women in all walks of life and end the gender inequalities and meet the sustainable Development Goal 5.

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