

Gender Inequality in India: Women's Representation in Economy, Politics and Judiciary

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Abstract: Gender is a societal construct that transcends biological distinctions, influencing roles, behaviors, expectations, and identities that affect how individuals perceive and interact with the world. Achieving gender equality is a fundamental human right and a crucial foundation for fostering a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable society. Given that women and girls constitute half of the global population, realizing their full potential necessitates addressing ongoing gender inequality. This paper examines the role of women in several key sectors, including economic participation and decision-making within the country. The analysis of the Labor Force and workforce participation rates reveals significant disparities in women's participation, with minimal contributions from women in one of the critical sectors. This paper evaluates the factors contributing to this issue and suggests potential measures that could be implemented to enhance the situation at the national level. Additionally, this paper addresses women's involvement in decision-making, where their representation remains markedly low compared to men. Data indicates that in 2024, there are still only seven women ministers in the central council of ministers and 106 women judges in the Supreme Court and High Court.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Reservation, Decision Making, Gender Gap

1. Introduction

According to the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report 2024, the global gender gap score is 68.5%, which does not indicate a good situation. According to this current data, it will take 135 years to achieve complete gender parity. Southern Asia ranks seventh in gender parity index, with a score of 63.7%. When we compare India's position with 146 countries worldwide, we find that India ranks 126th, which is a decrease in gender score compared to 2023, which is disappointing. The group of countries that are at the bottom in terms of economic parity. India is included in these 6 countries: Bangladesh, Sudan, Iran, Pakistan, India, and Morocco.

Women's economic empowerment is important for achieving gender equality and fostering inclusive growth. Gender equality means equal access to decent work, social protection, education, resources, and active participation in economic and political decision-making. In India, women's household participation is still very high compared to their economic and political participation.

As far as the issue of gender inequality is concerned globally, in India, it is still widespread on a large scale; in some sectors, the gender gap is very significant, such as in workforce participation and political decision-making. However, there has also been improvement in many sectors, such as in the gross enrolment ratio in primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels. These figures still show a gender gap, especially at the higher secondary level.

The 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation reiterated that "Women in every part of world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack

of access to health care, and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women".

The participation of women in decision-making leads to inclusive growth of a country, and it prioritizes the demands of half the population of a country like India, where the female population is fifty per cent of the total population, but their representation in political decision-making is insignificant.

2. Objectives

- 1) To analyse the trends in workforce participation among women aged 15 years and older in India.
- 2) To evaluate the current state of gender inequality and socio-economic status of women in India.
- 3) To review the status of female representation at various decision-making positions such as legislation and Judiciary.

3. Literature Review

- 1) Gender inequality is a widespread social concern that pertains to the unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. In India, this inequality is evident in various areas such as education, employment, health, and political engagement. Despite constitutional assurances and a multitude of policies designed to foster gender equity, entrenched patriarchal norms continue to obstruct advancement.
- 2) Chakravarti (2003) and Forbes (1996) trace the origins of gender inequality in India back to ancient texts and colonial regulations, which established male supremacy and reinforced strict gender roles. The transition from matrilineal to patrilineal systems in numerous Indian communities represented a notable decline in women's status.

- 3) Kingdon (2002), the educational gender gap is shaped by elements such as poverty, parental attitudes, and the state of school facilities. Although the last few decades have seen a rise in the enrolment of girls in educational institutions, dropout rates remain alarmingly high, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2023) underscores ongoing disparities in learning outcomes between boys and girls.
- 4) Despite economic growth, women's involvement in India's labour market has paradoxically decreased. Klasen and Pieters (2015) contend that societal norms, safety issues, and a lack of flexible job opportunities limit women's access to the workforce. Furthermore, the wage disparity persists, with women earning, on average, 20–30% less than their male peers for equivalent work (ILO, 2020).

4. Methodology

This study is based on secondary data taken from the report on women and men in India. Various aspects were covered in the endeavour to project the picture of inequality. We have studied and reviewed various research and review articles and websites of respective ministry of Government of India relevant to our study.

5. Results and Discussions

Labour Force Participation Rate

The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) is a critical indicator of an economy's health, closely tied to its capacity

for sustained and inclusive growth. Women's participation in the labour force, however, is influenced by a complex mix of economic and social factors operating at both household and broader societal levels.

Table 1: Labor Force Participation Rate for Age Group 15+

Year	Male	Female	Total
2019-20	76.8	30	53.5
2020-21	77	32.5	54.9
2021-22	77.2	32.8	55.2
2022-23	78.5	37	57.9
2023-24	78.8	41.7	60.1

Source: Annual Report, Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS), National Statistics Office, Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation.

$$\text{LFPR} = \frac{\text{No. of Employed Persons} + \text{No. of Unemployed Persons}}{\text{Total Population}} \times 100$$

Table 1 shows that the LFPR in usual status for ages 15 years and above has improved from 53% in 2019 to 60.1% in 2024. In all years, the female labor force participation rate was lower than that of males, showing Gender inequality in the labor force participation rate. The female participation rate has increased from 2019 to 2024, as it has recorded its highest in 2024, which is still much lower than that of their male counterparts.

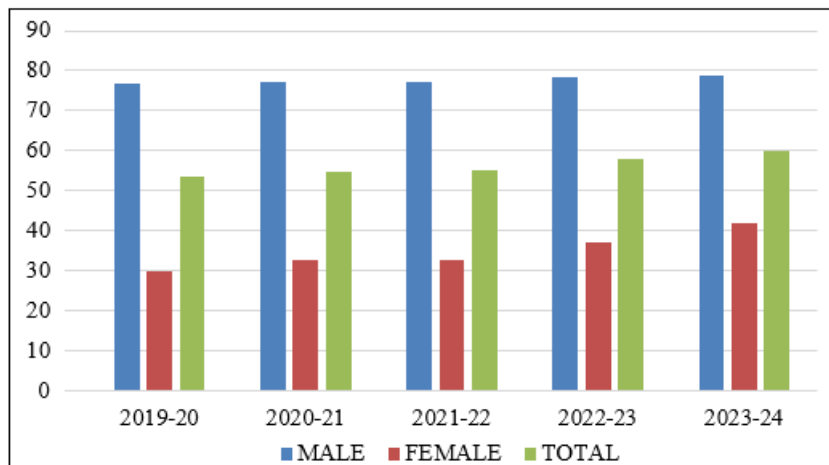


Figure 1: Labour force Participation Rate

6. Work Population Ratio

Table 2: Work Population Ratio in usual status for persons of age 15 years and above

Year	Male	Female	Person
2019-20	73	28.7	50.9
2020-21	73.5	31.4	52.6
2021-22	73.8	31.7	52.9
2022-23	76	35.9	56
2023-24	76.3	40.3	58.2

Source: Annual Report, Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), National Statistics Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

The work population ratio is an important indicator for evaluating a country's economic landscape. The work population ratio shows the proportion of the population actively engaged in the production of goods and services, which is the percentage of employed individuals within the total population. Work Population ratio for males increased from 73% in 2019 to 76.3% in 2024, and the corresponding figures for females increased from 28.7% in 2019-20 to 40.3% in 2023-24, which is a higher growth for females and states increasing proportion of females in economic participation rather than household participation. The work population ratio for females increased for rural and urban females as well.

7. Participation in Decision making.

Table 3: Persons Contesting and elected in various Lok Sabha Elections

Lok Sabha Election	Year	Total Number of Seats	Males Elected	Females Elected
1	1952	489	467	22
2	1957	494	467	27
3	1962	494	459	35
4	1967	520	490	30
5	1971	520	499	21
6	1977	542	523	19
7	1980	542	514	28
8	1984	542	500	42
9	1989	529	502	27
10	1991	521	484	37
11	1996	543	503	40
12	1998	543	500	43
13	1999	543	494	52
14	2004	543	484	45
15	2009	543	484	59
16	2014	543	481	62
17	2019	543	465	78
18	2024	542	468	74

Source: Election Commission of India & Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi

Women's participation in decision-making is crucial for a country's development and progress. The table shows that in every Lok Sabha election, there is a significant increase in the total number of seats, in which a higher proportion of seats are elected by males, and the female elected seats is negligible. From the year 1957 onwards, the situation became somewhat the same as it was earlier. There is a very large gender gap between the number of males elected and the number of females.

The data represents a very small number of seats, which means in 1957, out of a total of 494 seats in the Lok Sabha, only 27 females were elected that year, which is a very low representation of women after the independence which signifies the lack of awareness to their rights, which is simply related to the gender gap in education level, lack of opportunities, continuous struggle for their survival

Between 1957 and 1967, the number of women elected to seats increased very little, but after 1967 till 1980, it decreased to only 28. In the year 1977, it was only 19, which shows the decreasing number of seats. In 1984, this number again increased a little to 40, which was still not even ten per cent of the total number. In 1989, this number again decreased to only 27. In the year 1991, the number of seats reduced to 521 and the number of women elected seats became 37, which again shows a nominal increase. If we look, there is a huge difference in the number of male elected seats and female elected seats, which shows gender discrimination. There has been a continuous increase in the number of women selected for seats since 1991, but by the year 2024, this number has not reached even 100 seats. We are ensuring the participation of women in every sector, but still, the representation of women in decision-making in our country is very low. In 2019 figures show the highest elected seats by women with 78 seats, which is the highest representation of women, having 78 seats.

Table 4: Representation of Women in the Central Council of Ministers

Year	Total Number of Ministers	Number of Women Ministers
2020	54	5
2021	78	11
2022	76	11
2023	73	10
2024	72	7

8. Representation of Women Judges in Judiciary

Table 5: Women Judges in Supreme Court and High Court as of 2024

Total Number of Seats	Male	Female
753	647	106

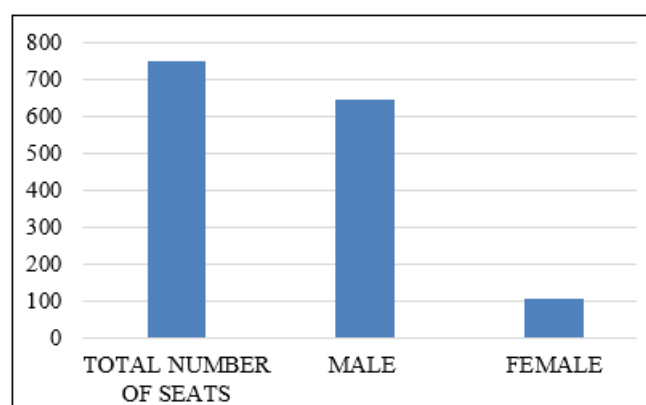


Figure 2: Women Judges in Supreme Court and High Court

The female representation in the Supreme Court and the High Court is significantly low. The figure shows a comparative analysis of the number of male and female judges and their role in decision-making positions. It eliminates the female perspective in decision-making. What would their thinking be, what should be the decision, which is not by their perspective, and we find this gender gap in every aspect in India.

9. Conclusion

To conclude, gender inequality continues to be prominently visible in economic participation and political representation in India, underscoring the need for women to engage actively in these areas. Notably, 33% of seats have been allocated for women, which is a vital measure that will empower women who wish to enter politics.

Despite progress, the representation of women in decision-making bodies remains relatively low, increasing from 22 in the first Lok Sabha to 74 in the 17th Lok Sabha. And the women Judges combined in supreme and high court are accounting for 106 seats out of 647 seats, which projects a grim picture of current status of gender disparity in India.

10. Suggestions

Government must focus on women empowerment aspect during the policy formation with some specific areas of focus such as workplace environment, healthcare facilities, inclusion in education, stringent laws against discrimination,

safety and security, sector specific policies, Furthermore, improving the representation of women in judicial roles is necessary, as it will encourage other women to pursue similar paths.

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