

Q. Analyse the challenges and progress in bridging the gender gap in education and politics in India. Discuss with relevant examples.

Answer Template:

Introduction:

- The gender gap in education and politics in India is a reflection of the broader societal inequalities that persist despite significant progress.
- The **Global Gender Gap Report 2024** indicates that India has closed 64.1% of its gender gap but highlights a need for improvement, especially in education and political empowerment.
- According to the <u>Census of India 2011</u>, the literacy rate for males was 82.14% while for females it was 65.46%, indicating a gender disparity in educational attainment. In politics, women continue to be underrepresented, holding only 14.4% of seats in the Lok Sabha as of 2023, reflecting persistent gender inequalities.

Body:

- <u>Education Sector- Challenges & Progress</u>
 - <u>Access to Education</u>:
 - Despite improvements, access to education remains uneven across genders in rural and urban areas.
 - Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2020 highlighted that girls in rural areas still face challenges in accessing secondary education due to cultural norms and safety concerns.

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- E.g.: The **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** initiative launched in 2015 aimed to improve the declining child sex ratio and promote girls' education, showing mixed results in different regions.
- <u>Quality of Education</u>:
 - Disparities also exist in the quality of education received by girls compared to boys, impacting their learning outcomes. Infrastructure issues like lack of separate toilets for girls in schools often deter female enrolment and attendance.
 - <u>Case Study</u>: The Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya scheme aimed to provide quality education to girls from marginalized communities, but challenges persist in its implementation and effectiveness in some regions.
- o Literacy Rates:
 - While overall literacy rates have improved, particularly among females, regional disparities and differences between rural and urban areas persist. States like Kerala have achieved near gender parity in literacy, but states like Bihar and Rajasthan lag behind.

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- <u>Statistic</u>: According to the **National Sample Survey Office** (NSSO), the literacy rate among females in Bihar was only 51.5% in 2019, highlighting regional disparities.
- <u>Socio-cultural Factors</u>:
 - Deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and practices such as early marriage, preference for male children, and limited mobility of girls continue to affect their education. Initiatives promoting gender sensitization and community engagement are crucial.
 - <u>Initiative</u>: The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) includes interventions to address these socio-cultural barriers and has shown some success in improving female enrolment rates.
- <u>Digital Divide</u>:
 - The digital divide further exacerbates educational disparities, with girls from rural and economically weaker backgrounds having limited access to online education resources, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - <u>Example</u>: The **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)** aimed to bridge this gap but faced challenges in implementation and accessibility.
- <u>Labour Force Participation</u>:
 - Increased women's enrolment in higher education contrasts with their reduced employment rates.

Political Participation- Challenges & Progress

- <u>Representation in Parliament</u>:
 - Women's representation in the Lok Sabha has been historically low, with only marginal increases over the years. Structural barriers such as patriarchal party structures and electoral violence deter women from entering politics.
 - <u>Data</u>: As of 2023, women hold only 14.4% of seats in the Lok Sabha, reflecting the slow progress in political empowerment.
 - Recently passed <u>Women Reservation Bill</u> is a step in the right direction.
- <u>Reservation Policies</u>:
 - Reservation policies like the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution have promoted women's participation in local governance (panchayats and municipalities). However, challenges in actual decision-making power and patriarchy within these institutions persist.
 - <u>Case Study</u>: The implementation of reservations for women in panchayats in states like Rajasthan and Kerala has shown varying degrees of success in empowering women politically.
- Violence and Harassment:
 - Women politicians often face harassment, threats, and violence, which deter their participation in electoral politics. Ensuring safety and support mechanisms for women in politics is crucial.

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- <u>Example</u>: The rise of social media has also led to increased online harassment and abuse of women politicians, highlighting new challenges in political participation.
- <u>Political Empowerment Initiatives</u>:
 - Initiatives such as the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) and the Mahila Shakti Kendra scheme aim to enhance women's political participation through training, capacity-building, and advocacy.
 - <u>Impact</u>: These initiatives have contributed to a gradual increase in the number of women contesting elections at various levels, although substantive representation remains a challenge.
- <u>Role of Civil Society and NGOs</u>:
 - Civil society organizations and NGOs play a crucial role in mobilizing women, providing training, and advocating for policy changes to enhance women's political representation.
 - <u>Success Story</u>: Organizations like Women Power Connect have been instrumental in lobbying for policy changes to improve gender parity in politics.

Conclusion

- While India has made significant strides in bridging the gender gap in education and politics, challenges persist due to socio-cultural norms, structural barriers, and systemic inequalities.
- Efforts such as legislative reforms, targeted educational initiatives, and grassroots mobilization have shown promise but require sustained commitment and holistic approaches.
- Moving forward, enhancing access to quality education, addressing socio-cultural barriers, enforcing safety measures for women in politics, and promoting inclusive governance are essential. Collaborative efforts involving government, civil society, and communities will be crucial in achieving substantive gender equality in these domains.

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