EMPOWERING WOMEN IN INDIA: PROGRESS, CHALLENGES, AND PROSPECTS IN DIFFERENT STATES OF INDIA

Name - Saurabh Pal
Assistant professor (Economics)
Madan Mohan Malviya Post Graduate college Bhatpar Rani
Deoria (274702)

Abstract :

Women's empowerment is a crucial aspect of societal development, promoting gender equality and fostering a fair and inclusive society. This research explores the status of women's empowerment across various states in India, examining economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions. The study utilises a robust methodology involving secondary data analysis and a Women Empowerment Index (WEI) construction to provide comprehensive insights. The importance of women's empowerment is underscored, linking it to economic growth, social harmony, and political representation. Despite strides in education and political participation, challenges persist in workforce engagement and leadership roles. Regional variations in literacy rates and institutional delivery patterns highlight the need for multifaceted interventions. Political representation, while improving, requires ongoing initiatives, including quotas and educational campaigns. The Women Empowerment Index, incorporating education, health, political representation, and economic participation, reveals Chhattisgarh as a leader, emphasising the need for nationwide efforts. The research concludes by stressing the imperative of sustained, targeted actions to achieve comprehensive women's empowerment across diverse dimensions and regions in India.

Keyword : Women empowerment, Education, Labour Force Participation, health empowerment, economic empowerment.

1. Introduction

Women's empowerment refers to the process of enhancing the rights, opportunities, and influence of women in various spheres of life. It involves empowering women to participate fully in economic, social, political, and cultural activities on an equal basis with men. The goal is to ensure that women have the freedom to make choices and decisions that affect their lives and to address and eliminate gender-based discrimination. Women's empowerment is pivotal for societal development, as they constitute a substantial portion of the population. The diverse perspectives and contributions of empowered women enrich the cultural, social, and economic fabric of communities and nations, leading to enhanced well-being and progress. Furthermore, women's empowerment is intrinsically linked to the pursuit of gender equality and justice, challenging discriminatory practices and fostering a fair and inclusive society. It serves as a fundamental human right and a necessary condition for sustainable development. **Economically**, empowered women play a crucial role in driving growth through active workforce participation, entrepreneurship, and innovation. Closing gender gaps in employment and income generates positive economic outcomes for families and nations. The positive impact extends to health and education, where empowered women are more likely to access healthcare services, leading to healthier communities. Education empowers women with knowledge and skills, enabling them to make informed decisions about their lives and those of their families. **Politically,** empowered women are essential for vibrant

and representative democracies. Increased female participation in political processes leads to more inclusive and responsive governance. Women's involvement in decision-making ensures that diverse perspectives are considered in policy formulation. Moreover, women's empowerment challenges traditional gender stereotypes, fostering a culture that recognizes and values the capabilities of both men and women. This contributes to a more equitable and just society, encouraging individuals to pursue their aspirations without predefined gender roles. Empowered women also contribute to social harmony by fostering stronger communities. Their involvement in community-building activities and social initiatives creates a more cohesive and supportive environment. The generational impact of women's empowerment is profound, as empowered women positively influence future generations, serving as role models for their children and instilling values of equality, resilience, and determination. In essence, women's empowerment is not solely a women's issue but a societal imperative, serving as a catalyst for positive change and fostering a world where individuals, regardless of gender, can thrive and contribute meaningfully to societal advancement.

2. Literature Review -

Women's empowerment and economic development are interconnected, but a one-time push for women's rights may not ensure a self-reinforcing cycle. Economic growth alone may not overcome stereotypes, and sustained policies favouring women are crucial for achieving gender equity, despite potential trade-offs. [1]

In his study, he discovers that despite increasing enrolment rates of women in colleges, their employment remains significantly low. A positive correlation is noted between the Gross Enrolment of Women in Tertiary Education, Government Expenditure on Education, and GDP per capita in India. Notably, Government Expenditure has a more substantial impact on enhancing women's enrolment rates in tertiary education. [2]

The study reveals the existence of unequal gender norms, with over half justifying wife beating for various reasons. Gender gaps persist in education and employment, with less than 50% literacy and employment rates for women. Limited control over earnings suggests challenges in women's economic empowerment. [3]

In her study, she identifies that cultural and socioeconomic factors, limited access to resources, safety concerns linked to infrastructure, regulatory biases, and income levels significantly affect the supply of female labour. The presence of educated unemployed women highlights issues of demand and a shortage of job opportunities. She suggests that increasing women's participation requires implementing macroeconomic and structural policies focused on generating new investments. [4]

The women empowerment index reveals that women in Oman exhibit empowerment, yet their inclination towards domestic roles hinders their empowerment potential. The influence of "social power" is crucial in perpetuating inequalities between men and women. Efforts for empowerment must address patriarchal "social power," a key factor in generating and sustaining gender disparities. [5]

This research indicates that the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in the area predominantly prioritise activities related to wage generation. However, this economic-centric focus does not effectively translate into the overall empowerment of women, particularly in terms of their involvement in decision-making and addressing health-related issues. [6]

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[1] Duflo, "Women Empowerment and Economic Development."
[2] Ghosh and Mehta, "Study on Economic Empowerment of Indian Women through Education – an Enabling Factor for Women Labour Force Participation."
[3] Nayak and Mahanta, "Women Empowerment in India."
[4] Sorsa, "Raising the Economic Participation of Women in India."
[5] Varghese, "Women Empowerment in Oman."
[6] Kar and Pradhan, "WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA."

Women's empowerment in India is shaped by diverse factors such as urban or rural residence, educational attainment, social status based on caste and class, and age. These variables contribute significantly to the nuanced landscape of women's empowerment in the country. Geographical location, educational background, and societal hierarchies play pivotal roles in determining the extent of women's empowerment.[7]

The financial inclusion of women in India has shown significant progress, with 53% of women currently holding bank accounts, marking substantial growth from 15.1% in the previous NFHS survey. This indicates a nearly 40% decadal growth in women's access to banking services. The status of women within households is reflected in their high participation in decision-making, reaching 84% in India.[8]

The position of women in India has experienced fluctuations across different historical periods.In ancient times, women held a commendable status on par with men, but during the mediaeval era, their position declined. In the colonial and post-independence epochs, concerted efforts have been undertaken to uplift the status of women in India. The government, through the enactment of pivotal Acts and the implementation of regulations, endeavours to empower and fortify women.[9]

The study emphasises the widespread violence against women as a grave human rights violation, with the Indian government actively addressing it through policies and laws. Legislative measures at central and state levels, aligned with the constitution's mandate for gender equality, contribute to women's empowerment. NGOs and government organisations play a crucial role in providing opportunities for women through diverse policies and strategies. Notably, government schemes like "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" aim to promote the social and economic independence of girls.[10]

3. Research Question:

How does women's empowerment vary across different states in India in terms of economic, social, political, and cultural aspects?

4. Research methodology

"The research methodology employed in the paper involved the utilisation of secondary data for result interpretation, and quantitative analysis was applied to analyse and interpret the data."

5. Research Objective:

The main goal of this study is to thoroughly analyse and create an index to measure women's empowerment in various states of India. The focus is on understanding the current situation, identifying challenges, and exploring opportunities for women's progress in economic, social, political, and cultural aspects.

6. Historical Perspective:

The evolution of women's empowerment in India spans various historical periods. In ancient times, women held significant roles in rituals and leadership. The mediaeval era saw a decline with practices like Sati, but exceptions existed. The colonial period brought challenges, but social reform movements addressed issues like Sati. Post-independence, legal reforms and constitutional guarantees aimed at equality. Legal reforms, such as the Hindu Succession Act (1956) and Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), aimed at empowering women post-independence. Ongoing initiatives, like the Women's Reservation Bill, underscore the quest for political empowerment. Contemporary movements address issues like workplace discrimination and violence. Despite progress, challenges persist, making ongoing efforts vital to achieving comprehensive women's empowerment globally and in India. The inclusion of the Triple Talaq Act in 2019 is a landmark moment in India's legal landscape. This legislation criminalises the practice of instant triple talaq, providing legal safeguards for Muslim women and contributing to broader efforts to empower

[7] Sobha and Ijmtst, "A Study on Women Empowerment in India."

[8] Dey et al., "Women Empowerment in India-A Perspective."

[9] Kadam, "Empowerment of Women in India- An Attempt to Fill the Gender Gap (June, 2012)."

[10] Mandal, "A STUDY ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN 21ST CENTURY."

women in socio-economic and legal spheres. Despite this progress, challenges persist, making ongoing efforts vital to achieving comprehensive women's empowerment globally and in India.

7. Current status of women in Indian society

The situation of women in Indian society is changing with significant advancements but has persistent challenges. In terms of education, there has been substantial progress with increasing enrollment and literacy rates among women. Initiatives like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child) aim to promote education and address gender-based discrimination. However, workforce participation remains a challenge. While women contribute significantly to informal sectors, their representation in formal employment, especially in leadership roles, is relatively low. Efforts such as the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act and corporate diversity programs aim to enhance workplace inclusivity. In political leadership, women's participation has increased over the years. The reservation of seats for women in local bodies, like panchayats, has played a crucial role.
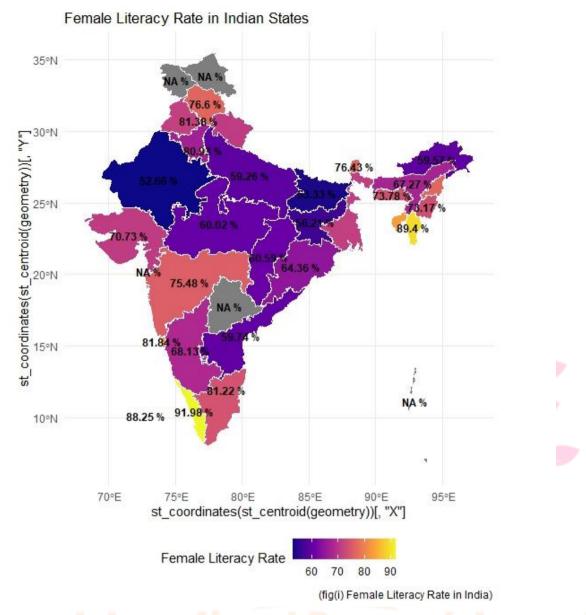
Despite this, achieving gender parity in higher political offices remains an ongoing struggle. Addressing the current status of women in Indian society requires comprehensive measures, including continued educational initiatives, workplace reforms, and sustained efforts to enhance women's representation in political leadership.

7.1 Participation in education :

Women's education is vital for empowerment, gender equality, improved health, economic growth, and child well-being. According to the Census of India 2011, the literacy rate among women in the country was 65.46%. The literacy situation in different states of India varies, literacy rates in different states are influenced by factors such as socio-economic development, educational infrastructure, and government policies. **As per a new National Statistical Office (NSO) report**, the literacy rate for women in India stands at around 70.3 percent. Rajasthan records the lowest female literacy rate in the country, standing at 52.66 percent, while Kerala boasts the highest with a female literacy rate of 91.98 percent. [11]

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[11] "Facts About Literacy Rate In India."

Female Literacy Rate in Indian States

(fig(i) Female Literacy Rate in India)

Improving women's literacy requires a multifaceted approach, including promoting educational access, providing financial support, raising community awareness, enhancing infrastructure, offering flexible learning options, improving teacher training, advocating for supportive government policies, engaging communities actively, addressing cultural barriers, and implementing robust monitoring and evaluation of interventions.

7.2 Institutional Delivery Patterns in India: Regional Disparities, Cultural Influences, and Socio-Economic Factors :
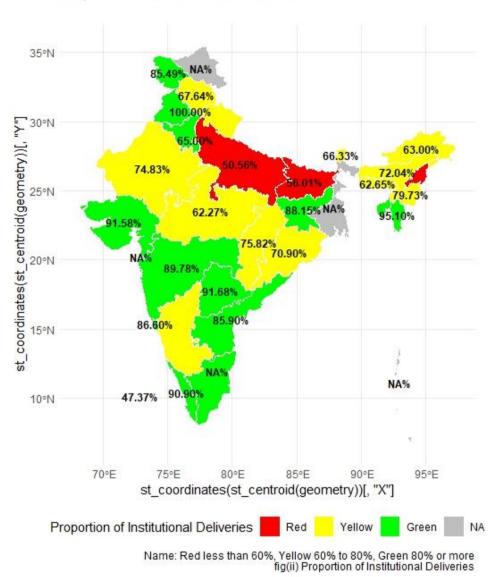
Institutional delivery refers to the process of childbirth that takes place in a healthcare facility, such as a hospital, clinic, or maternity centre, under the supervision of trained medical professionals. This is in contrast to deliveries that occur at home or in non-medical settings without the involvement of skilled birth attendants. In India, Chandigarh tops the chart with 100% institutional deliveries according to the NITI Ayog 2015- 16 report.[12]

In India, the prevalence of non-institutional deliveries in certain northern regions such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar is a complex issue influenced by cultural, infrastructural, and socio-economic factors. Cultural practices, including a preference for traditional home births, contribute to women's choices, often rooted in deeply ingrained beliefs. Moreover, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, economic limitations, low educational

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[12] "Health Performance : NITI Aayog, National Institution for Transforming India, Government of India."

attainment, and geographical challenges create barriers to accessing institutional delivery services in these areas. The lack of empowerment among women in such regions is intertwined with their limited access to quality healthcare during childbirth, impacting maternal and child health outcomes.
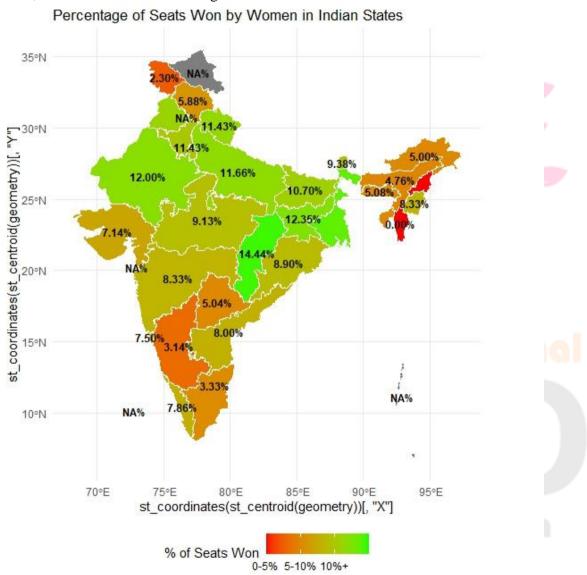

fig(ii) Proportion of Institutional Deliveries

To address this challenge comprehensively, a multi-faceted approach is essential. Firstly, there needs to be a substantial investment in improving healthcare infrastructure, particularly in rural and remote areas. This involves building well-equipped hospitals, ensuring the presence of skilled healthcare professionals, and enhancing transportation networks for better accessibility. Secondly, awareness campaigns should be strategically designed to educate communities about the advantages of institutional deliveries, emphasising the crucial role they play in ensuring the health and well-being of both mothers and infants. These campaigns should be culturally sensitive, respecting local practices while encouraging safe and medically supervised childbirth. Moreover, targeted interventions should focus on empowering women through education and skill-building programs, fostering a sense of autonomy and informed decision-making regarding their reproductive health. Additionally, government initiatives that provide financial support for healthcare expenses related to childbirth can help alleviate economic barriers, making institutional deliveries more accessible to women across various socio-economic backgrounds. Ultimately, a collaborative effort involving healthcare authorities, community leaders, and policymakers is vital to create sustainable solutions that improve maternal healthcare and empower women in these underserved regions.

7.3 Political representation of women in India -

Political representation is crucial as it ensures that diverse voices and perspectives, including those of women, are heard and considered in decision-making processes. It promotes inclusivity and reflects the diversity of the population in governance. Increased representation of women in politics leads to policies that address gender-specific issues, fostering a more equitable and just society. Moreover, it challenges traditional gender stereotypes and contributes to building a more representative and responsive democracy. Political representation of women is vital for creating laws and policies that consider the needs and concerns of the entire population, leading to better governance and social development.
 Women members of parliament make up less than 15% of the Indian Parliament, with only 14.94% in the Lok Sabha and 14.04% in the Rajya Sabha[13]. The situation is even more challenging in legislatures, where women account for less than 10% of the total Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) Here is the percentage-wise representation of women in legislative assemblies. None of the Indian states has even 15% representation from women. Chhattisgarh leads with 14.44% women representation, while Mizoram and Nagaland have the lowest representation, with 0% women in their legislature."

fig(iii) Percentage of Seats Won by Women in Indian States legislature

Increasing political representation involves implementing various strategies to encourage more women to participate in politics and ensuring their fair representation. Here are some key methods:

Quotas and Reservations: Implementing quotas or reservations for women in legislative bodies ensures a minimum percentage of seats are reserved for them. This affirmative action can accelerate women's entry into politics.

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[13] "Women MPs and MLAs."

Educational Initiatives: Promoting education and awareness campaigns can empower women to participate actively in political processes. Education enhances their understanding of governance and policy issues.

Financial Support: Providing financial support for women candidates can help overcome economic barriers. This includes access to campaign funding, reducing the financial burden on women seeking political office.

Inclusive Policies: Ensuring that political parties adopt inclusive policies that promote diversity and actively encourage the participation of women in leadership positions.

Constitutional Reforms: Advocating for constitutional reforms that address gender disparities and promote equal representation can be a powerful means to bring about systemic change.

Media Representation: Encouraging positive media representation of women in politics can challenge stereotypes and inspire more women to consider political careers.
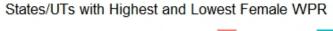
By combining these strategies and fostering a comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach, societies can work towards achieving better political representation for women.
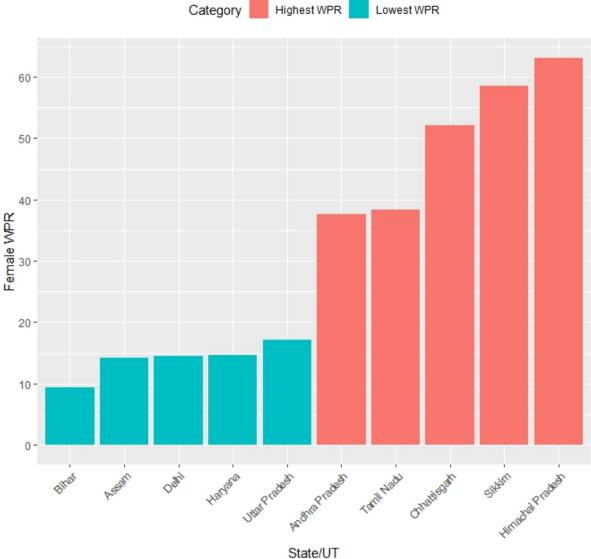
7.4 Participation of Women in Labor Force :

Women's participation is crucial for several reasons, and it contributes to the overall development and well-being of society. Women constitute a substantial portion of the workforce in India, contributing to various sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, services, and the informal economy. However, there are significant variations across states and urban-rural divides. Female/ Women participation rate in the labour force indicates the degree to which women are actively engaged in economic activities. The labour force encompasses individuals aged 15 and above and aged 60 or below who contribute their labour to the production of goods and services or willing and actively seeking a job within a specified timeframe. The information pertaining to Employment and Unemployment is gathered through the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)[14], a survey carried out by the National Statistical Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MOSPI). According to the most recent PLFS report, which covers the year 2019-20, the projected **Worker Population Ratio** (WPR) based on usual status for individuals aged 15 years and above stands at 73.0% for males and 28.7% for females. Women's Worker Population Ratio (WPR) varies across different states in India.Himachal Pradesh with female WPR 63.1 ranks best while Bihar with just 9.1 female WPR ranks worst among the Indian states. Several factors contribute to this variation, including socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, educational opportunities, and regional development disparities. Here's a bar diagram for top 5 and lowest 5 State/UT wise estimated female Worker Population Ratio (WPR).

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[14] "Women Participation in Workforce."

Governments can employ various strategies to increase women's participation in the labour force. Here are some effective measures:

Equal Employment Opportunities: Enforce and promote laws that ensure equal opportunities for men and women in the workplace. Implement anti-discrimination policies to address gender-based biases in hiring and promotion.

Flexible Work Policies: Introduce and encourage flexible work arrangements, such as part-time work, remote work, job-sharing, and flexible hours. This helps accommodate women's diverse responsibilities, including caregiving and household duties.

Affordable Childcare Services: Establish affordable and high-quality childcare services to support working mothers. Accessible childcare facilities enable women to pursue their careers without compromising their family responsibilities.

Parental Leave Policies: Implement robust parental leave policies that provide both mothers and fathers with paid leave options. Encouraging shared responsibility for childcare allows women to return to the workforce more seamlessly.

Training and Skill Development: Invest in training and skill development programs for women, especially in sectors where they are underrepresented. Equipping women with relevant skills enhances their employability and promotes career advancement.

Address Gender Wage Gap: Take measures to address and eliminate the gender wage gap. Ensure that women receive equal pay for equal work, and promote transparency in salary structures to reduce disparities.

8. Constructing Women Empowerment Index :

I am working to assess a composite value for each state based on these four criteria, which I have termed the Women Empowerment Index. This index aims to provide an overall measure of women's empowerment. I have strategically selected key indicators to serve as proxies for distinct dimensions of women's empowerment. Specifically, I utilise the female literacy rate as a representative measure for education, institutional delivery to capture aspects of health empowerment, women's representation in political assemblies as an indicator of political empowerment, and the women worker population ratio (WPR) to reflect economic empowerment. This comprehensive set of variables is chosen deliberately to encompass the diverse facets of women's empowerment. With these four pivotal variables, my objective is to construct a composite index that effectively functions as a proxy for a women's empowerment index. Each variable is assigned weightages based on its perceived significance, ensuring a nuanced and comprehensive representation of women's empowerment. The approach is designed to provide a holistic understanding of the status of women's empowerment across various dimensions, acknowledging the interconnectedness and multifaceted nature of this crucial societal aspect."

I have strategically allocated weightages to each dimension in the construction of the composite index, reflecting their relative importance in measuring women's empowerment.

Education (20% Weightage): Recognizing the pivotal role of education in empowerment, I have assigned a 20% weightage to the female literacy rate. This dimension serves as a proxy for educational empowerment.

Economic Empowerment (50% Weightage): Placing significant emphasis on economic empowerment, I allocated a substantial 50% weightage to the women worker population ratio (WPR). This decision is grounded in the understanding that women's employment plays a crucial role in determining their level of empowerment.

Health Empowerment (15% Weightage): Institutional delivery, considered as a proxy for health empowerment, has been assigned a 15% weightage. This reflects the importance of ensuring women's well-being for overall empowerment.

Political Empowerment (15% Weightage): Recognizing the role of women's representation in political institutions, I have assigned a 15% weightage to this dimension. This reflects the impact of political participation on women's empowerment. By incorporating these weightages, the composite index aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced representation of women's empowerment, taking into account the multifaceted nature of the concept.

the Women Empowerment Index (WEI) for a state can be calculated as follows:

$$WEI = 0.2 * X1 + 0.5 * X2 + 0.15 * X3 + 0.5 * X4$$

X1 - represents the literacy rate,

X2 - represents the proportion of institutional deliveries,

X3 - represents the representation of women in political assemblies, and

X4 - represents the women's worker population ratio (WPR).

This formula allows for a comprehensive assessment of women's empowerment by taking into account key aspects of education, health, political representation, and economic participation. The assigned weights reflect the perceived importance of each dimension in contributing to the overall empowerment index.

Serial Number	State	Composite Index
1	Chhattisgarh	57.2225
2	Sikkim	57.155
3	Manipur	56.8775
4	Himachal Pradesh	56.5575
5	Goa	54.99
6	Tamil Nadu	54.8975
7	Odisha	54.315
8	Maharashtra	57.3075
9	Gujarat	55.3325
10	Kerala	56.795
11	Tripura	54.7925
12	Jharkhand	53.4075
13	Meghalaya	53.9475
14	Karnataka	52.8375
15	Punjab	52.535
16	Uttarakhand	50.4625
17	Haryana	50.1075
18	Delhi	51.62
19	Daman and Diu	50.2625
20	Lakshadweep	58.23
21	Mizoram	54.36

22	Rajasthan	59.9075
23	Jammu and Kashmir	.
24	Nagaland	54.4375
25	Puducherry	53.7975
26	Bihar	47.785
27	Uttar Pradesh	47.68
28	Telangana	.

Findings : The Women Empowerment Index (WEI), calculated using the formula $WEI=0.2X1+0.5X2+0.15X3+0.5X4$, is presented in the table above. Chattisgarh secures the top rank with a WEI score of 67.22, while Uttar Pradesh, with a WEI of just 47.68, is positioned at the bottom among Indian states. Chattisgarh takes the lead due to its notable women worker population ratio and commendable performance in the other three components. Conversely, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar rank the lowest, primarily due to their subpar women worker population ratio compared to other Indian states. To promote gender equality in the workplace, several key initiatives should be implemented. Firstly, laws ensuring equal employment opportunities for both men and women must be enforced rigorously, with anti-discrimination policies addressing gender biases during hiring and promotions. Additionally, flexible work policies, including part-time and remote work options, job-sharing, and flexible hours, should be encouraged to accommodate women's diverse responsibilities, such as caregiving and household duties. Lastly, investing in training and skill development programs tailored for women, particularly in sectors where they are underrepresented, enhances their employability and fosters career progression. These measures collectively contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable work environment for women. To increase women's representation in legislative bodies, the implementation of quotas or reservations guarantees a minimum percentage of seats reserved exclusively for women. This affirmative action serves to expedite the inclusion of women in political spheres. Educational initiatives play a pivotal role in empowering women to actively engage in political processes by promoting awareness and education campaigns.

9. Conclusion :

In conclusion, this research has delved into the nuanced landscape of women's empowerment across different states in India, focusing on economic, social, political, and cultural aspects. The research employed a robust methodology involving the utilisation of secondary data for quantitative analysis, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The historical perspective traced the evolution of women's empowerment, highlighting both strides and persistent challenges. While advancements in education, political representation, and societal roles have been noted, substantial obstacles remain, especially in workforce participation and political leadership. The disparities in women's education across states emphasise the need for multifaceted approaches to improve literacy rates. The institutional delivery patterns underscore regional disparities and the impact of socio-economic factors on maternal healthcare. Political representation of women, though showing improvement, requires continued efforts, including quotas, education initiatives, and financial support. Variations in women's participation in the labour force across states underscore the importance of addressing socio-economic conditions and cultural norms. The construction of the Women Empowerment Index (WEI) provides a comprehensive and nuanced measure, revealing Chhattisgarh as a leader but emphasising the need for concerted efforts nationwide. In essence, this research contributes valuable insights into the dynamic landscape of women's empowerment in India, pointing towards the imperative of ongoing, targeted efforts to achieve comprehensive empowerment across all dimensions and regions.

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● The code for plotting the Proportion of Institutional Deliveries map and other map was implemented in R using the ggplot2, sf, and rnaturalearth libraries. Specific functions and code snippets were adapted from their respective documentation sources.