



# A critical review of empowerment of women in India

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Article 1

## **Introduction:**

The woman workforce in India has undergone tremendous transformation in the latter half of last century. From mostly farm working and menial jobs like tailoring, retail vending shops etc., women are now employed in every sector like accounting and finance, medicine, Engineering, banking & Insurance, law, and corporate Management. Activities like human resources, marketing, designing, Architecture, construction also employ women in large numbers. The glass ceilings of citadels like Judiciary, space sciences, Research and development, software, development, have also been breached and women occupy key positions in leadership and other roles in substantial numbers. The areas of security forces like police, Army navy and air force which were considered male dominated have started recruiting women in almost all roles. Of course, politics is one major area where women contribution is significant.

Does this mean that India has empowered women? This study discusses various issued related to the women's empowerment particularly in the context of Indian corporates. The article covers the importance different types of empowerment in areas like legal framework Economic, Social, Political Educational and health. The article also reviews factors that encourage and prohibit women's empowerment. The principles of women's empowerment and challenges and possible solutions are also discussed.

## **Importance of Women's Empowerment:**

There are several reasons which compel us to clearly understand what women's empowerment is and why Women's empowerment is important. Women empowerment is about enabling women to make choices, take decisions and have control over their own lives. This will enable them to have equal access to resources and opportunities. It enables an environment which make women participate equally with men in society and economy to ensure that their voices are heard, and their rights are protected giving them the power and freedom without discrimination or limitations based on gender to live their lives. Women's empowerment can be made in many forms, particularly education, economic, political, health and social Women are the backbone of families and communities They provide care, support, and nurturing to their families. Therefore, Women's empowerment is important and essential to the development of children and in community building. . In short women's empowerment aims to create a world of their own destiny.

## **Types of Women's Empowerment:**

There are different ways to categorize women's empowerment, but they are interconnected and complementary leading to empowerment in one area having positive ripple effects in other areas. Generally, the main area of empowerment relates to five segments.

**Economic Empowerment:** When a women participates in economic activities like employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities enjoying fair wages, equal pay, and access to credit and financial services equal and adequate opportunities for learning and training, and enjoy a non-discriminatory treatment because of gender in terms of promotion recognition etc on an equal footing with men., This will have a domino effect in improving productivity and improve contribution to the economy and society as a whole.

**Social Empowerment:** Women's empowerment is essential to ensure a fundamental human right for achieving gender equality, to participate equally and fully in social and cultural life, without harassment or violence having equal rights, opportunities, and resources, and can participate equally in all aspects of life as well as the ability to speak and decide for social causes. This leads to achieving social justice.

**Political Empowerment:** This empowers the women to participate in political career, participate and lead political initiatives and movements , political decision-making on an equal basis, to vote and run for office and to lead , political parties and participation in policy-making processes.

**Educational Empowerment:** This entails women's to unrestricted access to every type of quality education at all levels, training, developing skills and knowledge to enable them to make informed decisions. United Nation General Assembly adopted the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women' (CEDAW). CEDAW establishes an international bill of rights for women. Article 10 of CEDAW talks about providing right to education to women. India has ratified CEDAW for upliftment of women.

**Health Empowerment:** This refers to women's ability to access quality healthcare. It gives her the power to make decisions about her health and well-being including her right to bear or abort a child. It covers access to information, services, and resources that promote reproductive health, maternal health, and overall well-being. When women have access to education and healthcare, they can manage themselves and their families better.

**Sustainable Development:** Empowered women contribute in good measure to address environmental challenges, reduce poverty, and promote social justice.

In short Women's Empowerment is hastened and achieved if factors like education, Job Opportunities including in Politics, Defence, Sports, and, industrial and judicial services and entrepreneurial leadership positions, Equal Participation in Opportunities in Society, Exposure to Media, Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Movement Proper Nutrition, Sanitation and personal hygiene Introduction to Self-Help Groups and Changes in Women's Labour Patterns are made available to them to enable her to be a decision maker and to challenge gender-based discrimination. enabling them to participate fully in society and pursue their goals. In short, women's empowerment is crucial for achieving a prosperous, just, equitable, and sustainable world.

### The Women's Empowerment Principles

To empower women in the marketplace, workplace, and community UN Global Compact and UN Women have enunciated the following seven Principles.

Principle 1: Create high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.

Principle 2: Treat all people fairly at work, respecting and supporting non-discrimination and human rights.

Principle 3: Ensure the health, wellbeing, and safety of all workers, whether male or female

Principle 4: Promote education, training, and professional development for women.

Principle 5: Implement supply chain, marketing practices and enterprise development that empower women.

Principle 6: Champion equality through community initiatives and advocacy

Principle 7: Measure and report publicly on progress to create gender equality.

In the light of these principle let us examine women empowerment in India.

### Factors that limit Women's empowerment:

To plan and execute women's empowerment in India we need to know what inhibits the women's empowerment. Unfortunately, there are several factors we can identify.

- **Patriarchal Attitudes:** Patriarchal attitudes that prioritize men over women are still deeply ingrained in Indian society leading to discrimination.
- **Limited Access to Education:** Many girls and women in India still face limited access to education due to poverty, cultural attitudes, and lack of infrastructure.
- **Economic Inequality:** Women in India are often economically disadvantaged, facing lower wages, limited job opportunities, and unequal access to financial services and resources. This is truer of the less educated and rural based women
- **Violence and Discrimination:** Violence and discrimination against women, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based discrimination, continue to be major obstacles to women's empowerment in India.
- **Traditional Gender Roles:** Traditional gender roles and expectations can limit women's opportunities and choices, including in areas such as marriage, family, and career.
- **Lack of Legal and Political Support:** Women in India enjoy only limited legal and political support, including limited representation in government and limited access to legal protections and services.
- **Limited Mobility:** Restrictions on women's freedom of movement and access to transportation, limits mobility and women's empowerment in India.

Overall, addressing these factors will require a coordinated effort from the government, civil society, and individuals to promote gender equality, improve access to education and economic opportunities, and address violence and discrimination against women.

## Women Empowerment in Indian scenario

In a general sense Women Empowerment refers to the liberation of women from socio-economic restraints of reliance. In India census 2011, counts women population @ 48.5% of the total population in India. But only a small portion of women can use free will and are permitted to carve out their lives the way they want. But most of them are economically not so and are economically dependent, without employment. In most Indian villages and semi-urban cities, women are still denied fundamental education and are never allowed to continue higher education due to various social practices. Living in male-dominating societies, women surviving the brunt of unevenness, financial trustworthiness, oppression, and distinct social evils. Women have been residing under the shackles of enslavement for centuries despite delivering multiple roles effortlessly and considered the backbone of every society.

### Legal Status regarding Women empowerment

The Constitution of India has certain provisions that specifically focus on women empowerment and prevents discrimination against women in the society. Article 14 talks about equality before law. Article 15(1) prohibits gender discrimination; Article 15(3) empowers the state to take affirmative steps in favour of women. The Indian Penal code has specific provisions regarding rape ill treatment of women etc.

Many state governments have enacted laws regarding cases related to female feticide & infanticide by prohibiting the sex determination of child that is yet to take birth via the Regulation & Prevention of Misuse Act 1994 as well as PNT ACT (Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act).

For the Hindu women who are a majority specific Acts like Hindu Marriage Act, Indian succession ACT, Adoption act, equal rights for women in property and recognition as co parcener in a Hindu Undivided Firm and other rulings correlating to marriage, succession, divorce, adoption, dowry and moral safety or protection against sexual harassment are there to ensure women empowerment in India. There is a special Act for domestic violence. Peoples Representation Act treats women on par with men. All the labour laws are gender neutral and give equal rights and privileges to men and women without any discrimination. The government has passed the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017 increasing the maximum period of maternity leaves from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. The Women's Reservation Bill gives 33 per cent

reservation for women seats in all levels of Indian politics is just a step away in becoming a reality since it has already been cleared by Rajya Shaba.

Therefore, in India there exists a robust legal infrastructure and some of the latest developments in support of women empowerment. The Indian legal system is also confronted with gaps between policy and practice. Despite existing legislation to protect women and girls, the enforcement of these laws and conviction of alleged perpetrators is weak by systemic bureaucracy and corruption.

### **Notable recent initiatives**

“Beti Bachao Beti Padhao” Andolan has been launched for creating awareness among the people to educate all girl children in the country.

Government is bringing various schemes to maximize women’s access to education, skill training and institutional credit. MUDRA Yojana (Micro Units Development and Refinance agency Ltd) is one such scheme in which loans up to Rs. 10 lakhs are provided to women entrepreneurs, without any collateral.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (a scheme to provide gas connections to women from below the poverty line households) and “Mahila-E-Haat” project, an online marketing campaign, to support female entrepreneurs, self-help groups and non-government organisations (NGOs).

Working women hostels scheme has been launched for safe and convenient accommodation to working women. The benefit of this scheme is given to every working woman without any distinction of caste, religion, marital status etc

setting up the UN-India NITI Aayog Investor Consortium for Women Entrepreneurs to strengthen female entrepreneurship and create an ecosystem for investments.

### **Challenges Remain**

Women in India are emerging in all sectors, including politics, business, medicine, sports, and agriculture. when in 2019. The general narrative that rocket science is a profession reserved for men was shattered when Female leadership for a huge space mission by two female scientists from the Indian Space Research Organisation led the country’s second lunar mission Chandrayaan-2 from its inception to completion.



Global standing on gender equality remains low even while India has taken some measures on human development. India's ranking in the Global Gender Gap Report, commissioned by the World Economic Forum, declined from 108<sup>th</sup> in 2018 to 112<sup>th</sup> in 2020. India has managed well to close gender gap, especially in areas of political empowerment. It was ranked 18<sup>th</sup> on the Political Empowerment sub index. However, female legislators constitute only 14.4 per cent of the Indian parliament and 23 per cent of the cabinet, making overall political representation relatively low.

According to the ILO's Global Wage Report 2018/19, India's performance on economic empowerment for women has not improved as only 25 per cent of women relative to 82 per cent of men are working or seeking employment. Moreover, their average income is around a fifth of what their male counterparts are earning. Even when Indian women secure jobs, there is a high propensity for them to be paid less than male employees.

The found that the average pay gender gap is the highest in India at 34.5 per cent, among the 73 countries studied in detail. The International Monetary Fund has estimated that equal female participation in the workforce could increase India's gross domestic product by 27 per cent.

### **Future ahead**

Women empowerment in India is dependent up to a large extent on numerous different variables that includes geographical setting (urban/rural), social status (caste and class), educational status, and age factor. Despite various actions on the women empowerment that exist at the state, local (panchayat), and national levels, women still encounter differentiation in most sectors like education, economic opportunities, health and medical assistance, and political participation. There are substantial gaps between strategy advancements and real exercise at the community level. Crafting and execution of a concrete policy framework, dispersing civic awareness, and education concerning the empowerment of women can usher to accomplishing the desired missions to ensure empowerment at the right level. The following are suggested to be framed as policy initiatives and implemented vigorously.

## Changes in Women's Attitude

Empowerment must come from within, hence. women should made aware of their oppression, and available remedies to counter it. Women need to be counselled for bringing a major change in their attitude and realise that opportunities will not reach their laps. They should fight back to rebuild their prominent position in Indian communities and societies to enjoy their rights and maintain justice & equality in society. The governments must ensure productive implementation of all programmes and laws related to women.

## Organization for Awareness Programmes

Training programme based on action at the village or in rural areas of India, Vocational programmes and the growth-oriented entrepreneurship development programmes must be organized to make women self-reliant and self-employed

Government should bring women into the fore of the development strategy via numerous development-oriented schemes.

State and National level commissions for women, Non-Governmental Organisations, ICDS Programmes, must undertake e- awareness.

Taskforce for women & children Development DWACRA (Concerning Development of Women & Child in Rural Areas), should hold campaigns for women's rights, human rights, legal rights, education about saving schemes, population education, environmental education, rehabilitation programmes within all sincerity.

The education policy needs to be more inclusive to ensure girls right to education. To curb higher dropout rate among girls, providing relatively higher financial incentives for girls education until Class XII should be attempted.

Post Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship should be extended from Single Girl Child Scheme to families with two girl child.

Reward should be given to villages/districts that are able to attain equal child sex ratio through education, information and communication campaigns.

For security purposes, gender-friendly facilities should be provided in hostels.



Women can be organised into different professional groups there is need to promote skill development among women in non-traditional works like electricians, plumbers etc. to make women self-dependent

NGOs and other institutions who provide employable skills & training to women should be encouraged. Government should promote creation of Self-Help group by women.

## **Conclusion**

India's journey on women empowerment and gender equality started 1947. While visible gains have been made through legal reforms, human development, and grassroots initiatives, still has a long way to go in many areas of women empowerment. A concerted effort should be made to close the urban-rural divide and ensure that women in rural areas enjoy the same access to education, employment, healthcare, and decision-making as their urban counterparts. The mere celebration of and gifts to honour women on women's day will only be cosmetic approach. Shifting the focus from women development to women led development alone will Ensure a Holistic Development of Society

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