



# Reality of Gender Equality in India: Challenges to Achieve Un Sustainable Development Goal Five.

Subhra Protim Pramanick

Assistant Professor

Department of Political Science

Panskura Banamali College (Autonomous), Panskura, India

**Abstract:** Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. The UN sustainable development goals approved by the UN general assembly in September 2015 to secure all round development to the marginalized and maintain environment sustainability. Women have a vital role in development and environment sustainability therefore their participation is essential to achieve sustainable development. Gender Equality is a fundamental human right as well as it is necessary for Sustainable World and it is a significant goal of Sustainable Development Goals. Indian women always remain underprivileged group in accessing the economic, political and socio-cultural rights because of the patriarchal nature of Indian society. Therefore, the focus of the paper is to explore the present scenario of Gender Equality in India in comparison to the other countries of the various parts of the world. The study is exploratory and analyzed qualitatively by using secondary data resources. The paper is expected to help policy makers and civil society to understand the significance of Women Empowerment and Gender Equality in the successful implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in India.

**Index Terms** -Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals, Gender Equality, Human Right, Women Empowerment.

## Introduction:

Gender Equality is a goal in its own right but also a key factor for sustainable development. By providing the same opportunity to men and women in all kinds of activities, a sustainable path of development can be achieved. In India, women suffer from much repugnant social practice, religious editions and rights from ancient time due to her low literacy rate, less decision-making power or work opportunity than men. This situation give rise to the dependency of women consequently. Due to this dependency, they became a burden and less valued in the family. Women, construct approximately half of the world population and so the case with India. So, making women empowered is the main concern of almost all development policies of a country.

## Objectives:

- To highlight the schemes of Government of India for the protection and empowerment of Women.
- To understand the present scenario of Gender Equality in India in comparison to other countries.

**Methodology:**

The method of this paper is descriptive and analytical. In this paper data are collected from various secondary sources, which includes, Census of India, Gender Inequality Index Report, Global Gender Gap Report, Human Development Index Report, Employment – Unemployment Survey conducted by the Labor Bureau, Women in Politics Map published by UN Women and IPU and other existing literature.

**The Concept of Empowerment:**

Empowerment can be defined as a “Multi – dimensional social process that helps people to gain control over their own lives”. According to Cambridge Dictionary the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you.

Women are facing troubles in many aspects of their lives as they less empowered than men, various study proved it. In India, we can observe it in every aspect be it Social, Political and Economic. Thus, the concern for empowerment specially for women gaining more and more popularity gradually. According to United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia, Women’s empowerment is the process by which women become aware of gender-based unequal power relationships and acquire a greater voice in which to speak out against the inequality found in the home, workplace, and community. It involves women taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, solving problems, and developing self-reliance. The crux of the definition given by the UNESCWA, meaning of women’s empowerment is gaining more power and control over their own lives. according to UN Population Fund, an empowered woman has a sense of self-worth who can determine her own choices and has access to opportunities and resources.

**Gender Equality:**

As we are about to discuss the concept of ‘Gender Equality’ we should aware about the meaning of Gender and Equality. According to WHO, Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behavior and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. According to World Food Program, Equality is the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities. Gender Equality is a situation when and where women enjoy the same rights in every aspect of life as man gets. While the world has made great strides towards gender parity and women's empowerment, women and girls continue to suffer widespread discrimination and violence particularly in conflict settings. In most societies it is noticed that there are inequalities between women and men still exists. unequal access to education, health care, work opportunities and leadership positions has made women live like outliers in society. Gender equality on the other hand boosts economies, benefits society, contributes towards eliminating hunger and is a crucial foundation for a peaceful and prosperous country and a sustainable world.

**The Concept of Sustainable Development:**

What we observe at present as ‘Sustainable Development’ was changed gradually from the notion ‘development’. The concept of ‘Sustainable Development’ can be understood clearly by the definition acknowledged in the report ‘Our Common Future’ which is also known as Brundtland Report published by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. The report defined the concept as, “Development which meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Sustainable Development contains two concepts. One is “needs” in particular the essential needs of the poor people around the world and another one is the concept of “limitations or restrictions” over the use of natural resources by the state of technology and social organization to meet the demand of present and future generations. There are three core areas i.e. economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection need to be harmonized for achieving sustainable development.

**Sustainable Development Goals:**

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the goals adopted by the General assembly of United Nations on 25th September of 2015 which came into force from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016. The SDGs have 17 goals and 169 targets with a plan of achieving its aims by 2030. As a signatory member of the plan India is committed to achieve the objectives of this plan by 2030.

The MDG stands for Millennium Development Goals, a set of eight international development goals adopted by the United Nations in 2000, with measurable targets and clear deadlines for improving the lives of the world's poorest people, aiming to eradicate poverty and hunger by 2015. The SDGs were the further 15 years

extension of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Care has been taken by the United Nations to integrate the MDGs with SDGs. SDG 1,2,4 and 8 are related to the goal of MDG 1. SDG 2 and 3 has common characteristics with MDG 4 and 5. SDG 4 is related to MDG 2. SDG 5 is related to MDG 3. SDG 6,7,9,11,12,13,14 and 15 all are related with MDG 7. SDG 17 has the common relation with MDG 8.

### Schemes of Government of India for Gender Equality:

'Mission Shakti', an Integrated Women Empowerment Program, is the Umbrella Scheme for the Safety, Security and Empowerment of Women of the Government of India for implementation during the 15th Finance Commission period from 2021-22 to 2025-26. It aims at strengthening interventions for safety, security and empowerment of women in a mission mode through convergence and institutional mechanism. Mission Shakti has two sub-schemes - 'Sambal' and 'Samarthya'. While the "Sambal" sub-scheme is for safety and security of women, the "Samarthya" sub-scheme is for empowerment of women.

Their components are as follows:

- [A] Sambal– (1) One Stop Centres, (2) Women Help Lines, (3) Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, (4) Nari Adalats.  
[B] Samarthya– (1) Shakti Sadans (homes for women victims of destitution and trafficking), (2) Sakhi Niwas (working women hostels), (3) PMMVY, (4) Palna (creches), (5) NHEW (national, state and district level hubs for empowerment of women).

The total outlay of the sub-schemes under Mission Shakti is Rs. 20989 crores with Central Share of Rs. 15761 crores. The sub-scheme of 'Sambal' will be implemented as a Centrally Sponsored scheme with 100% central funding from Nirbhaya Fund/ MWCD budget with provision for direct release of funds to the District Collector or the concerned Directorate/ Commissionerate in State/ UT. The sub-scheme 'Samarthya' will be implemented as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with funding ratio of 60:40 between Centre and State Governments / UTs with legislature; and for NER and Himalayan States and the UT of Jammu & Kashmir, the funding ratio will be 90:10. For UTs without legislature, 100% funding will be provided by the Central Government.

**Table 1. Schemes of Government of India for Gender Equality**

Components of the Sambal Sub Scheme	Details
<b>One Stop Centres (OSCs)</b>	Provide support of temporary shelter, and medical, police, legal and psychological support under one roof. 770 OSCs have been operationalized across the States/UTs. These are proposed to continue. Further, under Mission Shakti, 263 more OSCs will be opened in districts with high rate of crime against women or large geographical area based on the demands from the States/UTs.
<b>Women Helpline</b>	Women Helplines are already running on telephonic shortcode 181-WHL in 35 States/ UTs. They work in tandem with OSCs and connect to various institutional setups for safety and security of women. Under Mission Shakti, the WHLs will connect to all institutional and statutory, schematic and institutional setups pertaining to women. Their linkages with other helplines will also be strengthened.
<b>Beti Bachao Beti Padhao</b>	Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) is the clarion call of our Hon'ble Prime Minister for social, cultural and mindset change for safety, empowerment and dignity of women and girls from a lifecycle continuum perspective. It will be extended from the present 405 districts to all districts of the nation under Mission Shakti.

<b>Nari Adalat</b>	Nari Adalat will be a new component under the Sambal sub-scheme of Mission Shakti. These will be women's collectives to promote and facilitate alternative dispute resolution and gender justice in society and within families, taking learnings from their success in Gujarat.
<b>Components of the Samarthya Sub Scheme</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Shakti Sadan</b>	Shakti Sadans will be the main schematic set up providing homes and institutional support for empowerment of women facing destitution of any kind, including through recovery, rehabilitation, repatriation and reintegration of such women, including women victims of trafficking.
<b>Working Women Hostel as Sakhi Niwas</b>	Working Women Hostels will run as Sakhi Niwas under Mission Shakti, and 50 new hostels will be operationalized under the Mission to run on rental model, responding to demands and locational requirements of working, rather than on building construction.
<b>Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)</b>	The Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) will now run under Mission Shakti as it pertains at its core to women's empowerment. It was earlier a part of the Umbrella ICDS Scheme. Its aims will continue to be to provide for wage loss compensation to and to promote health seeking behaviour amongst pregnant and lactating mothers and their newborn.
<b>National Creche Scheme</b>	The National Creche Scheme for children of working mothers will run as the component named Palna under Mission Shakti. Most of the creches under this component will run at Anganwadis in order to make the best use of already available governmental resource. However, where there is a demand for a creche and an anganwadi is not there, it will be possible to open standalone creches also. Earlier, this scheme was also under Umbrella ICDS Scheme.
<b>National Hub for Empowerment of Women</b>	The component called National Hub for Empowerment of Women will have national, state and district level set ups for (i) drilling down the implementation and monitoring of all components of Mission Shakti; (ii) convergence of all schemes and initiatives of central and state governments for enhanced results for empowerment, security and safety of women, (iii) research, publication, gender budgeting etc.; (iv) gap funding for empowerment of women.
<b>Nirbhaya Fund</b>	The Government has set up a dedicated fund – Nirbhaya Fund – which can be utilized for projects specifically designed to improve the safety and security of women.

### Present scenario of Gender Equality in India on the basis of SDG India Index 2023-24:

To track the progress of SDGs in India, SDG India index and Dashboard was released in 2018 by Niti Aayog in partnership with the UN in India and UNDP in India. Since then, it has become an important tool to monitor the progress of States and UTs and instill a competition. The States and UTs are ranked on a composite index for each of the goals separately and on a combined index for all the goals. In addition to ranking States and UTs, these reports also highlight the country level performance on each goal.

SDG India Index 2023-2024 reflects India's advancements across various goals, underpinned by the Prime Minister's emphasis on 'Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas'. The composite score for India improved from 66 in 2020-21 to 71 in 2023-24. This indicates that the country has accelerated progress on the SDGs despite various global hindrances. But goal 5(Gender Equality) of Sustainable Development Goals demands special attention, as the overall country score is below 50 since the inception of SDG India Index. Goal 5 calls for ending all form of discrimination, violence and exploitation against women and girls because it is basic human right for women and girls as well as it is pre-requisite for sustainable development.



Nine national level indicators have been identified to measure India's performance towards the goal of Gender Equality. Nagaland and Lakshadweep are the top performers among the States and UTs, respectively. Four States namely, Kerala, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and one UT namely Lakshadweep bagged a position in the category of front runners. Twelve States and two UTs fell behind in the aspirant's category with the index score less than 50.

### Present scenario of Gender Equality in India on the basis of Gender Inequality Index 2025:

Every Human Development Report is a voyage of discovery, exploring how the human development approach helps to navigate pressing challenges and emerging opportunities. Gender Inequality Index is an important standalone index of this report. This is calculated by Human Development Report Office of United Nations Development Program to reach the extent of inequality in Gender.

Gender Inequality Index, presents a composite measure of gender inequality using three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labor market. The reproductive health indicators are maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rate. The empowerment indicators are the percentage of parliamentary seats held by women and the percentage of population with at least some secondary education by gender. The labor market indicator is participation in the labor force by gender. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) ranges from 0, where women and men are equal, to 1, where inequality exists in all measured dimensions. A low GII value indicates low inequality between women and men, and thus the higher the GII value represents more disparities between women and men. The GII value for India as per Human Development Report -2025 is 0.403 and standing at One Hundred Two (102) rank among 193 countries. In India, the measure of Reproductive Health is arrived through using maternal mortality rate and Adolescent birth rate which are 103 deaths per one lakh births and 14.1 births per thousand women respectively. On empowerment, the index measures the extent of seats filled in by women in parliament which is 14.8 percent in India. Educational attainments as empowerment measure is also taken into account which is measured by the extent of completing secondary education, the same stands at 43.5 percents for females and 61.1 for males. Economic activity as an indicator of development is measured by labour market participation, the same for Indian males and females are 76.4 percent and 35.1 percent respectively indicating a wide inequality between women and men.

In comparison with the average GII values of the world and the GII value of India we can find that the GII value of world is 0.455 and India is 0.403 respectively. We can evaluate from this value that India is at good position in comparison to the most of the countries in the world but in some area like share of seats in parliament by women, population with at least some secondary education, labor force participation rate of women we are far behind of the most of the nations.

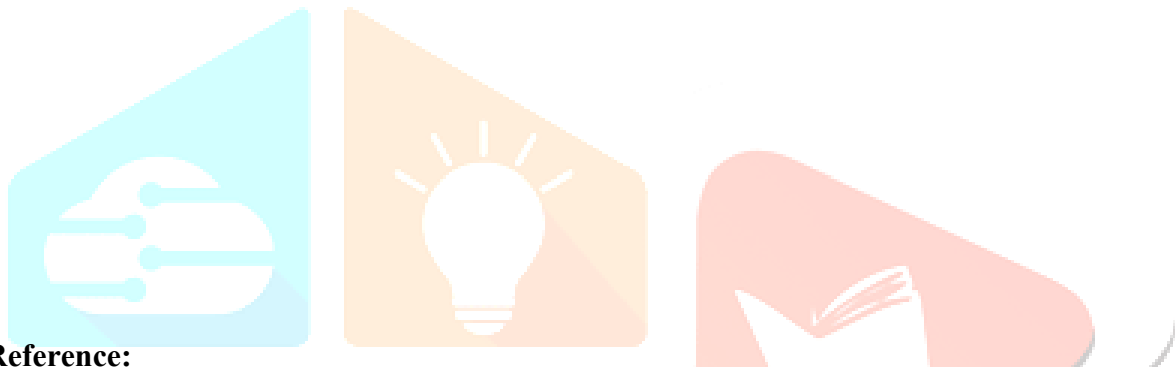
Table 2. GII Index

	HDI Rank	Value	Rank	Maternal Mortality Ratio (Deaths Per 100,000 Live Births)	Adolescent Birth Rate (Births Per 1,000 Women Ages 15-19)	Share Of Seats In Parliament (% Held By Women)	Population With At Least Some Secondary Education (% Ages 25 And Older)		Labour Force Participation Rate (% Ages 15 And Older)	
India	131	0.403	102	103	14.1	14.8	Female	Male	Female	Male
							43.5	61.1	35.1	76.4
World	NA	0.455	NA	216	39.1	26.5	Female	Male	Female	Male
							62.0	70.2	48.5	74.1

**Conclusion:**

The performance of Sustainable Development Goals is mixed in India. As per Human Development Report of 2025 we are in the category of medium human developed countries and on the basis of GII we are stood at 131th position. The agenda of Sustainable Development Goals supported to mainstream the “Gender Equality and Empowerment”. Gender Equality plays an important role in achieving Sustainable Development. As women constitute half of the population therefore, it is important to emphasize the needs and interest of the women for the development of the nation and society. The Government of India, as a remarkable signatory to the agenda 2030, is progressively implementing to accomplish the targets. Progress has achieved in various area of the goal 5 of SDGs but due to the lack of adequate resource and poor management of resource and lack of awareness about the existence of the national schemes for the eradication of Gender Inequality, India is lagging behind other nations.

This paper concludes to a significant remark that to reach the Sustainable Development Goals in India we need to address the basic hindrance for the development of women. Violence against women is an issue which need to be settle with utmost priority we need to launch and implement various national schemes for the Indian women and we have to aware them about their rights through grassroot sensitization programs.

**Reference:**

1. Buch, N. Gender Equality. Achievements, Gaps, Future Challenges Implementation Framework to be adopted by India. New Delhi: Research and Information System for Developing Countries, (2016).
2. Blithe, S. Gender equality and work-life balance: glass handcuffs and working men in the U.S. Routledge Research in Employment Relations, Taylor & Francis Group, (2015).
3. Elliott, J.A. An Introduction to Sustainable Development. Routledge, (2006).
4. Seth, M. Women and Development: The Indian Experience. New Delhi: Sage Publications, (2001).
5. Deshpande, A. & Bhat, R.A. Women & Sustainable Development Goals-Agenda 2030 [Gender Inequality & Women Health Issues from Indian Perspective] SCHOLEGE International Journal of Business Policy & Governance, (2019).
6. UN World Commission on Environment and Development. Our Common Future. Oxford University Press, (1987).
7. Human Development Report, A Matter of Choice: People and possibilities in the age of AI, United Nations Development Programme, (2025).
8. SDG India Index 2023-2024.
9. <https://www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1795471>.
10. <https://missionshakti.wcd.gov.in/about>.
11. <https://wcd.gov.in/offerrings/mission-guidelines>.
12. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/empowerment>