



Women Empowerment in India: A critical Analysis

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Abstract: India is under pressure to focus more on social and human development, especially women's empowerment, as its economy grows. In the report, efforts to "advocate for the human rights of women and girls, resist discriminatory practices, and challenge roles and stereotypes that produce disparities and exclusion" are referred to as initiatives to "empower women." In order to achieve gender equality, when men and women have equal authority and opportunity for education, health care, economic engagement, and personal growth, it is crucial to empower women.

Keywords: Women empowerment, education, healthcare, economic participation and personal development.

Brief History of Women Empowerment: The Indian Constitution, which went into effect on January 26, 1950, includes Articles 14 through 16 that guarantee equal rights for men and women. It is illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender. Long before many western nations granted women the right to vote, India's independence in 1947 saw the enactment of universal suffrage for women. India became the second nation in modern history to have a female leader, Indira Gandhi, in 1966, following the election of Sirimavo Bandaranaike as president of another South Asian nation, Sri Lanka, in 1960.

In an effort to end discrimination against women, New Delhi has made a concerted effort to ratify important international conventions. The International Labor Organization (ILO), of which it is a founding member, has ratified 47 agreements and one protocol. With a few concerns, it ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993 after signing it in 1980. The National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security as well as the Optional Protocol to CEDAW has not yet been ratified by it. To make dowry and domestic violence crimes throughout the nation, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005 and the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 were both passed. The government increased maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks for the private sector under the Maternity Benefit Act in 2017.

In all spheres of Indian politics, women will get a 33 percent reserve under the Women's Reservation Law. It is an effort to enhance the political engagement of women. The Deve Gowda administration originally proposed the legislation on September 12th, 1996. The measure was attempted to be pushed by many governments, but it took 14 years for the Rajya Sabha to pass it (the upper house of parliament). The Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament, and all state assemblies still need to approve the measure. The bill's introduction was a significant effort to alter the gender demographics of Indian politics. The quota system's proponents contend that it is a crucial step towards boosting the effective and meaningful involvement of women in politics. By



engaging the opinions of women in government, a process that often takes centuries can be sped up. On the other hand, sceptics think that this measure will exclusively help wealthy women. Although allocating 33% of seats for women is a bold step, the Trinamool Party, one of the bill's staunch backers, went even farther by reserving 40% of seats for women in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Notable Gains: In India, there are more and more women in business, politics, medicine, sports, and agriculture. The second lunar mission of India, Chandrayaan-2, was directed by two female scientists from the Indian Space Research Organization from its commencement till its conclusion in 2019. A female commander of a significant space mission challenges the stereotype that males should only work in rocket science. When the Supreme Court confirmed the government's position on women serving as army leaders in 2020, another significant step was made. Since their initial enlistment in the military in 1992, women have held a variety of roles, including those of fighter pilots, physicians, nurses, and engineers. These are instances of Indian women who have broken the glass ceiling in the armed services, despite the fact that participating in combat positions for women is still a contentious topic throughout the world.

Without concentrating on the grassroots measures taken by the government and civil society organizations, India's tale of women's empowerment would be incomplete. New initiatives, policies, and programmes have been implemented by the federal and state governments to empower women in both urban and rural areas. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the girl child, educate the girl child), Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (a programme to provide gas connections to women from families below poverty line), and Women Are Equal were among the major programmes that the Narendra Modi government launched to promote gender equality. The Bachao Beti Padhao initiative was introduced in January 2015 in an effort to address the problem of gender inequality and increase the wellbeing of young girls. The region of Northern India with the highest sex ratios is primarily the emphasis, including Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, and Uttarakhand. An online marketing campaign called Mahila-e-Haat was started in 2016. It supports female entrepreneurs, self-help organizations, and non-governmental organizations using technology (NGOs). Every programme has a distinct goal, from promoting community involvement and girl child welfare to assisting budding female entrepreneurs.

Also, the government has created space for foreign organizations to collaborate with regional and local NGOs as well as for-profit businesses. For instance, the World Bank collaborates closely with both the federal government and the state government of Andhra Pradesh to enhance the state's public health services, especially maternal and child health care. The National Institution for Women and the United Nations (UN) India Business Forum have collaborated to establish the UN-India NITI Aayog Investor Consortium for Women Entrepreneurs as another endeavour to support female entrepreneurship and provide a supportive environment for women. is collaborating with Changing India (NITI Aayog) Investment.



Reasons for the empowerment of women: Nowadays, we have seen many Acts and Plans from the national and state governments to empower Indian women. Nonetheless, women are disadvantaged and discriminated against in India on all societal levels, including those related to social involvement, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and reproductive healthcare. In India as a whole, women are considered to be extremely impoverished economically. A small number of women work in services and other fields. They thus require economic strength to compete on an equal footing with males. On the other side, Dhruva Hazarika noted in 202 that women are discovered to be less literate than males. In India, men have a literacy rate of 76%, compared to only 54% for women, according to the 2001 census. So, educating more women is crucial to giving them more influence. Moreover, some women have been found to be too frail to work. They labour harder and consume less food. So, women who are supposed to be weaker are supposed to be made stronger from a health perspective. The harassment of women at work is another issue. Rape, abduction of girls, dowry harassment, and other crimes are prevalent. They need empowerment of all types in order to safeguard their purity and dignity and to defend themselves as a result. In conclusion, women's emancipation is not achievable without their participation in and support of self-empowerment. Formulating strategies for gendered poverty reduction, women's education promotion, and the prevention and eradication of violence against women is necessary.

Challenges: India has made progress towards human development, but it still ranks poorly internationally in terms of gender equality. India's position in the World Economic Forum-commissioned Global Gender Gap Report fell from 108th in 2018 to 112th in 2020.

India has succeeded in narrowing the gender gap by two-thirds overall, particularly in the areas of political empowerment. In the political empowerment sub-index, it was placed 18th, with the government being governed for 20 years by a woman. Nonetheless, the total political representation in India is rather low, with women making up only 23% of the cabinet and 14.4% of the parliament. Regrettably, since 2006, its record on empowering women economically has been worse. According to the report, only 25% of women are employed or looking for work, compared to 82% of males. Also, their median salary is only one-fifth that of their male colleagues. Even when Indian women do manage to land jobs, they typically receive lower pay than male workers. According to the ILO's World Wages Report 2018/19, among the 73 countries it carefully examined, India has the largest average wage gender disparity, at 34.5%. Many women are suffering from this wage gap as their participation rates are greater in informal employment than in official employment. Just 14 percent of leadership positions in India are held by women. The economic empowerment of women will have positive effects on everyone. According to IMF estimates, India's GDP might expand by 27% if women were equally represented in the workforce. India may learn from the Japanese model in order to increase the economic empowerment of women. A big portion of the reason Tokyo's female labour force participation rose from 66.5 percent in 2000 to 76.3 percent in 2016 was because of Womenomics-related economic, demographic, and policy developments. Throughout time, it has dramatically altered its policies,



changing labour laws, introducing new anti-discrimination clauses, and improving child-care regulations. New and current laws might be implemented and strengthened to encourage women to enter the workforce and continue working during early marriage and parenthood. India has one of the most lenient maternity leave regulations, although only a tiny percentage of working women are covered by it. Few women genuinely gain from its drive to copy measures that have been successful elsewhere without taking into consideration local circumstances. Even if it could be beneficial to extensively examine these models, they still need to be improved in light of the Indian setting.

Also, there are discrepancies between policy and practise in the Indian legal system. Even while there is legislation in place to protect women and girls, there are still problems with its implementation and the conviction of suspected offenders. Corrupt practises and systematic bureaucracy deepen the gaps in these procedures. The legendary "Nirbhaya" gang rape case's offenders were hanged after seven years. The issue of women's empowerment being less apparent in rural India than in metropolitan areas is another. Given that the rural population in India is around 65.97%, despite rising urbanisation and the expansion of cities, this should be of great concern. Women have more access to healthcare, career opportunities, education, and decision-making in metropolitan settings.

There is a mismatch between policy and practise in the Indian legal system as well. Despite existing laws protecting women and girls, they are not consistently enforced, and those who break them are rarely punished. Corrupt practices and systematic bureaucracy deepen the gaps in these procedures. Seven years passed until the notorious "Nirbhaya" gang rape case's defendants were executed. In contrast to metropolitan areas, the problem of women's empowerment is less evident in rural India. Given that the rural population in India is around 65.97%, despite rising urbanization and city expansion, this should be of great concern. Women have more access to education, employment, healthcare, and decision-making opportunities in metropolitan regions.

It is important to consider South Asia as a whole while analysing the current gender disparity concerns in India. Gender inequality is still a problem in rural regions, especially in the Hindi heartland. Women are restricted to household duties and have little to no influence over economic decisions. Social welfare standards are low in comparison to Bangladesh, the country's neighbor, and levels of literacy, nutrition, and access to healthcare remain low. After the Middle East and North Africa, the area has the second-largest gender gap. With the exception of Sri Lanka, female parliamentary representation in the area has been at or below 20%. (33 percent). Social standards, met narratives, and gender stereotypes that are strongly ingrained in South Asian society are to blame for these elements. Jawad Syed and Edwina Pio, researchers, have suggested that initiatives to advance women's empowerment in South Asia should be evaluated through the prism of religious, cultural, and socioeconomic particularities where new legislative provisions may not always be put into practise. Nevertheless, prejudice can still exist. Social and familial organization. With rare exceptions, patriarchal and matriarchal traditions have hampered female mobility, restricted their access to basic healthcare and education, and encouraged forced unions. Because



victims lack agency and authority, gender-based violence—including domestic, sexual, and physical abuse—is particularly common in South Asia.

Conclusion: India's journey towards gender equality and women's empowerment began in 1947, when it attained independence. New Delhi still has a long way to go for women in many sectors, despite the fact that there have been definite improvements due to legal changes, human development, and grassroots initiatives. Authority. To eliminate the disparity between urban and rural communities and guarantee that rural women have the same access to work, education, health care, and decision-making as their urban counterparts, more concentrated efforts are required. As many of the obstacles to women's empowerment are related to patriarchal and matriarchal traditions that are strongly rooted in many South Asian civilizations, changing mindsets will be the most difficult issue.

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