

**ENABLING INCREASED PARTICIPATION OF
WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT OF INDIA: A STUDY
OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

Dissertation submitted to the Panjab University, Chandigarh
for the award of Degree of
Master of Arts in Public Administration and Public Policy,
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the
Advanced Professional Programme in Public Administration (2024-25)

Submitted by

Air Commodore Sudhir Yadav VSM Roll No.5024

Under the Guidance and Supervision of

Dr Shweta Mittal



**50th ADVANCED PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMME IN PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION (2024-25)**

**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION,
NEW DELHI**

Certificate

It is hereby declared that this submission is my original piece of work and to best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by any other person. I am aware of the University's norms and regulations regarding the plagiarism including the disciplinary action that it may invite. Any use of the works by any another author, in any form, is adequately acknowledged at their point of use or in the Bibliography.

Date: **March 2025**
Place: **New Delhi**

Sudhir Yadav
Air Commodore
Roll No 5024
Indian Institute of Public Administration
New Delhi - 110002

Certificate

I have the pleasure to certify that *Air Commodore Sudhir Yadav* has pursued his research work and prepared the present dissertation titled '*empowering the nation through development led by women in India: a study of economic empowerment of women,*' under my guidance and supervision. This is being submitted to the Panjab University, Chandigarh, for the purpose of Master of Arts in Public Administration and Public Policy in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Advanced Professional Programme in Public Administration (APPPA) of Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), New Delhi.

I recommend that the dissertation of *Air Commodore Sudhir Yadav* is worthy of consideration for the award of Master of Arts degree of the Panjab University, Chandigarh.

Date: March 2025
Place: New Delhi

Dr Shweta Mittal
Indian Institute of Public Administration
New Delhi - 110002

Acknowledgment

This research has been made possible with the help of many people who have directly or indirectly contributed in completing the same; therefore, I express my gratitude to all of them. First and foremost, I am extremely grateful and indebted to my Guide and Mentor Dr Shweta Mittal for continuously guiding me and supporting me, inspite of her busy schedule towards timely completion of this dissertation.

I also would like to thank the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) for providing me an opportunity to undertake research on the topic on which I had little domain knowledge and which was a completely uncharted territory for me. However, in the conducive environment of IIPA and with the help and assistance provided by the IIPA faculty, I was able to complete this dissertation satisfactorily.

I would also like to thank Prof Neetu Jain, Programme Director and Dr Saket Bihari, Additional Programme Director for facilitating the visits of various subject experts for talks at IIPA some of which have benefitted me greatly in my research and completion of the dissertation. The knowledge and inputs gained during these talks and presentations have been very helpful in understanding the subject and towards conduct of my study. I also thank both of them for providing me adequate time to carry out my research and creating very congenial environment for gaining knowledge as part of the APPPA curriculum.

I would also like to place on record my thanks to Dr Roma Debnath for guiding me about the methodology and process of doing research.

I would like to express my gratitude to the IIPA Library Staff, who were ever smiling and always very helpful in searching and providing the journals, papers and other research related material towards the study.

And last, but not the least, it will be most apt for me to thank the APPPA office staff; Mr. Anil Sharma, Mr. Manish Rawat and Mr. Rajesh for always being there to help and support me during the conduct of my research and completing this dissertation.

Date: **March 2025**
Place: **New Delhi**

(Sudhir Yadav)
Air Commodore
Roll No – 5024
Indian Institute of Public Administration
New Delhi - 110002

CONTENTS

CHAPTER NUMBER	TITLE OF CHAPTER	PAGE NUMBERS
I	Introduction	1 - 9
II	Review of Literature and Research Methodology	10- 17
III	Status of Women Empowerment in India	18-32
IV	Social Challenges to Women Empowerment in India	33- 44
V	Status of Economic Empowerment of Women in India	45-63
VI	Conclusion and Recommendations	64-83

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Enabling Increased Participation of Women in Development of India: A Study of Economic Empowerment of Women

Introduction

The economic empowerment of women is a crucial driver of national development and social progress. In India, where gender disparities have historically limited women's participation in the economy, policy interventions and grassroots movements have played a pivotal role in fostering women's economic inclusion. This dissertation examines the impact of women inclusive development in India, highlighting how economic empowerment of women translates into broader societal and national growth. The research underscores that women's participation in economic activities is not only a matter of social justice but also a strategic economic necessity that can significantly contribute to India's GDP and overall development.

Objectives and Scope

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- To explore the evolution of participation of women work force in the Indian economy in the formal and informal sectors
- To analyze the social factors limiting increased participation of women work force in India's economy and study the legal and policy interventions facilitated by the Government to remedy this problem.
- To study the status of present contribution of women work force in Indian economy and compare it with the global participation of women work force.

- To identify key actions that need to be taken by the government and non-government organisations to remove the obstacles in women's empowerment and financial inclusion.

Propositions

The propositions of the research are as follows:

- Implementing focused economic and social policies in India will enhance women's participation in the workforce, thereby contributing to the country's economic growth.
- Social factors are acting as barriers to inclusive participation of women in India's workforce.
- Increasing employment and leadership opportunities for women will significantly enhance their contribution to the future of the Indian economy.

Methodology

A mixed-method approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative data. The study involved:

- **Secondary Research:** Analysis of government reports, academic literature, and case studies of successful women-led initiatives.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Evaluating India's progress in women's economic empowerment relative to other developing nations. This involves benchmarking against global best practices and identifying key lessons that can be adapted to the Indian context.
- **Data Analysis:** Statistical analysis of employment trends, wage disparities, and economic contributions by women to better understand the effectiveness of current policies and initiatives.

Chapterisation

For the ease of understanding and better assimilation, the study has been segregated in six chapters:

- **Chapter I: Introduction.** This chapter covers the background of the subject, definition of key terms, statement of the problem, the scope of the study, justification of the study, objectives and propositions of the dissertation and chapterisation.
- **Chapter II. Review of Literature and Research Methodology.** This chapter covers the review of literature, hypothesis, research methodology and source of data collection.
- **Chapter III: Evolution of Women Empowerment in India.** This chapter provides a foundation of knowledge on the subject based on earlier academic studies carried out on the evolution of the women empowerment in our country. An endeavor has been made to identify the inconsistencies and conflicts in the previous studies and bring out the open questions left from the research on issues related to economic empowerment of women in India.
- **Chapter IV: Social Challenges to Women Empowerment in India.** This chapter brings out that women empowerment in India faces many challenges in our society on account of literacy, socio economic conditions, geographical areas, limited education, religious and social beliefs and local traditions. It also contains details on related issues of culture and women rights in India. It also dwells upon the gap between the policies and practices relating to women's rights in India.
- **Chapter V: Status of Economic Empowerment of Women in India.** This chapter contains as to why women's economic empowerment in India is essential for making them realize their rights and gender equality. It shall emphasize that economic empowerment includes women's inclusive rights over finances, property, participation in politics and economic policy

decisions from household to international establishments.

- **Chapter VI: Conclusion and Recommendations.** This chapter contains various challenges and opportunities for economic empowerment of women in India. It shall recommend potential areas of focus with an emphasis on certain societal and cultural reforms in India which could aid in speedy implementation of various schemes initiated by the Government of India specifically for women.

Key Findings

1. **Women as Catalysts for Economic Growth:** Increased female labor force participation has significantly contributed to India's GDP growth. Women-led enterprises, particularly in micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), have driven job creation and innovation. Women's involvement in industries such as textiles, handicrafts, agriculture, and technology has led to increased productivity and economic diversification.
2. **Government and Policy Interventions:** Initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Mudra Yojana, Stand-Up India, and the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement have played a significant role in financial inclusion and entrepreneurial support for women. These programs have provided access to credit, training, and market linkages, enabling women to become economically self-sufficient.
3. **Challenges:** Gender wage gaps, cultural barriers, and limited access to capital continue to hinder women's economic participation. The informal sector remains a significant employer of women, often lacking job security, fair wages, and social protections. Additionally, lack of digital literacy and limited access to technology act as barriers to women's economic empowerment in a rapidly digitizing economy.

4. **Success Stories of Women led Businesses:** Women-led enterprises in sectors like handicrafts, technology, and agriculture have demonstrated scalable models for sustainable development, emphasizing the role of financial literacy and digital inclusion. Notable examples include rural women entrepreneurs who have leveraged e-commerce platforms to sell their products globally and technology-driven women-led start-ups that are breaking barriers in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

5. **The Role of Education and Skill Development:** Education is a fundamental enabler of economic empowerment. However, disparities in female literacy rates, especially in rural areas, pose a challenge to women's ability to participate fully in economic activities. Vocational training and digital literacy programs have proven effective in equipping women with marketable skills.

6. **Impact of Women in Leadership Roles:** Women in leadership positions, whether in politics, business, or community organizations, have a multiplier effect on economic development. Their presence in decision-making roles influences policies that are more inclusive and supportive of women's empowerment.

Recommendations

The following aspects need to be focussed upon by the Government and Society for enabling women empowerment and their financial inclusion in India's economy to optimal potential -

- **Policy Enhancements:** Strengthening gender-responsive budgeting, improving access to credit for women entrepreneurs, and enhancing legal protections against workplace discrimination. Government schemes should be expanded with better outreach and implementation to reach marginalized women.

- **Capacity Building:** Expanding skill development programs tailored to women's needs, fostering leadership training, and encouraging mentorship networks. Special focus should be given to STEM education and digital literacy for women to equip them for high-growth industries.
- **Technological Integration:** Leveraging digital platforms for financial inclusion, market access, and knowledge-sharing among women entrepreneurs. This includes promoting fintech solutions tailored to women's financial needs and ensuring equal access to technology and internet services.
- **Community and Private Sector Engagement:** Encouraging corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and public-private partnerships to support women's economic ventures. Large corporations should create inclusive hiring and supplier diversity programs to integrate more women into the formal economy.
- **Enhanced Social Support Systems:** Improving childcare facilities, maternity benefits, and workplace policies that allow women to balance professional and personal responsibilities. Community-driven childcare models can enable more women to enter and remain in the workforce.
- **Legal Reforms and Awareness Campaigns:** Strengthening laws related to property rights, workplace harassment, and gender-based violence, along with awareness campaigns to educate women about their legal and economic rights.

Conclusion

Women-led development is not just a pathway to gender equality but a strategic approach to national economic growth. By fostering economic empowerment through inclusive policies, education, and financial access, India can harness the potential of its female workforce to drive sustainable and equitable development. The findings of this study emphasize the need for

continued investment in women's economic participation to create a more resilient and prosperous nation.

Empowering women economically is not merely a social necessity but an economic imperative that can transform India's developmental trajectory. With concerted efforts from the government, private sector, and civil society, India can create an inclusive growth model where women play an integral role in shaping the nation's future. This research highlights that true economic empowerment of women goes beyond financial independence—it paves the way for greater social equity, improved quality of life, and long-term national prosperity.

Enabling Increased Participation of Women in Development of India: A Study of Economic Empowerment of Women in India

“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women.” - Jawaharlal Nehru.

Chapter I

Introduction

Introduction

The empowerment of women is the cornerstone of sustainable development of any country, particularly in case of a diverse and rapidly evolving country like India. As the nation strives for holistic growth, the involvement of women in the economic sphere is crucial not only for achieving gender equality but also for enhancing national prosperity. This dissertation, titled "Empowering the Nation through Development Led by Women in India: A Study of Economic Empowerment of Women", aims to explore the multifaceted dimensions of women's economic empowerment in India and their implications for Indian societal progress as whole.

India's socio-economic landscape has witnessed transformative changes over the past few decades. While these changes have brought about economic growth, the participation of women in this progress has been inconsistent and uneven. Despite significant advancements, women continue to face systemic barriers that hinder their full participation in the workforce and economic activities. The Government of India has rightly recognized the importance of women empowerment as a catalyst for India's development and has launched various initiatives and policies aimed at fostering women's participation in economic activities. Programs such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Stand-Up India, and the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) highlight the government's commitment to creating an enabling environment for women's

economic empowerment. However, the path to empowerment is fraught with challenges. Women in India often grapple with socio-cultural constraints, limited access to education and skills training, inadequate healthcare, and economic insecurity. These barriers are further compounded by traditional gender roles and societal norms that prioritize men's contributions to the economy. As a result, women remain over represented in the informal sector, where job security, fair wages, and key benefits are non-existent in real sense. This disparity in economic opportunities not only affects personal and professional development of women work force but also limits the overall economic potential of the nation.

In his monthly address on 'Mann ki Baat' on 23 February 2020, the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi said, "the country was moving from women development to women- led development"¹. He emphasized that the mission of New India was to empower women and consider them as an equal partner in the inclusive growth of our nation. From the creation of cheerful future for the girl child, initiating of new opportunities for women and guaranteeing all-inclusive well-being for them, India is moving gradually towards creating awareness for gender equivalence and women empowerment. India needs women-led development and not just women development, which could make women the guiding force of our nation's path to prosperity.

It is because of continued women's struggle that today we have women pilots, doctors, engineers, space scientists, politicians, artists, authors and much more. In recent decades, there have been a large number of prominent female personalities in various fields like Arundhati Roy, Mary Kom, Irom Sharmila, Laxmi Agrawal, Kiran Bedi, Sushma Swaraj and Indira Gandhi. There is no domain or field of work where women have not participated and excelled. Indian women are no longer push- overs who could be suppressed and treated unequally to men in the society. The standards set by them in various areas is worth emulation, especially in the fields of arts, literature and sports.

This study seeks to analyze the specific dimensions of women's economic empowerment, focusing on how targeted policies and initiatives can address existing gaps and enhance women's participation in the economy. By examining various sectors, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services, this research aims to highlight best practices and identify areas for improvement. Moreover, the study will explore the role of women's self-help groups (SHGs) and cooperatives in promoting entrepreneurship and financial independence, showcasing successful models that can be replicated across different regions.

The effect of development is influenced by various factors like gender, geography and some of them unique to Indian context like caste and class play a significant role in shaping women's experiences and opportunities in India. Therefore, this dissertation will also consider the diverse experiences of women from various backgrounds, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the barriers they face and the strategies they employ to overcome them. By delving into the experiences of marginalised groups, this research will contribute to the discourse on inclusive development and the need for policies that address the specific challenges faced by all women.

Justification of The Study

In recent decades, the discourse on development has increasingly emphasized the critical role of women in driving economic growth and national progress. Globally, nations that have prioritized gender equality and women's empowerment have witnessed significant improvements in economic performance, poverty reduction, and overall societal well-being. In India, however, despite considerable strides in women's education, health, and political representation, the economic empowerment of women remains uneven and, in many cases, inadequate. Women's labor force participation, while slowly rising, lags behind that of men, and significant barriers persist in terms of access to resources, financial inclusion, and leadership opportunities. This gap not only hinders the potential of millions of women but

also stifles India's broader development goals, which are intrinsically linked to inclusive economic growth.

The various government initiatives, such as the "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" and "Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana," have been designed to promote gender equity and women's empowerment, however, challenges remain in addressing the deeply ingrained structural barriers that prevent women from realizing their full economic potential. Cultural norms that prioritize women's roles as caregivers over their roles in the workforce, a lack of access to financial capital for women entrepreneurs, and discriminatory practices in hiring and wage distribution continue to persist. Furthermore, women in rural areas face additional constraints, such as limited access to education, health care, and infrastructure, further exacerbating their economic marginalization.

The women's work in informal sectors of the economy like carpet weaving and handloom industry is not taken into cognizance for the officially stated designation of economic productivity. "The contribution of women to India's GDP is thus analyzed to be only 17 percent by some estimates"². While women should be encouraged to work in the formal sectors of the economy, their contribution in informal sectors should be given due recognition and counted. "The Indian economy would grow by an additional 27 percent by 2025, adding \$2.9 trillion, if women were represented in the formal economy at the same rate as men"³.

Most Indian women get employment in informal sectors of the economy which have fewer social protection laws and comparatively lesser wages as compared to jobs in the formal sectors. The Government of India recognises the huge potential and gains that would be in the offering by way of women's economic inclusion. Hence, many policy reforms have been undertaken keeping in mind the gender equality issues prevalent in society. For example, "the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is an expansive worker

protection program that mandates equal wages for men and women and includes provisions for childcare at worksites”⁴. Additionally, “in March 2017 India enacted a federal law mandating that all employers offer twenty-six weeks of paid maternity leave”⁵.

Self-help groups (SHGs), which are women-only groups, have been created across our nation, who lend money to one another for utilisation of government services specifically for women. This would boost women entrepreneurship where they could be heading small and medium-sized businesses and move away from jobs in informal sectors of the economy. “Only 36% of Women in India are part of some work force in some way which is nearly the same as 35% who were part of work force in 2004”⁶. This percentage had dipped to 29% in 2020 and has only now come up again after focused institutional interventions. Most of the Indian women workers are working in unpaid care activities which are generally considered as informal sectors of the economy. “They comprise almost 40 percent of agricultural labour but control only 9 percent of the land in India”⁷. Women are also kept out of the formal financial system. “Nearly half of Indian women do not have a bank or savings accounts of their own and 60 percent of women have no valuable assets in their name”⁸. Therefore, it is not surprising that “India has a lower share of women’s contribution to the GDP at only 17 percent than the global average of 37 percent”⁹. There are various social benefits which could be reaped by women empowerment like increased demand, good schooling for kids and higher capacity of the government to initiate appropriate welfare measures. “The IMF has estimated that equal participation of women in the workforce will increase India’s GDP by 27 percent”¹⁰.

The study is motivated by the understanding that empowering women is not only a matter of social justice but also an economic imperative. By fostering an environment in which women can participate fully in the economy, India has the potential to unlock new sources of growth and innovation, thereby accelerating its development trajectory. Thus, this

research will provide policy recommendations to enhance women's participation in the economy, recognizing that the economic empowerment of women is essential to achieving sustainable, inclusive development for the nation as a whole.

This study shall focus on studying the status of empowerment of women in India, with emphasis on their economic empowerment defining women's economic empowerment and analyse how women's socio economic has changed from a situation where they had limited control and approach to financial assets to a situation where they can or will practice financial independence and advancement. This would make them more powerful, knowledgeable, capable and skillful, to make necessary changes in their lives or be an entrepreneur and contribute to growth of India. They would then be able to make decisions in the financial domain including household expenses that are otherwise regarded as men's domain. Such empowerment would also enable them to undertake vocation of their choice and exercise freedom in controlling and spending their income. This would lead to the all-round improvement in their socio-economic status.

Statement of Problem

Women comprise nearly half of India's population, yet their contribution to the nation's formal economy remains disproportionately low. According to the World Bank, women's participation in the labor force in India dropped to 20.3% in 2019, among the lowest globally. Factors such as societal norms, gender-based discrimination, and inadequate policy interventions contribute to this disparity, restricting women's access to education, employment, entrepreneurship, and leadership positions. The failure to integrate women fully into the economy has led to missed opportunities for India's development, particularly given the strong correlation between gender equality and economic growth. Research has demonstrated that women's economic empowerment can lead to more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes, including reduced poverty rates, improved household

welfare, and enhanced economic resilience. Despite sustained efforts by the successive governments, a majority of women work in informal sectors of the economy and are therefore outside the gambit of government protection. Jobs in informal sectors have fewer social protection laws and low wages. Theoretically, there are no legal barriers for women to work in formal sectors of the economy in India. Instead, the prevalent cultures and traditions in India, tend to converge women in those jobs and industries which have had a lower wage growth rate in recent years as compared to jobs in other sectors of the economy.

The problem this dissertation seeks to address is how women in India can be economically empowered to contribute to national development. It aims to study the various steps taken by the Government for facilitating the participation of the women workforce in India and their effect on increasing the participation of women in India's work force. Specifically, this research will focus on identifying the barriers that Indian women face in participating in the economy, particularly in terms of overcoming societal barriers, accessing employment opportunities, leadership roles, and entrepreneurial ventures. It will also explore the contribution of the women work force in the Indian economy and its comparison with global parameters. It is also aimed to discuss road map for future to achieve the economic empowerment of women in India and as to how the private sector and civil society can further contribute to this goal.

Objectives

- To explore the evolution of participation of women work force in the Indian economy in the formal and informal sectors
- To analyze the social factors restraining increased participation of women work force in India's economy and study the legal and policy interventions facilitated by the Government to remedy this problem.
- To study the status of present contribution of women work force in Indian economy and compare it with the global participation of women work force.

- To identify key actions that need to be taken by the government and non-government organisations to remove the obstacles in women's empowerment and financial inclusion.

Propositions for Dissertation

- Implementing focused economic and social policies in India will enhance women's participation in the workforce, thereby contributing to the country's economic growth.
- Social factors are acting as barriers to inclusive participation of women in India's workforce.
- Increasing employment and leadership opportunities for women will significantly enhance their contribution to the future of the Indian economy.

¹ "Moving from Women Development to Women-Led Development: Modi | Business Standard News," accessed August 20, 2024, https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/moving-from-women-development-to-women-led-development-modi-118022500223_1.html.

² "Spotlight on India: Growing Economies Through Gender Parity," accessed August 25, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-global-economy/case-studies/india/>.

³ "Spotlight on India: Growing Economies Through Gender Parity."

⁴ "The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005," accessed August 25, 2024, https://www.nrega.nic.in/netnrega/mgnrega_new/Nrega_home.aspx.

⁵ "Maternity Leave in India Increased to Six Months - Employment and HR - India," accessed August 25, 2024, <https://www.mondaq.com/india/employee-benefits-compensation/583462/maternity-leave-in-India-increased-to-six-months>.

⁶ "Reversing Women's Decline in the Indian Labour Force," accessed December 5, 2020, <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/v80I9EwDz6oyklST8ebqMM/Reversing-womens-decline-in-the-Indian-labour-force.html>.

⁷ "Gender Equality: Women's Economic Empowerment - UN India," accessed August 24, 2024, <https://in.one.un.org/unibf/gender-equality/>.

⁸ "Indian Women Aren't Using Their Bank Accounts. This Is How and Why Women's World Banking Plans to Change That. -Women's World Banking," accessed August 24, 2024, <https://www.womensworldbanking.org/insights-and-impact/indian-women-arent-using-their-bank-accounts-this-is-how-and-why-womens-world-banking-plans-to-change-that/>.

⁹ *“Women in India’s Economic Growth,”* accessed August 24, 2024, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2018/03/17/women-india's-economic-growth>.

¹⁰ *“India and the IMF,”* accessed August 24, 2024, <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/IND>.

Chapter II

Review of Literature and Research Methodology

Review of Literature

Swami Vivekananda said, “There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing”¹. “Therefore, the addition of women empowerment as one of the key goals in the eight millennium Development Goals emphasizes the significance of this fact”². Women empowerment would assist India in achieving the status of a developed country.

Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam (2003), “Empowering woman is a prerequisite for creating a good nation; when women are empowered, a society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their value systems lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation”³.

Doepke M. Tertilt M. (2011), “Does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development?”⁴ It was studied and observed that mothers could provide good care to their children if they have money to spend themselves. Various non-cooperative family bargaining tools were studied to understand the types of the phenomenon which could give rise to the observed empirical relationship.

Duflo E. (2011), “Women Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge”⁵. As per the study, women empowerment may not always lead to their development unless suitable policies are enacted simultaneously for promoting gender equality.

M. Suguna (2011), “Women education in India has likewise been a noteworthy distraction of both the administration and common society”⁶. The study highlights the significance of education in women empowerment in India, which it perceives as moderate

presently. The standard of education should be considered as a vital parameter in measuring the level of women empowerment as it is education which could help women to alter their life. It would be immoral to disregard the importance of education and skilling for women when we discuss ways to empower them.

Chandra (2012), "Empowerment is gradually being perceived as a systematic process by which people without power gain exercise greater control over their lives"⁷. As per the study, women's empowerment has to start by building on her psychological strength so that they can raise their voice for their rights and privileges in the male-dominated society of India. This would then affect a change in their ideology, power to influence decisions and proclaim themselves and would give them control over various resources for upliftment of their status.

Dr. Sahab Singh, et al (2013) "Empowerment of rural women has developed as a critical issue today"⁸. As per the study, when a woman is economically empowered, it is an indication of the growth of the nation. The subject of women empowerment and their rise in status as equal partners in the growth of a nation has become very important to social activists and reformists, economists and politicians.

Arpita Banerjee (2013), "In India, the condition of women was appalling during independence"⁹. Women remained in the background and did not get opportunities for education and leadership roles as men continued to influence the Indian culture and because of the stagnant economic state of the nation. Since independence, there have been efforts to evenly match the status of women with men. However, there is much to do for women in states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and North-Eastern states.

Rajnish (2013), "The status of women is one of the vital angles to think about in each time"⁹. The writer suggests that in recent times, the status of Indian women has changed due to globalisation and corporate culture prevailing in the society, as compared to ancient times. The study tries to find reasons behind the continued struggle of women for empowerment

despite several measures and policies for women, initiated in the fields of health-care, skilling, marriage and employment.

Mehra (2014), “One of the real issues of India society is the mediocre position agreed to women”¹⁰. The study describes the set-up of the Indian society and the position of Indian women in the Ancient, Medieval, British and Independent periods. It argues that though there has been a considerable improvement over the periods in the position and status of women, it is far from satisfactory and a lot more is desired to be done.

Dr. Rajeshwari (2015), “Today the strengthening of women has turned out to be a standout amongst the most essential worries of 21st century”¹¹. As per the study, women empowerment is perceived as an illusion in the real world. It shall help reduce atrocities committed against women and would enhance their capacity to withstand stress and be judgmental while taking key decisions of her life.

Abhishek (2018), “In the previous decade, women were compelled to participate in any social exercises and not considered a piece of any basic leadership process in the family”¹². As per the study, women continue to live under terrible conditions of economic impoverishment in the rural and economically backward areas of India, though they are seen to participate in some low paid jobs in these areas gradually. These areas continue to accept the tyranny of women as normal even today.

Kashyap (2019), “From last such huge numbers of years, women business visionaries are moving and propelling business people”¹³. India has seen a rise in the number of women entrepreneurs since the onset of globalisation. They are becoming inclined to carry out business activities as compared to staying inside their home. Government has initiated various financial schemes to encourage these young business-women, who are working hard to reap the benefits of these schemes and become economically empowered.

Christiana, et al (2019), “Women’s use of safety and avoidance strategies are safety

behaviors that play a key role in maintaining women's fear and societal dynamics"¹⁴. The study is based on analysis of interviews of adolescent women in India in various age groups on their views on existing levels of violence against women, its effect on their psychology and confidence levels and how they deal with them. The study recommends that women need to be aware of safety and security measures, avoidance strategy and a need for their empowerment to deal with incidents of violence against them.

An initial study of the existing literature of women's empowerment at different levels in India has been carried out. The study brings out that women's economic empowerment would improve and hasten the process of the nation's development. However, the following significant limitations emerge in the literature:

- All the studies on women empowerment in India have mainly been conducted at macro-level and do not touch the issues at micro-level which are important enablers of women economic empowerment, such as reducing unpaid work which shall reduce the burden of care of women, moving from risky to protected work which is often acknowledged with the transition from the informal to the formal sector and women moving into highvalue-based sectors of the Indian economy.
- Studies on the women participation in the labour force emphasise on variations in the rate and the various issues responsible for the long-term drop in women employment. The types of unpaid work undertaken by women have been studied while considering the literature on unpaid work. However, the areas of the burden of unpaid work done by women in the agriculture sector and rural households have not gained much attention.
- The literature does not bring out adequately the main reasons that impede the employment of women in high growth sectors of the Indian economy. Also, there is not much study which lays down the enablers for improving women productivity in various sectors of employment.

India is a developing nation with lots of changes taking place in social, political and

economic aspects of women's lives. Therefore, even though several micro-studies on the subject are already there, starting a new study on the subject of women economic empowerment with emphasis on better wages and working environment, enhancement of growth for workers in informal sectors, increasing the productivity of women-owned businesses and promoting financial and digital inclusion would be important, as such an attempt would produce several new facts which could have a bearing on policy issues.

The present study on women's economic empowerment in India is also likely to contribute substantially to the understanding of the patterns of social and cultural behavior in India. It would assist in better assimilation of the socio-economic role of women in India. It would also add to the existing field of knowledge and bring out enablers to promote the vision of empowering the nation through development led by women, in India.

Research Gaps in The Existing Literature

The study of literature reveals that there are some existing research gaps that could be explored in a dissertation focused on "Enabling Increased Participation of Women In Development of India: A Study Of Economic Empowerment Of Women In India"

1. **Regional Disparities:** While there is research on women's economic empowerment in India, there is a gap in comparative studies that analyze how different states or regions (urban vs. rural) experience varying levels of empowerment and economic participation.
2. **Sector-Specific Analysis:** Limited research has been conducted on the specific sectors where women are economically empowered, such as agriculture, technology, and services. Exploring sector-specific challenges and opportunities could provide deeper insights.
3. **Impact of Informal Sector Work:** Much of the existing research focuses on formal employment. A gap exists in understanding the economic empowerment of women in the informal sector, including street vendors and home-based workers.

4. **Role of Technology:** While technology is increasingly recognized for its role in empowerment, there is a need for more focused research on how digital platforms and tools impact women's economic participation and entrepreneurship in India.
5. **Longitudinal Studies:** There is a lack of longitudinal research that tracks the long-term impact of specific policies and programs on women's economic empowerment over time, particularly in relation to changes in family dynamics and community structures.
6. **Intersectionality:** Research often overlooks how intersecting identities (e.g., caste, class, religion) influence women's economic empowerment. There is a need for studies that explore how these factors shape experiences and outcomes.
7. **Barriers to Accessing Resources:** More in-depth exploration is needed on the barriers women face in accessing financial resources, training, and support networks, as well as the effectiveness of existing initiatives aimed at overcoming these barriers.
8. **Policy Impact Evaluation:** While many policies exist, comprehensive evaluations of their actual impact on women's economic empowerment are scarce. This gap includes assessing how well these policies are implemented and whether they achieve their intended outcomes.
9. **Cultural Influences:** There is limited understanding of how cultural norms and attitudes towards women in different communities affect their economic empowerment. Research could explore the role of community perceptions and support systems.
10. **Case Studies of Successful Models:** There is a need for more case studies that highlight successful models of women-led development initiatives. These case studies could serve as blueprints for scaling successful programs nationwide.

Research Methodology and Sources of Data Collection

The method of approach for the study is based on exploratory research. The data was collated from secondary sources through the study of books, online research and various

reference material available in the library and websites. While the material reviewed is from multiple sources few prominent references are mentioned below:

- Empowering the Nation with Women-Led Development, Yojana, Oct 2018.
- Web access of the National Policy for Women Empowerment, Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India.
- Website access to Gender Equality-Women's Economic Empowerment-UNIndia.
- Website access to National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 2015-16, India,2017
- Websites like Wikipedia, Women's Web, Care India, Women-National Portal of India etc.
- Magazines and Newspapers like Yojana, India Today, The EconomicTimes, The Hindu etc.

The research was done with mixed approach and as follows:

Secondary Research: Analysis of government reports, academic literature, and reports and publications available online.

Comparative Analysis: Evaluating India's progress in women's economic empowerment relative to other nations. This involved identifying key lessons that can be adapted to the Indian context.

Data Analysis: Statistical analysis of employment trends, wage disparities, and economic contributions by women to better understand the effectiveness of current policies and initiatives.

¹ *“The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda/Volume 6/Epistles - Second Series/LXXV Shashi - The Free Online Library,” accessed August 9, 2024, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda/Volume 6/Epistles - Second Series/LXXV Shashi](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Complete_Works_of_Swami_Vivekananda/Volume_6/Epistles_-_Second_Series/LXXV_Shahi).*

- ² “India’s Progress Toward Achieving the Millennium Development Goals,” accessed August 9, 2024, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3180952/>.
- ³ “Dr. Abdul Kalam Prescribes Women Empowerment to Stabilise Society - The Hindu,” accessed August 9, 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Tiruchirapalli/drabdul-kalam-prescribes-women-empowerment-to-stabilise-society/article2301815.ece>.
- ⁴ Matthias Doepke and Michèle Tertilt, “Does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development?” 2014, <http://www.worldbank.org/mdgs/gender.html>.
- ⁵ Esther Duflo, “Women’s Empowerment and Economic Development” (Cambridge, MA, December 2011), <https://doi.org/10.3386/w17702>.
- ⁶ M Suguna, “Education and Women Empowerment in India,” *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, Vol. 1, 2011, [Www.Zenithresearch.Org.In](http://www.Zenithresearch.Org.In).
- ¹⁰ Rakesh Chandra, “Women Empowerment in India-Milestones & Challenges,” n.d.
- ⁷ Sahab Singh, Gaurav Thakur, and P C Gupta, “A Case Study on Empowerment of Rural Women through Micro Entrepreneurship Development,” vol. 9, accessed January 9, 2025, www.iosrjournals.org.
- ⁸ Arpita Banerjee, “Status of Women and Gender Discrimination In India: A Statewise Analysis,” 2013, <http://www.journalijdr.com>.
- ⁹ Vikas Nandal and Ms Rajnish, “Status of Women through Ages in India,” *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 3, 2014, pp 21–26, www.isca.me.
- ¹⁰ “Socio-Economic and Political Status of Women: Understanding The Indian Context / International Journal Of Social, Political And Economic Research,” Accessed January 9, 2025, [Https://Ijosper.Uk/Index.Php/I/Article/View/14](https://Ijosper.Uk/Index.Php/I/Article/View/14).
- ¹¹ Rajeshwari M Shettar, “A Study on Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment in India,” *IOSR Journal of Business and Management Ver. I* 17, no. 4 (2015): 2319–7668, <https://doi.org/10.9790/487X-17411319>.
- ¹² P Abishek And Gayathri J, “A Critical Analysis Of Status Of Women In India,” *International Journal Of Pure And Applied Mathematics* 120, No. 5 (2018): 4853–74.
- ¹³ Er Nivedita Kashyap, Assistant Professor CSE Department ABVGIET Pragatinagar Shimla Mithilesh Kumar Jha, and Director cum Principal ABVGIET Pragatinagar Shimla, “A Study on Women Empowerment and Development in India,” 2019.
- ¹⁴ Christina Nieder, Christoph Muck, and Joscha Kärtner, “Sexual Violence Against Women in India: Daily Life and Coping Strategies of Young Women in Delhi,” *Violence Against Women* 25, no. 14 (November 1, 2019): 1717–38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801218824056>.

Chapter III

Evolution of Women Empowerment in India

Introduction

The status of women in Indian society has fluctuated significantly over its history. In ancient India, women enjoyed a high social status. Some of the ancient Indian literature (e.g. Rig Veda) provide ample evidence of equality between women and men with regards to the ability to acquire the highest knowledge. This deteriorated during the medieval period (500 AD -1500AD) when women's role got restricted to primarily within confines of home. After a prolonged phase of secondary social status, Indian women seem to be experiencing a rise towards equality again. There has been a wide range of socio-economic developments which are catalysing a broader change in women's roles, responsibilities, and the economic state. Women's contribution has started to broaden from the care economy to the market economy. Some of these key socio-economic developments include improved literacy, infrastructure development and increased policy focus on gender equality

Evolution of Women Empowerment in Modern India

“Savitribai Phule is considered to be one of the pioneers of the feminist movement in India”¹. She was born in Satara, Maharashtra on 03 January 1832. The day is celebrated in the state of Maharashtra as Women's Day to mark her birth anniversary. She was a social activist and struggled for the empowerment of women and their education in India with support from her husband Sh Jyotirao Phule, to whom she got married at nine years of age. She opened the only girls' school of that time at Pune in 1848. She was rejected and ill-treated by men several times for encouraging women's literacy and making efforts to enhance their standing in society. Within a few years, Phule managed to establish many schools for rural and backward class girls and started teaching herself. The women were not charged any tuition fee and instead offered money to attend school. Along with promoting education for

women, Phule also raised her voice against the social evils prevalent in the society against women like casteism, untouchability and Sati-Pratha, thus becoming the first woman to advocate their rights in India. She was also a poet and a writer who questioned the hegemonic attitude of higher caste Brahmins in the society at that time. She managed to establish resources like provision for drinking water for so-called untouchables in the society, provided care to raped women who were pregnant. Make them aware and counsel them on the issue of equal feminine rights and privileges in society. In 1897, when the plague hit India, she nursed and provided care to various plague victims selflessly without caring for her life. She passed away the same year due to plague.

The idea of women's empowerment was announced for the first time in 1986 at the UN session in Nairobi, where it was pronounced as “redistribution of social and economic powers and control of resources in favour of women”². United Nations Development Fund for Women defines women empowerment as, “acquiring knowledge, understanding of gender relations, developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life”³.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar said, “I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have made”⁴. The values of gender parity and identical privileges are cherished in the constitution of India, which grants equal status to females and calls for all the states to embrace a constructive outlook towards them. “The National Commission for Women in India was set up as statutory body in January 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990 to review the Constitutional and legal safeguards for women, recommend remedial legislative measures, facilitate redressal of grievances and advise the Government on all policy matters affecting women”⁵.

As per Keshab Chandra Mandal, women empowerment could be classified as, “five separate categories of social, educational, economic, political, and psychological”⁶.

Though, all the categories are inter-related, it's important to focus on them individually. Since each category has different goals and agenda, so trying to focus on them as a whole would not be beneficial. Working in all the areas five categories would not only facilitate women empowerment but also ensure gender equality in society.

Importance of Women Empowerment

The term, empowered woman is often perceived negatively in our society when in reality it implies her empowerment and a respectable social status. It is a general tendency to misunderstand the term with someone who is a pure feminist and does not care for the male population in our society. This is far from reality. It is to be clearly understood that a woman could be empowered even without being too feminist or without having any ill-feelings towards the men. An empowered woman is one who can live her life her way being able to make her own choices of good and bad in her education, marriage and job. She does not want to live alone in society but believes in being an equal partner with men in the progress of the nation. Just because she is a lady doesn't imply that she has to be an introvert, shy or exhibit girlish qualities all the time while not able to express her feelings and choices. An empowered woman would be able to make her own decisions confidently, will be empowered to speak her mind on various issues and have money to lead a healthy and secure life. Being empowered would enable a woman to achieve the highest goals she sets for herself and would fill her life with happiness and joy. A woman needs to be strong, determined and focused to be empowered which is challenging but it shall be the most important prized possession for her.

Women must be able to single-out those men without any fear, who misbehave or harass them and not letting them go scot-free. An empowered woman would only support the cause of other woman and engage in a healthy competition with them without any animosity. She would have the capacity to work towards her dreams willingly without any pressure of what anyone in the society opines or thinks of her. It is a tough task which requires qualities such

as consistent hard work, high self-esteem and perseverance. An empowered woman who has these qualities would make use of the best available opportunities that come her way to boost herself in her path towards success. Women have the potential to look after themselves and their families and they need to assimilate the power to continue growing and become empowered.

Women Empowerment in India

Empowerment is attained when each human being has control over his/her life and the society where they live. An empowered person should be able to choose lifestyle, career and living without any restrictions or impediments. In medieval ages, Indian society was parched by practices such as child marriage, dowry, polygamy and Sati system. Thus, the women were mostly confined to their home and were kept busy in managing the household activities with practically no opportunity for their economic growth and empowerment. They generally remained isolated from decision-making activities, which was considered to be the domain of men.

Under the British rule, some reforms were initiated to remove gender bias in the fields of education and job opportunities for women. Efforts towards industrialization and urbanization had a positive impact on women's lives in many ways. The work put in by social activists like Vinoba Bhave and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar on women's education led to the abolition of many discriminatory practices faced by women earlier.

“In the Vedic age, the status of women was better as compared to the subsequent periods as they held great respect and considerable rights and privileges”⁷. They were considered a goddess and were adored. The married girl was regarded as an inherent part of her husband and her presence was inevitable in every religious function. The literature of that period shows that women were regarded in high esteem and they enjoyed a wholesome social status as mother, daughter, sister, or wife. She was portrayed as kind, affectionate, forgiving, adjusting, enduring and submissive within the social framework but the same woman

becomes a fierce fighter in the battlefield. These are beautifully described in the nine forms of goddess Durga who is obedient and motherly on one hand and becomes Kali when she has to fight against the demonic powers of Asuras.

Women empowerment would assist India in achieving the status of a developed country. The laws regarding Indian women were introduced after Independence. The Constitution provides equal rights to men and women. There are laws to inhibit sexual harassment and indecent representation of women. "The law has also given equal rights to women in the fields of adoption, maternity benefits, pay and good working conditions"⁸. The women related movements in the past two decades have raised consciousness, advocated and built institutions to bring to the forefront of women's issues and demands into the mainstream. But the gains of these movements are now being threatened by rising trends of globalisation and resurgent fundamentalism, amongst other forces.

The tussle for the improved economic status of women and to provide openings for them in urban as well as rural areas has been a continuous process, but the job opportunity in rural areas is comparatively inferior. "Nearly 80 per cent of the total female work force is employed in agriculture but little attention has been paid in reality by the social planners to improve the social situation of these women"⁹.

The literacy growth in India has been unable to match up with the increase in population. Though on year-on-year basis, there has been a percentage increase in literacy. The study revealed that the problem of literacy in India is embedded more among females than among males. "The problem is compounded by a variety of economic, social, cultural and even anthropological factors to keep women in economic oppression as long as is possible"¹⁰.

The working and living conditions of poor women have taken up various issues with the changing economic and social conditions, like gender inequality, technology, health, legislation, housing and politics. "Education has slowly helped in making Indian women

aware of their rights”¹¹. However, the social status of women has mostly remained the same despite improved education and job prospects in the market. Education has laid importance on women’s diverse role as daughter, parent and bread earner.

The role continuity of women in the maternal role obligation remains intact with slight role adjustment. Despite the economic empowerment of women, hierarchical role structure within the family remains unchanged and the traditional mother role has not undergone any change. The role sharing by husbands’ is associated with the activities that are intellectual oriented while women are culturally made responsible for the emotionally oriented activities. The role continuity may be attributed to the ideological notions of maternal instinct and the natural relationship between mother and child. Thus, women are forced into motherhood by ideology and cultural pressure. “The theoretical economic empowerment has seldom allowed women to redefine their role as cultural values predominant in the society restrains their bargaining power for a role change”¹².

The policies for the empowerment of women must look into removing gender bias prevalent in society. This would help the women in actively participating and sharing their experiences and gains of success with other members of the community and society. Rural SC/ST women who are a part of the rural poor population, lack not only income and skill but also self-assurance and motivation. “Project for economic enhancement has not improved their status in the family or community because they do not think of themselves as participants and citizens, who though poor and illiterate still have fundamental rights of fair treatment, justice, dignity, a share in the fruits of development, and above all to make decisions about their own lives”¹³.

The judiciary has continued to play a crucial role in dispensing justice and shaping public opinion. However, there is undoubtedly deep-rooted gender bias in the judiciary which needs to be eliminated. This fact is obvious from the many judgments in women related cases of dowry death and rape which have often led to nationwide protests by women's

organisations. All the people have certain inherent rights by birth and women are no exception to the universal entitlement of human rights. It is hoped that these revelations would expose the failure of the government and society to ensure equality and gender justice even after so many years of Independence and provide an incentive to change this. “Women deserve a more humane and gender- sensitive world and we need to recommit ourselves to guarantee women's human rights”¹⁴.

Women empowerment within social, political and economic ranges elevates their status as an individual and within society. To achieve the milestone of sustainable development for women, education and employment are mandatory. The system of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), which are women-only groups are created across our nation and who lend money to one another, for utilisation of government services specifically for women. This would boost women entrepreneurship where they could be heading small and medium-sized businesses and move away from jobs in informal sectors of the economy. There is no doubt regarding the commitment of India towards women empowerment. In the last three decades, various reforms to raise their marriageable age, skill enhancement, gender equality and job opportunities have been initiated. All these measures go on to show the commitment of our country towards enhancing the status of women and their empowerment.

The study emphasizes that for realizing the goal of women empowerment in India, education and employment would lead to other aspects of empowerment like physical, legal, political and socio-cultural. A culture of sharing household responsibilities among men and women is the need of time, for gender equality. This would dismantle the culture of non-productive work as an exclusive domain of women. As women are emerging in all walks of life, they are faced with gender sensitivity, gender differentiation and role conflict. Women are caught in the web of modernization and related trends. “A multipronged effort both by government and private sectors needs to be made as a relatively long-term strategy so that even the poorest of the woman becomes an active participant in the country and would

involve a formidable task of educating all women”¹⁵.

Women continue to be subdued in all activities of life and need empowerment. All aspects of society need to be restructured. Women need to have admittance to higher education, good medical care, higher marriageable age, better skills and work participation, no economic dependence, advancement opportunity to a higher position of power and decision making, self-reliance, dignity and self-respect and better living conditions. The government policies will be able to only facilitate the process, reduce the hurdles and create an atmosphere which is conducive for transformation. “The onus of empowerment rests with women wherein they need to exploit the opportunities given by the government reforms to upgrade their status”¹⁶.

Self-help groups (SHGs), which are women-only groups, have been created across our nation, who lend money to one another for utilisation of government services specifically for women. This would boost women entrepreneurship where they could be heading small and medium-sized businesses and move away from jobs in informal sectors of the economy. Though SHGs and similar micro-credit schemes for women in rural India would contribute vastly to improving the economic status of women, they would not de-facto lead to women empowerment. It might at best lead to a little bit of poverty alienation and some enhancement in the living conditions of these women. The women need to be mentored to use these schemes for skill enhancement so they could start their own business and slowly become self-reliant. This would enable them to become independent and ensure their all-round empowerment. Gender equality in a society helps women to overcome misery caused due to poverty on herself, children, parents and families. While eliminating gender discrimination from the society will reap multiple dividends for the economic growth of our nation, it shall require policies and reforms which focus on creating jobs, social protection laws and labour laws for women. They need to be empowered so that they could exercise their influence in important sectors of decision making and act as catalysts for change.

It is vital to enhance the knowledge and confidence level of women in India by widening their skills, giving them ownership of assets and huge earning opportunities. Women need to be encouraged to participate in decision making both inside and outside their homes, which is inhibited mainly by the patriarchy nature of Indian society. Introduction of reservation for women in jobs is an important step towards providing an opportunity to women for equal participation in decision making, develop high self-esteem and achieve higher economic status in the society. “The government is making consistent towards the abolition of gender inequality from the society but differences are still visible in the rural areas in areas of education, hygiene facilities and rights over the property”¹⁷.

Women empowerment can only be achieved by their economic, political, social and legal empowerment. “All four areas are interrelated and are equally important. Economic empowerment would improve the quality of life, social empowerment would enhance their status in the society, political empowerment would ensure their decision making in matters related to policy reforms and legal empowerment would provide women necessary protection from social evils against them”¹⁸. The literacy rate among women also needs to be improved from the present levels.

Women form the mainstay of our families and society. Very often, roles played by women are justified by the requirement of their religion and culture which are subject to change. They should be encouraged to actively participate in cooperative societies so that they can be partners in decision making, provide them with a means for social interaction and healthy interaction in community discussions. “Such actions would gradually empower women and will be beneficial for society and the young generation”¹⁹.

In an educated and cultured society, there would be a healthy and similar standing for men and women. It is ironical that while the strength of women in armed forces, science and technology, politics, legal and sports has increased, cases of dowry deaths and molestation against them have also increased. “Women, especially in rural areas are still ignorant about

their rights and opportunities as provided by various laws and government”²⁰.

There are several impediments to a women’s employment, specifically in sectors which have a heavy concentration of male population which prohibit their economic empowerment. A few of the impediments include gender-specific labour laws, harassment at workplaces and home, and restricted access to good schooling, land ownership, technical skills and financial independence. However, there is a major impact of social norms related to religion, caste, urban and rural area background and income groups, on gender parity issue confronted by the women prevalent in the society. These norms act as barriers to women empowerment as they do not get an opportunity to gain high-income jobs, information and social networking. The women are subjected to gender-based occupation compartmentalization and they invariably get employed in low-income jobs. Gender norms are often used to explain the instances of sexual harassment of women and the desired role of women at home and workplace, by manipulating the awareness of the policymakers in the country. Most of the gender norms do not have any foundation in biotic gender differences.

There have been studies which associate the use of a technology-intensive machine with only men as it was related to the physical strength of the men, even though the machine might be owned by a woman. A few of the studies also emphasise that men perform greater skilled jobs in the agricultural sector than women and men were superior in jobs related to the mining sector. Similarly, gender norms were considered valuable in various studies, across other sectors such as aviation and defence forces. Over the last few decades, Indian women have challenged the existing gender norms and proved their ability to participate in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. This has resulted in improving gender relations in society and bring about positive changes in the present gender norms along with the economic empowerment of women. The institutional leaders and policymakers must realise the importance of changing the existing gender norms in society and understand that merely introducing new welfare measures and programs for women would not give

substantial results.

Participation of Women in India's Workforce and Contribution to India's GDP

It is evident that with changing times the Indian women are influencing and contributing to the Indian growth story in an increasingly productive manner. The increase in participation and contribution of women is seen across key sectors. Thus, their contribution to the India's overall GDP and is also increasing. However, presently there is no official (Government) statistics of women's GDP contribution. This is an existing research gap. However, researches have been done various researchers in estimating the participation and contribution of women in India's GDP by conduct of field surveys and other methods. One such survey found that surveyed companies are witnessing a rising share of female employees and expect the said trend to continue. The increase in women participation is more notable in the faster growing services sectors. The trend of increased women participation in the service sector augurs well for the Indian growth story since the wages are comparatively higher in the services sector compared to agriculture and labour sectors. The survey estimates that the Indian women's contribution to the GDP is in range of 30-32 % ²¹.

The conclusion of survey was based on following factors:

- Indian growth is increasingly led by the new age service sectors. Indian women are playing a dominant role in these faster growing sectors;
- government policy initiatives and corporate India's increased focus on women employees are helping increased economic participation of women;
- the official data collection methodology, especially of the unorganized sectors, could be underrepresenting the women labor force.

The Survey revealed the overall shift in the Sectoral composition of various sectors of the GDP over the years from 1051 to 2024. The same is depicted in Figure -1 below.

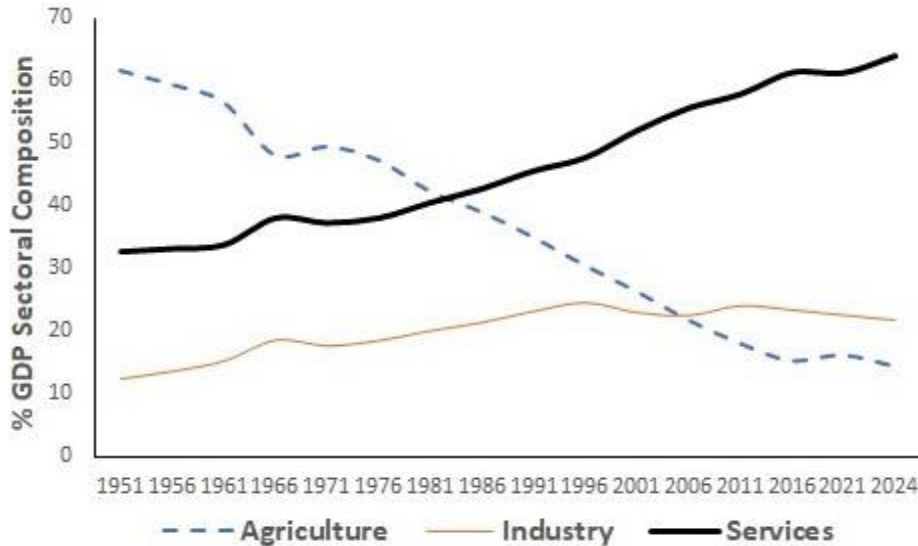


Figure 1: Indian GDP - Sectoral Composition. The long-term trend of changing sectoral composition of Indian GDP from 1951 to 2024. The data is for GDP composition from the fiscal year ending in March, i.e. 1951 (April 1950 – March 1951). The services sector has grown at a faster pace than agriculture and industry sectors over the last few decades.

Conclusion

In historical times, women enjoyed a higher status than men only in scriptures and lesser status in practical life. Indian women are the epitome of devotion to family and are excellent home-makers. We continue to worship Indian women in the name of Maa Durga, Maa Saraswati and Maa Kali. The domination of men in our society can be seen in all spheres of lives. Traditionally, women were assigned the jobs within their homes like running the household economically, raising the children and taking care of the elders in the family. Husbands or male members used to take major decisions in the family and women were generally kept out of it. Since the custom in earlier days was to marry off girls as soon as she attains puberty, she was not well educated. However, few of the women in earlier times were highly educated due to support and upward thinking by their parents. It was these women who struggled and brought a change in the status of women in society.

The substance in any civilization could be valued by the standing of women in its community. The esteem of women was high in ancient India. But the women were considered inferior to men in the society and there was considerable deterioration in their status during

the Muslim reign in India. In the 19th century, Raja Ram Mohan Roy started a socialist campaign to end the apathy faced by women in the society and treat them as equal partners in the development plans of the nation. The British rule in India also influenced the culture in India that improved the standing of Indian women. The restoration of the women's position could also be attributed to the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi who prevailed in ensuring the participation of women in the freedom struggle against the British rule in India. The women are gradually reclaiming their freedom in modern times and have distinguished themselves as teachers, doctors, pilots and in sports. They are also actively contributing to politics and administration. But despite this elevation, the existing practices of illiteracy and economic slavery would have to be eliminated to give the women their equitable place in Indian society.

After the independence of India, many laws have been enacted to protect women from dowry cases, sexual harassment at workplace and domestic violence. However, all these forms of crime are still prevalent in India even today, making the lives of women vulnerable. Those responsible for such crimes are many times able to escape punishment due to shortcomings existing in the legal process. The incidents like rape and other forms of sexual harassment make women feel insecure and they prefer not to step out of their house for jobs or any business activity, thus limiting their empowerment.

India has been ruled by many empires over the last thousands of centuries. The Indians have shown resilience in displaying unity in diversity, despite different cultures, religions, caste and language. The society can bring people from different states together and work under a common political institution. Peace and harmony have been promoted by various religious leaders and social activists. The people of India are employed in various jobs as per their qualification and skill levels. The Indians are God-fearing where relatives and friends place trust in each other and celebrate festivals together. The society can rely upon these strengths as it continues its struggle for women empowerment and gender equality.

-
- ¹ “Pioneer of Women’s Education, Indian Feminist Movement: Remembering Savitribai Phule on Her 190th Birth Anniversary - India News - Hindustan Times,” accessed January 4, 2021, <https://m.hindustantimes.com/india-news/pioneer-of-women-s-education-indian-feminist-movement-remembering-2>
- ² “Round Table India - Women’s Empowerment: History and Policy.”
- ³ “Flagship Programme: Making Every Woman and Girl Count | UN Women – Headquarters,” accessed December 19, 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/flagship-programmes/making-every-woman-and-girl-count>.
- ⁴ “‘I Measure the Progress of a Community by the Degree of Progress Which Women Have Achieved.’ – B. | Quotes by Famous Personalities, India Facts, Quote of the Day,” accessed December 09, 2024, <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/807411039424349724/>.
- ⁵ “Brief History| National Commission for Women,” accessed September 21, 2024, <http://ncw.nic.in/commission/about-us/brief-history>.
- ⁶ “Types of Female Empowerment | Jutta Curatolo | Empowerment,” accessed December 9, 2024, <http://juttacuratolo.co.uk/five-types-of-female-empowerment/>.
- ⁷ “Status of Women in Vedic and Post-Vedic Period,” accessed December 22, 2024, <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/society/status-of-women-in-vedic-and-post-vedic-period/4397>.
- ⁸ “Important Constitutional and Legal Provisions For Women In India - Womans Rights,” accessed August 22, 2024, http://www.legalserviceindia.com/helpline/woman_rights.htm.
- ⁹ Devaki Jain, “India: Alfred De Souza (Ed.): Women in Contemporary India. Manohar Book Service, New Delhi,” 525–528, <https://doi.org/10.1177/097492847703300433>.
- ¹⁰ Mitra, Ashok (1979), *Status of Women: Employment and Literacy*, ICSSR, New Delhi.¹¹ (National Commission on Self-employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector: New Delhi, 1988), <http://krishikosh.egranth.ac.in/handle/1/2041426>.
- ¹² Jayalakshmi, D. & Janaki, G. (1998), *Roots of Inequality within Family: Is Economic Empowerment a Solution?* Anmol Publications Pvt Ltd., New Delhi.
- ¹³ Narasmhan, Sakuntala (1999), *Empowerment of Women: An Alternative Strategy from Rural India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi.
- ¹⁴ Iyer, Saroj (1999), *The Struggle to Human Women’s Rights*, Books for Change, New Delhi.¹⁵ Meghavi (2012), *Changing Status and Emerging Problems of Educated Working Women*, *Contemporary Social Sciences*, Vol 21, No. 1, January.
- ¹⁶ Singh, Vineeta & Kumar, Kishore (2012), *Empowerment of Rural Women*, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Volume LXXIII, No. 3, July-September.

¹⁷ Sharma, Anjali Pal (2013), *Rural Women Empowerment: An Analytical View*, A Journal of Rural Development, Yojana, August.

¹⁸ R H Waghmode and J L Kalyan, "Women Empowerment In India: A Study," *Reviews of Literature* •, vol. 1, 2014.

¹⁹ Chauhan, Poonam and Sharma, Gulnar (2015), *Cooperatives Intervention and Social Empowerment of Indian Women: An Empirical Study*. Abhinav, National Monthly Refereed Journal of Research in Commerce & Management, Volume No.1, Issue No. 5.

²⁰ Khanday, Mohd Ishaq, et. al. (2015), *Empowerment of Women in India Historical Perspective*, European Academic Research, Vol. 2, Issue 11, February.

²¹ Nandini Kumar and Bijay Kumar (2025), *Contribution of Indian Women to the National GDP*, Journal of Emerging Investigators, Vol 8, 14 march 2025.

Chapter IV

Social Challenges to Women Empowerment in India

Introduction

India is a country with widely accepted democratic norms to openly discuss various social, economic and legal issues affecting the masses. There is a lot of difference in the way, relationships and marriages are conducted in different Indian states. The society in India is multidimensional and unique. Unlike a nation-state which is bound by a language, culture, religion and ethos, India displays variety in all of these aspects except that it has a defined geographical boundary. It is a challenge to maintain unity within such a diverse culture which of late has been getting influenced by Western ways of thinking and is posing difficulties in maintaining social harmony and peace.

The status of Indian women is being gradually enhanced due to various policy initiatives by the government in favour of women's education, health and economic well-being. These reforms must be given a further boost by opening of new avenues and providing women more opportunities to achieve economic empowerment. Many social and political activists are actively engaged in recognising the women's involvement in political, business activities, sports and entrepreneurship in our country. Poverty, illiteracy and unemployment are impediments to women empowerment, which need to be overcome to provide prosperity and happiness to women.

Society and Culture

The authority of women in India is determined by her family background, place where she belongs to, her professional skills, type of job and the tangible assets she owns and controls. The government of India has formulated many policy reforms to grant women protection at state and national levels in areas of social, political, legal and economic

influence. There is still a large gap between what we preach and practice and this poses a continuous challenge for Indian women and policymakers.

“One key factor responsible for the gap in the implementation of laws and policies to address discrimination, economic disadvantages and violence against women at the community level is India’s largely patriarchal structure that governs our community and households”¹. Gender bias is widely prevalent in the society and women face discrimination in the selection of jobs, educational facilities, sexual crimes and an effective participant in decision making inside and outside their home.

Indian society is mostly patriarchal, where the control and authority of urban women are visibly more as compared to rural women. Despite the rapid rate of urbanisation of Indian villages, due to effects of globalisation and growing Indian economy, a majority of Indian population still live in rural India, and the women there do not enjoy the same status as that of women in urban India. Women staying in rural parts of India have lesser opportunities and access to higher education, white-collar jobs, medical facilities and social security as compared to urban women. This has a direct bearing on the education and health of their children. Among the rural women, there are further sub-divisions due to different standards of education and division based on religion and caste. Also, women belonging to scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and backward classes are many a time unable to get access to good medical facilities and thus have higher maternal mortality rates. They also suffer from a higher rate of domestic violence and have limited access to good schools and colleges. This leads to lower levels of economic empowerment among most of the women from rural India. Similar kind of divisions based on religion and caste exists among the women in urban India though on a lesser scale as compared to women in the rural area. As a result, women belonging to higher class in urban areas enjoy the benefits of better education, medical and job opportunities as compared to women staying in rural areas.

Facing a lack of economic development in rural areas, there has been a huge influx of

people to urban areas where the migrants are generally staying in shanties and slum areas. People staying in these areas have poor health and hygiene conditions and generally find jobs in informal sectors of the economy which is largely unregulated. Hence, the workers suffer from poor labour and wage regulation laws, thus giving them a feeling of insecurity. Women staying in such areas are subjected to various forms of social abuses and violence and are unable to exercise their basic fundamental rights.

Some very significant policies for women empowerment have been introduced in India due to struggle by women for the last six decades. “These policies which advance human rights for women in India are substantial and forward-thinking, such as the Domestic Violence Act, 2005² and the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution that provides reservation for women to enter politics at the Panchayat level”³. The women commission of India along with various formal and informal organisations in several parts of the country are actively engaged in furthering these policies so that its benefits can reach women staying in rural and urban areas. There is a lot of corruption and swindling of finances at all levels of governance in India. While the money is allotted by the Central Govt to the various state governments for women-specific schemes, by the time it reaches the last level, only a meagre amount of initial sum allotted is available for the welfare of women. Though the situation has now improved in past few years due to use of digital technology and Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs). Thus, there is a huge disparity between what the policymakers announce and what they practice, causing a hindrance to the implementation of schemes for enhancement of the status of women. The passage of Right to Information Act in 2005, has brought in some accountability of the office bearers and transparency in the ways of governance. Political leaders are often charged with corrupt practices and bribery with many cases being highlighted in social media.

While there is inadequate political will for the effective implementation of women empowerment schemes, their growth is also hampered by widespread gender bias in our

society. Because of the largely patriarchal nature of our society, women are considered less capable, inefficient decision-makers and consequently have lesser access to quality education and health facilities. This discrimination is further aggravated by class and caste system in our society which restricts women choices of work and their freedom of mobility. Empowering Indian women shall require a methodology which can overcome the complexities created by various social class existing in the society and can address all the sectors viz. economic, social, political and legal. The rights of marginalised women are not brought to the forefront by various social and political activists who represent the cause of tribal and Dalit classes. Such activists have the agenda of bringing the Dalits and backward population into the mainstream society but fail to fight for the women issues and in a way continue to support the gender inequalities existing in our society. Therefore, the methodologies adopted for women empowerment should be able to identify and overcome the diverse layers of discrimination against women which is existing in the society. The focus should be laid on abolishing the choice of male child over a female child by parents which is dominant in many states of India. Before investing in quality infrastructure for women, it is important to change the mind-set of parents towards a preference for a son only.

Mobility, choice-making ability and social security are the factors which indicate the level of women power in a society, lag in India especially in case of rural uneducated women. “Data from the NFHS-4 survey on women decision making power shows that only one-third of the women took decisions on their own, regarding household issues and their health”⁴. These factors are stronger and more visible among the women staying in urban areas who are educated and employed. Discrimination also exists as per the age group of women wherein older women enjoy more freedom and have more choices to work in society. Rural women India has several restrictions on going out of their house as per their own decision, for medical treatment or higher studies as compared to skilled urban women. Hence there is a wide disparity among the women in terms of their ability to access the basic services

which inhibit their empowerment. “Seventy-nine percent of urban women from the highest education levels and only 40 percent of rural women without education were allowed to go to the market alone”⁵.

Restraints on the movement of women largely depend upon the outlook and thinking of their family members and the environment of social fabric existing around them. It also is directly affected by the level of physical abuse that women are subjected to in their families and their level of tolerance against such practices. Such practices through anti-social are still acceptable in many families in different regions of India. “Wife beating, slapping, rape, dowry-related deaths, feudal violence toward tribal women, trafficking, street violence and sexual abuse permeate the Indian social fabric and create one of the most serious obstacles in achieving women empowerment”⁶. Again, there exists a disparity between what policymakers preach and what is practiced. “Despite the policies, laws and initiatives by civil society institutions, violence against women in India is extensive and the consequences for perpetrators rarely match the crime”⁷. Rampant graft practices and long years of legal trial delay the justice for these women thus defeating the very purpose of social protection laws enacted for their empowerment. Women and girls do not report acts of sexual abuse against them due to lack of proper information on their rights on the issue and also due to fear of social stigma which could be attached to them for their full lives.

Women’s Rights

The government has implemented many reforms and policies for upliftment of the status of Indian women which has started showing a positive impact in the last few years. These reforms and policies are directed towards achieving gender equality in social, economic and legal spheres. “There are two main governing bodies in India to advance gender equality, the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the National Commission for Women, which is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Women and Child Development”⁸.

These organisations ensure the implementation of government policies on gender equality at the nation and state level. This would aid in economic empowerment of women, especially a rural uneducated lot, by creating awareness among them on various micro-level finance schemes which they could take advantage of and become successful entrepreneurs by way of start-ups and setting low or medium scale business. “The National Commission for Women has been instrumental in bringing legislative changes and has set up Complaint and Investigation Cells at the state level which receives complaints of gender-based crimes and are mandated to investigate, provide referrals, counselling and submit a report on such cases”⁹. “There has been a change in India’s rape laws, and in 2006 marital rape was recognized along with women rights activists demanding better provisions in Sections 375 and 376 of the Indian Penal Code”¹⁰. The same have been continued with in the latest laws implemented by enactment of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023 (BNS). Owing to constant demands from women rights activists in India, there has been an incremental change in the rights and privileges of women and their effective practice mechanisms in society. “The 2005 Domestic Violence Act protects from violence in the household from male perpetrators and also from female perpetrators like mothers-in-law and other female members in extended families”¹¹. Right to inheritance and laws related to it if fully implemented would help in removing social biases against women. This law is not applicable for transfer of ownership of land used for agriculture purposes in Hindu and Muslim religion. This is a grey area and needs to be amended as Indians are predominantly engaged in agriculture-related activities to earn their livelihood. The inheritance laws in India should be able to ensure social well-being and welfare of women. Also, lack of adequate knowledge on various policies and reforms related to women empowerment due to rigid social fabric in India built on caste and religion politics inhibits the utilisation of these by women at all levels of governance.

There is a wide disparity between the rights and privileges of Indian women as compared to men in social, economic, legal and political spheres. The disparity is seen in both

government and non-government institutions. Women are subjected to a very high rate of violence in India. “Lower caste and tribal women are among those who experience the highest levels of physical violence”¹². “85.3% of women reporting violence claimed that their husbands were the perpetrators”¹³.

Women’s Security

Women in India are not as safe as they constantly live under the threat of physical abuse and violence. They experience these within the household and also at the workplace. In many families, people prefer to know the sex of the baby before birth and in some cases, this even leads to the abortion of a girl child before her birth. While this practice is considered illegal in India, however, it is still prevalent due to corruption among police and existing loopholes in concerned laws. In many households, girls do not have the same access to schools, medical facilities and good diet as compared to men. “Research conducted by the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) found that although not universal, in households where there is more than one daughter, there are significant differences in health and nutrition levels between the male and female children”¹⁴.

Indian women feel insecure due to threat from the dowry system in most parts of India, physical violence in their homes and inadequate action by law enforcement agencies like the police and legal institutions. The uneducated rural women and those belonging to backward castes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes feel insecure. These classes of women are often denied justice owing to their poverty whenever they file a case of violence against themselves and find themselves neglected. Many a times, such women are unaware of the existing laws and their basic rights as given in the Constitution and hence fail to seek justice against the atrocities committed on them. It is not that only those women who stay in rural parts of our country face the risk of violence due to their gender. Urban women are also subjected to gender-based violence. Even in Delhi and other metropolitan cities of India, there are daily

reports of crime against women as can be seen in social media reports. Incidents of sexual abuse, rape and molestation happen and are reported very often in urban areas of our country. This is a very disturbing trend as young girls and women are gradually moving towards urban towns and cities in search of good education and jobs to improve their status of living and empower themselves and their future generations. This is especially true for women from North-East parts of our country who move to places like Delhi owing to active insurgency and lack of development in the region and are often subjected to physical abuses and discrimination. “In 2019, according to the National crime records bureau, among the people from the northeast states of India living in Delhi, 86% had reported racial discrimination and 41% of cases were of sexual abuse”¹⁵. The tribal women in North-East states who chose to stay back, are also subjected to atrocities by the security personnel as well as the insurgents’ active in the region. “This region, because of its physical and cultural proximity to Myanmar, China and Bhutan, has by far been ignored by successive governments’, thereby fueling the insurgents’ demand for development and autonomy”¹⁶.

Trafficking of Women and Girls

India is strongly committed to human rights protection laws for women at the national and international level. Over the years it has become a source a starting and endpoint for trafficked women who are then forced into paid sex-trade. “While exact numbers of trafficked women and girls in India are difficult to ascertain, there have been huge figures projected by various national and international NGOs”¹⁷. Various legal provisions have been evolved at national and state levels, in India to remove this malice from the society. “The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (ITPA) 1956, is a widely used law to prosecute traffickers and to target prostitution”¹⁸.

Prostitution is a much-deliberated topic in India on whether to legalise it or not. The law against prostitution in India is very controversial with people having views both for and

against it. “Women rights organizations and activists, such as the Durbar Mahila Samanvay Committee, a nationwide sex workers’ collective, have long supported the legalization of the sex trade in India”¹⁹. Many people in India are in favour of legalising prostitution as a profession and are lobbying for changes in ITPA such that women who have come out of prostitution on their own could be rehabilitated. “The ITPA also does not give sufficient measures for those who are trafficked for purposes other than sex work and disproportionately targets women, making them vulnerable to poverty and exploitation”²⁰.

Conclusion

Indian society is patriarchal where men have been traditionally taking all decisions in a family including economic decisions. Gender bias and inequality between different classes of society owing to caste, sex and age are still prevalent after more than seventy years of independence. While the contribution by women in day-to-day activities at home cannot be over-estimated, they continue to take a back seat when it comes to taking economic decisions and making choices in family matters concerned. In Indian society, women have been traditionally facing discrimination against and kept away from political and family-oriented decisions, due to the patriarchal nature of society. Women are engaged in doing a lot of house-hold jobs every day to support their families, but they have limited rights and opportunities for their growth and empowerment.

The status of women in our society has transformed in recent years. Women have become achievers and are making a name for themselves in various spheres of activity. They are willingly coming out from the comfort zones of their home and are actively working with men as an equal partner, thus making a mark for themselves. This is women empowerment where women are gaining power in social, economic and political fields. Women are viewed differently by society due to their all-round progress in various sectors of growth. Yet there are reports of various forms of sexual harassment against the women, both inside and outside

their home.

In the modern times, the women, especially those born and brought up in urban cities, have completely transformed and are proving their competence and potential in handling jobs both within and outside their homes with grit and determination. They can maintain their work-life balance perfectly, thus making their decisions independently and trading along the path to prosperity and success. Women have done extremely commendable jobs in the field of medicine, engineering, journalism, politics and other spheres of activity. The transformation of rural women is slowly catching up with the advancement in Information and communication technology services in India, which provides them with more services and growth opportunities. Nowadays girls are encouraged to pursue their higher studies before getting married. However, problems of sexual harassment at work, domestic violence and female foeticide are still reported in many parts of the country very often.

Various government and non-government organisations provide financial support to women in developing their skills and start their own business. The state governments are also coming forward to supporting women entrepreneurs in India. These initiatives help the women especially from rural background to overcome the challenges of skill development and financial instability and explore various opportunities to empower themselves. As a result, many women are occupying senior positions in the public and private sector organisations.

The rape and murder of a doctor in Hyderabad in 2019 was one of the most shameful incidents and is a testimony of the fact that even the capital metro cities are not safe for working women. Incidents like these, coupled with the delay in delivering justice by the legal system in India, forces parents of the effected daughter to undergo shame and harassment in India. When justice is delayed people start losing faith in the judiciary. Thus, many parents prefer to marry off their daughters early without investing in their higher education and giving time to pursue their career dreams. While few women have emerged strong and fought against

all odds to make a name for themselves in various fields, there is a lot of work to be done before women in India feel empowered in real sense.

¹ “Laws Related to Women | National Commission for Women,” accessed August 13, 2020, <http://ncw.nic.in/important-links/List-of-Laws-Related-to-Women>.

² “India Code: Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005,” accessed August 15, 2024, <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/handle/123456789/2021?locale=en>.

³ “73rd And 74th Constitution Amendments and Reservation for Women,” accessed August 15, 2020, <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/constitution/73rd-and-74th-constitution-amendments-and-reservation-for-women/40440>.

⁴ “National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) 2015-16 India,” 2017, 510, <http://www.rchiips.org/nfhs>.

⁵ “National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) 2015-16 India,” p.512.⁶ “Ending Violence Against Women,” n.d., p.96, www.oxfam.org.uk.

⁷ “The Protection Of Women From Domestic Violence Act, 2005,” n.d.

⁸ “National Policy for Women Empowerment | Ministry of Women & Child Development | GoI,” accessed August 13, 2020, <https://wcd.nic.in/womendevlopment/national-policy-women-empowerment>.

⁹ “Complaint & Investigation Cell | National Commission for Women,” accessed September 13, 2024, <http://ncw.nic.in/ncw-cells/complaint-investigation-cell>.

¹⁰ “Comparison of Hindu and Muslim Law with the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). - Indianlegalsolution.Com,” accessed September 16, 2024, <https://indianlegalsolution.com/comparison-of-hindu-and-muslim-law-with-the-uniform-civil-code-ucc/>.

¹¹ “India Code: Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.”

¹² “National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) 2015-16 India,” p.570.

¹³ “National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) 2015-16 India,” p. 571.

¹⁴ “ICRW | Passion. Proof. Power.,” accessed August 16, 2024, <https://www.icrw.org/research-programs/examining-mens-attitudes-toward-son-preference/>.

- 15 “Gender Based Discrimination and Violence against Women – North East Network,” accessed August 16, 2024, <https://northeastnetwork.org/gender-based-discrimination-and-violence-against-women/>.
- 16 “Introduction,” accessed August 16, 2024, [http://ncwapps.nic.in/pdfReports/Violence against women in North East India - An Inquiry.pdf](http://ncwapps.nic.in/pdfReports/Violence%20against%20women%20in%20North%20East%20India%20-%20An%20Inquiry.pdf).
- 17 “Human Trafficking in India,” accessed August 16, 2024, <https://www.dianova.org/opinion/human-trafficking-in-india/>.
- 18 “Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956,” December 30, 1956, <http://indiacode.nic.in/handle/123456789/1661>.
- 19 “Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee,” accessed August 16, 2024, <https://www.durbar.org/>.
- 20 “Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.”

Chapter V

Status of Economic Empowerment of Women in India

Introduction

“As per current estimates, India's rate of women participation in the formal labour force is only 24 percent, which is amongst the lowest in developing nations”¹. Despite sustained efforts by the Government of India, a large number of women work in informal sectors of the economy and are therefore outside the gambit of government protection. Jobs in informal sectors have fewer social protection laws and low wages. There are no legal barriers for women to work in informal sectors of the economy in India. “As far as equal economic opportunities and women participation in the labour force, India ranks 127th and 122nd respectively”². The Indian government is aware of the fact that the country would achieve a higher success rate in economic growth if the number of female workers in the workforce is increased. From time to time, the economic policymakers in India have brought in many reforms to empower women.

The growth story of the Indian economy has been formidable in the last few years. Many women, especially those belonging to the semi-urban middle class are eager to take up jobs and are increasing the strength of the young Indian workforce. The issue of economic empowerment of Indian women cannot be resolved in isolation without understanding the intricate fabric of the society which is bound by several religions, caste, creed and languages. “In the Indian context, there are projects like the Programme on Women Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (PWESCR), which is coordinating between the international human rights movement and the local articulation of women rights, to build a women rights movement in India that would create equality in all spheres of women lives”³. PWESCR addresses a wide range of issues concerning women and would focus on all human rights facets. This would surely aid in empowering women socially and financially.

Significance of Economic Empowerment of Women

It is extremely important to realise that women need to be economically empowered, now than ever before. Quite a large number of women have to live a major part of their life alone due to separation from their spouse and increased life span when they would be required to manage their economic situation all alone. The career of most of the Indian women is not a priority as a major portion of their time is spent in doing house-hold chores and taking care of their families. To lead a healthy and comfortable, there would be a requirement for women to earn along with male members in the family. However, economic empowerment is different from economic security. It is not only vital for a woman to earn sufficiently; it is the planning of expenses which will help her in achieving economic independence. Every woman needs to be economically empowered due to the following reasons:

- There could be a situation when the husband who is the sole bread earner in the family, loses his job or passes away suddenly. If his wife and kids are dependent on him, it would create a distress situation in the family wherein the lady and her kids would be in distress. The situation would be in control had the lady of the house would have been in some job and earning.
- Due to rising inflation, the cost of living a decent life has grown very high. If a family wants to travel abroad for vacations, send children to good schools, buy branded clothes, the parents must be in jobs to manage the household expenses and sustain their life-style and economic objectives of the family.
- Women who belong to conservative families in India, have to demand economic support from their husband or parents for pursuing their career and fulfilling their aspirations in life. If she is economically empowered, she would be more confident in making her choices related to marriage, chasing her dreams, higher education and picking up a job of her choice. She would then cease to be economically dependent on anyone and lead a more

fulfilling life without feeling helpless on any occasion. This would also give her self-respect and confidence not to face violence or physical abuse from their husbands’.

- An economically empowered and strong mother would inspire her young daughter to be independent, and a young son would learn early in life that his mother in particular and a woman, in general, is second to none in the society. Thus, the children would see their mother as role-model and understand the value of economic independence early in life and would strive to be self-sufficient when they grow up, as they would believe what they see.
- There would be an increase in the country’s GDP if women start earning. The income-tax paid by women would enable the government to spend more money on vital sectors of the economy such as manufacturing, health and education. More number of people would be able to donate money for philanthropic causes which will lead to upliftment of poor and down-trodden people in the society.
- When women are not economically empowered, they are likely to live under conditions of poverty and misery. When they take up jobs in the unregulated informal sectors of the economy, they earn less and are subject to exploitation and harassment by their employers due to weak labour laws and poor work conditions. When women are economically strong, they could become entrepreneurs, create more jobs for women and become a part of our country’s economic value-chain.
- Economic empowerment of women would act as catalyst, wherein it would not only aid individual women, but also their family, society and the country. Women would be able to have greater control over their house-hold expenditure, access better medical facilities for their children and own health, create avenues for starting a business and make effective impact towards sustaining a greener environment.

Work Choices of Women

“In India, 97% of women are employed in the unorganised sector and are involved in

jobs which lacks the dignity of labour, social security, justified wages and in some cases, even the right to be called a worker”⁴. The nature and type of job preferred by women are often dictated by the decisions made by the male members of their family and various other factors. Due to this, women are not taking their own decisions regarding the choice of work and are mostly restricted to working in the informal sectors of the economy. “Their work and contribution to the economy are not valued and since domestic and care activities are categorised as ‘woman’s work’, they are left to manage both the paid and unpaid work responsibilities on their own, daily”⁵.

“The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data on female labour force participation shows that a majority of women are employed in the primary sector, within the realm of agriculture and farm work”⁶. Women generally take up jobs in the manufacturing sector which pay less, where they are confined to their premises and more often owned by a family member. Women also seek employment in areas which make it possible for them to strike a work-life balance. These areas include household jobs within the domestic arena, working in schools or a retail business.

Care Work and Women

“The first and only national Time Use Survey (TUS), conducted in India in 1998-99 on a pilot basis, showed that women spend less time than men on paid work activities, but spent a substantial amount of time on household chores as well as unpaid work which included the collection of water, fuel, animal grazing and helping in family enterprises”⁷. Various studies have indicated that as women undertake care work along with performing miscellaneous jobs in their homes and paid work, the calculation of the amount of unpaid care work done by them may be under-estimated. Taking care of the home and looking after their children remains a priority for most of the Indian women. For this reason, it is observed that women make decisions which are centered on these two issues when it comes to

choosing their place of work. They tend to prefer working in places which are closer to their residence, which could be then a part-time low paying job. Women also prefer to take jobs in those offices which permit them to bring their small children to the office so they could be taken care of. There is a multitude of other issues which women have to find solutions to when she chooses to work in an informal sector.

“A film developed by the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) on the situation of informal women workers of Delhi highlights those women in informal sectors have to deal with numerous challenges at the workplace”⁸. The challenges are related to low pay and perks offered for their work, dangerous working conditions, poor office surroundings including toilet facilities, no-breaks from the job and physical and moral abuses by colleagues and bosses. Along with this, women also need to give time to various domestic issues at home which cause a lot of stress and anxiety among them.

Women may find themselves in tricky situations when they are not able to take their kids to workplaces and decide to leave them with elder children at home without someone to take good care of them. The smaller kid left at home could disturb the studies of elder kid and when left without supervision may injure himself or herself when left free. Women often stay at home and quit their jobs so that they can take care of their small children. For those women who work in field jobs and not work in a secure office environment, getting their kid to workplace takes away their lots of attention from work as they are worried about the safety of their children. Men around them often pass livid remarks when women are breastfeeding their toddlers and their employers often cut their payments for taking an unscheduled break during office hours for these activities. This induces further stress among women as they are very often unable to cope up with simultaneous domestic and work pressures.

Access to Basic Public Services

Women who choose to empower themselves by getting employed in good jobs face a lot of issues when it comes to accessing basic public services. The most complex issue which women face pertains to taking care of their toddlers. Though the opening of Anganwadis has come as a relief for many of these women, these child care centres are open only for a couple of hours and do not serve the purpose in totality. Hence, most of the working women do not prefer to leave their children at Anganwadis during working hours as it does not meet their requirements satisfactorily. While women employed in high paying jobs can afford to keep a maid servant at home to take care of their toddlers during working hours, those working in low paid informal sectors of the economy cannot afford it, and hence suffer from lack of access to such basic service.

The statistics collated on the number of Indian women who are employed may be showing a fall, but is not accurate as women put in hours of work both inside and outside their house. The quantum of work which women do while inside their home does not find any recognition as is considered to be unpaid care work. This prohibits her very labour hours and failure if government norms for her equal entitlement to pay, perks and status in society. “The Maternity Benefits Act 2017, as well as the Labour Code on Social Security 2018, have also failed to tackle the challenges that women in informal work face and the complex nature of the work they do”⁹. The government needs to evolve and put into practice specific policies that could ease their working conditions by the provision of facilities for long hours of child care. This would encourage and motivate more women to work with full vigour and confidence and prompt the people to give due recognition to their talent and hard work.

Access to Water

“As per National Sample Survey Office (NSSO, 2018), Ministry of Statistics and

Program Implementation, Government of India, women in rural areas spend on an average 20 minutes a day to travel to the source of water and wait for up to 15 minutes to collect it”¹⁰. It is a fact that in many households’ women have to make several trips to collect water to meet the requirements for domestic purposes. A lot of time is spent by women mostly in rural and backward areas in collecting water as it is an important source of healthy living conditions, is not given due credit and weightage in the compilation of women’s work and their contribution to the economy had they not engaged themselves in this job and utilised this time in working outside their homes for income.

Collecting Energy Resources

There are still large parts of India, especially in rural areas where ladies are engaged in collecting cow-dung and wood every day to cook food and protect themselves from cold. They live in conditions of poverty and cannot afford to have cooking gas. Women in village areas have to travel long distances for collection of this energy resources for purpose of cooking and feeding their family members. Many forest areas in the past have been intruded by humans for commercial gains which have led to water and food shortage along with additional time which women have to now spend in these areas while travelling for collection of energy resources. This consumes a lot of their time which otherwise could have been utilised in gaining employment outside their home and contributing to the economy. “Though the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana was launched in 2016 to provide a free first cooking gas cylinder to BPL households, it has been superficially successful in reducing the poverty of women, as the refilling cost of the second cylinder is too high”¹¹. Most of the household do not consider this scheme viable and hence do not subscribe to it as they want to continue to take benefit of government policies meant for people living Below Poverty Line (BPL).

Outsourcing of Domestic Activities

Women staying in big cities and working in well-paid jobs can afford to employ domestic servants, often ladies who could work for them and carry out activities like cooking and taking care of their children. While the jobs undertaken by these women contribute significantly to efficient and peaceful functioning of women those employed in the formal sectors of the economy, the tasks performed by these women workers generally belonging to the poor section of our society go unnoticed and they continue to remain living an undignified life. Many women while continuing to perform duties within their homes, also take up part-time jobs in various sectors which makes it convenient for them to attain work-life balance, apart from some earnings. These products and services produce by unpaid care activities are important for maintaining optimal output and efficiency of the formal sector.

It is very essential that the government lays adequate emphasis on opening and improving access to such basic services in society. This would allow movement of women from largely insignificant and unrecognized unpaid jobs to formal labour markets where they would earn more and empower themselves economically. The government should make provisions for the opening of crèches, availability of water for drinking and cooking at a reasonable fee, availability of electric supply and of cooking gas. Such measures would relieve women from time spent on unpaid household jobs and they could then utilise this time to enhance their skills, apply for jobs, earn for themselves and become financially independent. This would lead to their economic empowerment and give them more control over their decisions and lives.

Women in the Workforce

“While a majority of South Asian countries (except for Afghanistan and Pakistan) have reported high women labour force participation rate, the participation rate of women in India has been declining over the period 1993 to 2018”¹². The number of women in the

Indian workforce is shrinking while due recognition is not given to the unpaid care work carried out by them. These activities include cloth stitching, cooking, washing and collection of woods etc. these unpaid care jobs are not gathered by statisticians while counting the contribution of women in the Indian workforce. It is true that these activities are very important for the smooth and efficient functioning of any household and hence cannot be underestimated.

Overall, there is a lack of adequate public services in our country along with the patriarchy nature of the society which assumes that these activities must not be carried out by men. Hence it is widely believed that when carrying out these unpaid activities at homes, it does not add to their work and time constraint, which is an incorrect assessment. “To rectify this, Niti Aayog, in its recently unveiled document, ‘Strategy for New India @ 75’, had pressed the need to enhance female labour force participation rate by at least 7% by 2022-23”¹³.

COVID-19 and Women Informal Sector Workers in India

“The International Labour Organization (ILO), 2020 report indicated that due to COVID-19, approximately 400 million informal sector workers reached risk of extreme poverty in India”¹⁴. The pandemic had broken out when a large population in India did not have jobs and mostly people were working in the vastly unregulated informal sectors which provide little or no job security. Thus, women employed in these sectors of the economy were the worst hit in terms of job losses. “As per the ILO, women working with the construction sector were informal workers who work as daily wage labourers, and they had been affected most in terms of job losses as all the construction activities had completely ceased during the lockdown period”¹⁵. There was need felt to have some mechanism to ensure that all non-regular workforce at least earn some wages in exceptionally turbulent periods. The policies also need to cover women who are staying in rural as well as urban areas and work in

informal sectors. This would vastly benefit several women who lose their jobs in the wake of such pandemics in future and ensure that they do not suffer from hunger and poverty.

The focus on the public distribution of food grains for the poor and suffering women during such periods in future will help in reducing the misery and sufferings to some extent. Also, the government could consider transferring some minimum amount of money in the bank account of those women who have lost their jobs and are living below the poverty line. This would make them less susceptible to exploitation by society and other social evils. “Following the recommendations of the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS 2006), the process of extending social security to informal workers should be implemented”¹⁶. Lastly, the government should give due recognition to the work done by women who are employed in the informal sectors of the economy.

Women Entrepreneurship

With more women as business leaders and occupying senior management positions would create more diversity in the board-rooms which would make the business firm stronger. Women generally have a different perspective on a problem which could lead to a unique and unorthodox solution. There are many reasons to encourage women entrepreneurs in India which would strengthen the nation, socially and economically. As the number of women-led business increases, so would their economic status which could have a catalyst effect in terms of the number of women joining the workforce, whose potential remains largely untapped. This would also result in narrowing the gender-gap existing in the workforce. The strong inter-personal networking and communication skills of women could make them more successful entrepreneurs than men in many sectors of the economy, especially in niche markets. Their tendency to investing in their children education would give a boost to productivity and provide stability within the country. Since women experience the problems of maintaining a work-life balance since a very early age, they can

implement policies and create a conducive working environment for female employees in the companies owned by them. They emphasize a great deal on women security, values, a strong culture and strict anti-sexual harassment laws. Thus, more and more women are motivated to go out of their comfort zones and work.

A few of the issues faced by the women who have started their own business are financial woes for investments in a business, scarcity of raw materials due to the high prices and required inputs, strong peer competitors, limited mobility as compared to men, issues relating to maintaining a work-life balance between looking after her home and office, lack of quality education skills among rural women, and survivability in a male-dominated Indian society. There are various schemes which have been initiated by the Indian government to promote and support women-initiated start-ups in India. With the support of the government-backed schemes, during the past few years, the prominence of women in Indian society has improved phenomenally. Women-led success stories have become a prominent feature in almost all the sectors of work, which is gradually leading to their economic empowerment. Few of the Indian women who have contributed significantly to the economy and have become a role model for other women are, “Vandana Luthra (founder of VLCC beauty Services Company), Kiran Majumdar (founder of Biocon Limited Pharma Company), Priya Paul (Chairman of Priya group of hotels), Ritu Kumar (famous fashion designer) and Aditi Gupta (owner of Menstrupedia Company)”¹⁷.

Comparative Analysis of Participation of Indian Women in Workforce with other Nations

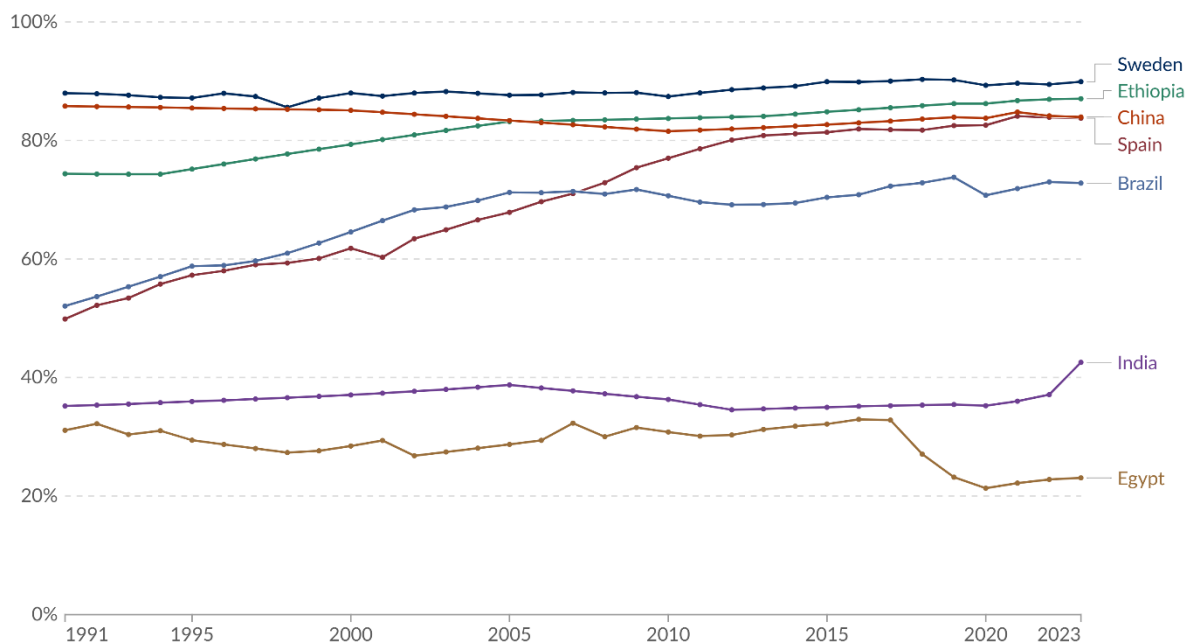
It is a common fact that in most nations, men participation is higher in labour markets than women. However, the trends do not indicate any particular justification or reason for such a pattern and we see that there are huge differences across societies. The map in Figure-2 below, provides a picture of how men and women compare today in terms of participation in labor markets, for some countries across the development spectrum. It contains a depiction of

the female-to-male ratio in labor force participation rates in percentage terms. This figure is based on estimates of International Labor Organization (ILO) as published in a research paper published in ourworldindata.org – Women’s Employment¹⁸. As can be seen, the numbers for most countries are well below 100%, which means that the participation of women tends to be lower than that of men. Yet differences reflect outstanding information. In some countries, the ratio is below 25% while in others, the ratio is close to, or even slightly above 100% (i.e., there is gender parity in labor force participation or even a higher share of women participating in the labor market than men).

Ratio of female to male labor force participation rates, 1991 to 2023

Our World
in Data

This ratio is calculated by dividing the labor force participation rate among women by the corresponding rate for men. The labor force participation rate is the proportion of the population aged 15 years and older that is economically active.



Data source: World Bank based on data from International Labour Organization (2025)

OurWorldinData.org/female-labor-supply | CC BY

Figure -2

The female labor force participation for the year 2023 was the highest in some of the poorest and some of the richest nations in the world while it can be seen to be lowest in countries with average national incomes in middle. This implies that in a cross-section, the

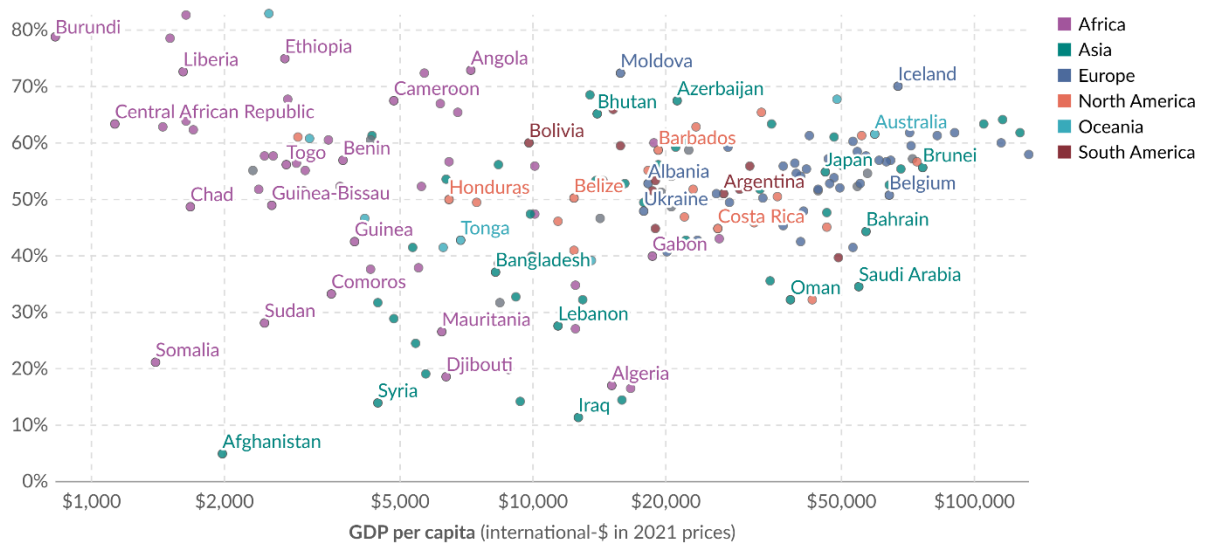
relationship between female participation rates and GDP per capita follows a U-shape. This is reflected in the scatter plot shown as Figure-3 below. This data in the figure is based on estimates of International Labor Organization (ILO) as published in a research paper published in ourworldindata.org – Women’s Employment¹⁹.

Female labor force participation rates vs. GDP per capita, 2023

Our World
in Data

The labor force participation rate corresponds to the proportion of the population ages 15 and older that is economically active. GDP per capita is adjusted for inflation and for differences in living costs between countries.

Female labor force participation rate (%) (% of female population ages 15+, modeled ILO estimate)



Data source: International Labour Organization (2025); Data compiled from multiple sources by World Bank (2025)

Note: GDP per capita is expressed in international-\$¹ at 2021 prices.

OurWorldinData.org/female-labor-force-participation-key-facts | CC BY

1. **International dollars:** International dollars are a hypothetical currency that is used to make meaningful comparisons of monetary indicators of living standards. Figures expressed in international dollars are adjusted for inflation within countries over time, and for differences in the cost of living between countries. The goal of such adjustments is to provide a unit whose purchasing power is held fixed over time and across countries, such that one international dollar can buy the same quantity and quality of goods and services no matter where or when it is spent. Read more in our article: [What are Purchasing Power Parity adjustments and why do we need them?](#)

Figure -3

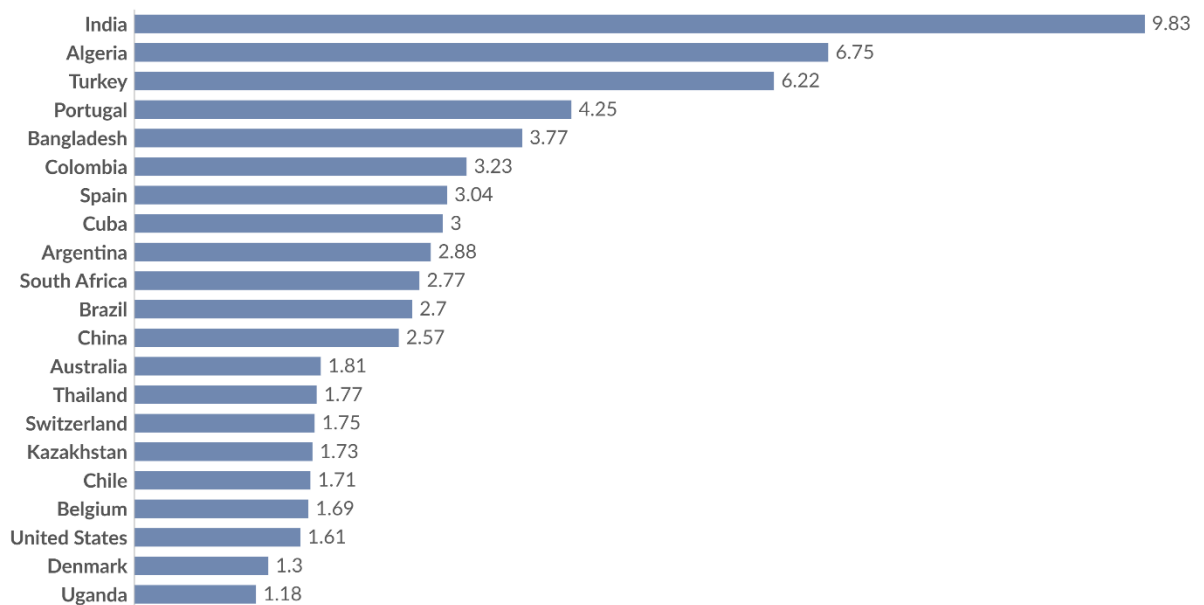
The data in relation to women workforce involved in unpaid work shows that India is placed poorly vis-à-vis other nations. It needs to be understood that while assessing the status of women empowerment and financial standing that domestic unpaid care work is an important activity on which women tend to spend a significant amount of time. However, it is also an activity that is typically unaccounted for in labor supply data and statistics. In the chart shown as Figure-4 below the stark contrast amongst various nations is reflected and

the skewed gender distribution of unpaid care work in the household is shown. This data in the figure is based on estimates of International Labor Organization (ILO) as published in a research paper published in ourworldindata.org – Women’s Employment²⁰. The bars show the female-to-male ratio of time devoted to unpaid services provided within the household, including care of persons, housework and voluntary community work. As we can see, gender differences in time devoted to unpaid care work cut across societies: All over the world, women spend more time than men on these activities. Yet there are clear differences when it comes to the magnitude of these gender gaps. In some countries, women work around 70% more than men in unpaid care activities at home. In others, women work four or six times more than men on these activities.

Female-to-male ratio of time devoted to unpaid care work, 2014

Our World
in Data

Female to male ratio of time devoted to unpaid care work. Unpaid care work refers to all unpaid services provided within a household for its members, including care of persons, housework and voluntary community work.



Data source: OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database (2014)
OurWorldinData.org/women-in-the-labor-force-determinants | CC BY

Figure-4

The analysis of above data shows that in order to understand the changing female labor force participation, it is important to first conceptualize the overarching context within which various factors operate. For women to be able to participate in the labor market, they have to have the *time* and *opportunity* to do so. This means that we can only fully analyse labor force participation if we understand time allocation more generally. In the case of female labor supply in particular, time allocation is crucially affected by the fact that women all over the world tend to spend a substantial amount of time on activities such as unpaid care work, which fall outside of the traditional economic production boundary. In other words, women often work but are not regarded as 'economically active' for the purpose of labor supply statistics.

Conclusion

As per the findings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), “India’s GDP will increase by as much as 27 percent of women participated in the economy at the same rate as men”²¹. Hence, there is a strong economic argument for more women to gain employment in India, which shall also help in the fulfilment of her aspirations, rights and privileges. There is a growing concern among the masses with regards to social, economic and legal rights of women in India. The women need to be seen beyond the realms of only their humanitarian rights. Attention needs to be paid on miscellaneous issues concerning women such as schooling, food, clothing, housing and employment.

Women play an important role in the growth of the economy and society as a whole. They are a vital workforce in both the manufacturing and service sectors of the economy. Women empowerment would provide solutions to many problems of economic development by their active involvement in various forums of the society and harnessing their potential. This would also help in achieving the objective of inclusive growth and human development in India. To empower women, it would be essential to implement appropriate policies and

monitor their implementation. This would give women their due rights and level playing opportunities which is essential to curb sexual violence against them. Education would be the key to their success in helping them shape their lives as per their choice.

While there would be bottlenecks and impediments in improving the status of women in India, a holistic approach backed by well-planned and good governance would surely empower these women. There have been many programs and initiatives for the upliftment of a section of women in a particular area which have been accomplished. Instead, the need of the hour is to undertake major programs that aim to cover a large population of women on a national scale to help them come out of their needless sufferings which they have undergone for last so many years. This would require a set of well thought of goals, an actionable time-bound strategy, good managerial and organisational skills and appropriate funding by the government and philanthropic institutions. The program if successful would serve as a model for future goals and objectives that would lead to women empowerment.

It is rather difficult to appreciate the difficulties faced by rural women in some parts of India. However, there has been an upward trend in the interest shown by women who wish to join schools and colleges. Initiatives in the health sector have also helped in the reduction of female mortality rates across India. In the last two decades, women are also taking up jobs in the police, armed forces and research related professions, which were otherwise dominated by men only. More and more women in rural and urban India are willing to leave their household jobs and take up paid jobs in India. With the passage of the bill for reservation of 33 % for women in Parliament would result in real women empowerment as they would then occupy positions of decision making and governance in India. The strength of women is critical for the transformation of our nation into a developed country.

There are various emerging opportunities for women in India for gaining employment and moving from informal to formal sectors of the economy. Gradually, the number of women workers is increasing in India, which is also facilitated by the effects of

globalisation and the availability of comparatively cheap labour force in our country. The multi-national companies are eager to enter Indian markets which could be advanced further by government policies on ease of doing business in India. Policymakers in public and private sector companies need to ensure that provision of gender equality and equal job opportunities remain the hallmark of their policies so that there are no occasions of exploitation of women while at work.

The nature of jobs in India is transforming due to changes brought by emerging technologies and digitisation at workplaces. There are opportunities within this transformation period to eliminate the existing gender disparities and redefine the existing culture that would enhance women's economic participation. Changes in labour laws, establishing suitable workplaces and the creation of new jobs would be a few steps in the right direction. Besides other factors, the existing deep-rooted social norms restrict the full participation of Indian women in the economy. To reap the benefits of technological revolution, there is a need to address the existing socio-cultural norms, the problem related to reluctance in women education, the liability of unpaid care work and the issues relating to safety and mobility of women. The policies aimed at increasing women economic empowerment should be taking into account the existing gender inequalities in women's job in the informal sectors of the economy and unpaid care activities carried out by them. Solutions need to be found to distinguish and formalise distribution of care related jobs amongst men and women, to nullify the wage inequality due to gender-related reasons and implement an action plan towards sustaining an environment where women could work without fear in a level playing field and establish as leaders in various fields of the economy.

The position of women in Indian society is being gradually elevated in the 21st century and they are getting involved in the formulation of strategies for economic growth in the country. The central and state governments are ensuring the implementation of various

acts, rules and regulations which would empower women. The society has to ensure that gender parity is observed at all places and women are encouraged to participate in all the activities in the society with a sense of equality. However, women need to be aware of their rights and the steps the government is taking for their empowerment. If they chose to have a laid-back attitude and continue their dependence on the male members of their family and society, they would find themselves in the same backward state even in the 22nd century. The parents of the girl child need to make them understand the true meaning of empowerment at an early stage and help their daughters to focus towards attaining it.

- 1 *“India’s Workforce Is Masculinizing Rapidly,” accessed August 25, 2024, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/india-s-workforce-is-masculinising-rapidly-1560150389726.html>.*
- 2 *Insight Report Global Gender Gap Report 2020.*
- 3 *“Programme on Women’s Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (PWESCR),” accessed August 16, 2024, <https://www.pwescr.org/aboutus.html>.*
- 4 *Diptirekha Mohapatra, “Female Workers in the Unorganised Sector in India,” accessed September 12, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.15242/ICEHM.ED715042>.*
- 5 *“What Work Choices Are Indian Women Making and Why?” accessed August 31, 2024, <https://thewire.in/women/indian-women-work-care-informal-sector>.*
- 6 *“NSSO Data on Female Labour Force Participation News,” accessed September 2, 2024, <https://www.jatinverma.org>.*
- 7 *“India - Time Use Survey 1998,” accessed December 13, 2024, <http://microdata.gov.in/nada43/index.php/catalog/140>.*
- 8 *“(141) Left in the Lurch: Tales of Women Workers in Delhi’s Informal Sector - YouTube,” accessed September 2, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIaicyEje4E>.*
- 9 *“How Maternity Benefits Can Be Extended to Informal Women Workers,” accessed December 05, 2024, <https://thewire.in/women/how-maternity-benefits-can-be-extended-to-informal-women-workers>.*
- 10 *“Drinking Water, Sanitation, Hygiene and Housing Condition in India,” NSSO, 2018.*
- 11 *“About PM Ujjwala Yojana,” accessed September 03, 2024, <https://pmuy.gov.in/about.html>.*
- 12 *“Where Are Indian Women If Not in the Workforce?” accessed August 31, 2024,*

<https://thewire.in/women/women-india-workforce-unpaid-labour>.

¹³ “Strategy for New India @ 75 | NITI Aayog,” accessed September 2, 2024, <https://niti.gov.in/the-strategy-for-new-india>.

¹⁴ “ILO India Response to COVID-19,” accessed September 12, 2024 https://www.ilo.org/newdelhi/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_747007/lang--en/index.htm.

¹⁵ “COVID-19 and Women Informal Sector Workers in India | Economic and Political Weekly.”

¹⁶ “Informal Sector, Informal Workers and Social Security,” accessed September 2, 2024, [http://dcmsme.gov.in/Social security report.pdf](http://dcmsme.gov.in/Social%20security%20report.pdf), p.7.

¹⁷ “Top 10 Famous Women Entrepreneurs in India | The CEO Story,” accessed December 22, 2024, <https://theceostory.in/blog/top-10-famous-women-entrepreneurs-in-india/>.

¹⁸ Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, Sandra Tzvetkova and Max Roser, Women's Employment first published in March 2018 and changes in March 2024, <https://ourworldindata.org/female-labor-supply>, accessed 25 March 2025.

¹⁹ Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, Sandra Tzvetkova and Max Roser, Women's Employment first published in March 2018 and changes in March 2024, <https://ourworldindata.org/female-labor-supply>, accessed 25 March 2025.

²⁰ Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, Sandra Tzvetkova and Max Roser, Women's Employment first published in March 2018 and changes in March 2024, <https://ourworldindata.org/female-labor-supply>, accessed 25 March 2025.

²¹ “India and the IMF,” accessed August 24, 2024, <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/IND>.

Chapter VI

Conclusion and Recommendations

Challenging Socio-Economic Environment

“The female labour force participation (FLFP) in India is down to 26% in 2018 from 36.7% in 2005, due to lack of access to quality education and underlying social, economic barriers limiting the opportunities for women”¹. The decline in FLFP could be due to various reasons which continue to exist in the society, mainly due to customs, traditions and patriarchal nature of Indian society. Other reasons could be mainly assigned to increased levels of automation of the manufacturing process leading to a decrease in levels of human intervention, lack of commensurate operating skills and corresponding levels of education. Women have to take care of their basic house-keeping duties which leaves them with very little time to spare for high- demanding jobs. They can work in sectors which require less of their time and sometimes take up part-time jobs and thus have low-income jobs as compared to their spouses. These forces the women in many cases to quit their jobs under the family pressures leading to a decline in FLFP.

“It is not surprising then that at 17 percent, India has a lower share of women’s contribution to the GDP than the global average of 37 percent”². In our country, women are mostly employed in informal sectors of the economy which is largely unregulated and lack social protection benefits which are available to jobs in the formal sectors. They are also spending a lot of their time in unpaid jobs related to care facilities. There are very few women in India who occupy top managerial positions in popular business organisations. “Women comprise almost 40 percent of agricultural labour but they control just 9 percent of land in India”³. They are also deprived of property ownership rights in many parts of India and a large number of them do not even avail banking services.

Women also live in an environment of insecurity with the fear of sexual harassment at workplaces by their employers and colleagues, prevailing over them. “In Delhi alone, the capital city of India, 92 percent of the women reported having experienced sexual or physical violence in public spaces”⁴.

Jobs in the Informal Sector

On account of unavailability of the required number of job opportunities in the formal sectors of the economy in India and the need to take up jobs for a decent living, many women seek jobs in the informal sectors which is largely unorganised. “Women are employed in the vast unregulated informal sector, which accounts for 93% of India’s workforce, but the wages in this sector are discriminatory and the women get paid 34% lesser than a man for the same job”⁵. While the government has formulated and called for the implementation of labour regulating laws in the informal sectors, there are many loopholes which are used by the owners mainly for profit making. It could be also stated that there is a lack of will among the policymakers in India to rectify these loopholes due to certain vested interests and ownership issues.

Unpaid Care Activities

“The reversing fall in the female workforce participation in India could be controlled by the unionisation of the labour force in the informal sector and freeing women from unpaid care work, which would boost participation and the economy”⁶. Women have to devote a large portion of their time and energy in unpaid care activities like looking after their toddlers, cooking food, collecting drinking water and various other day to day household chores. There is a need for the policymakers in India to provide basic social facilities to women like drinking water, piped gas and child care crèche facilities so that women are free to take up quality high pay jobs which would lead to their economic empowerment. The policy enforcement mechanisms at all levels of governance from national to village

panchayat levels must ensure the success of schemes like the ‘Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana’, as they are duty-bound to look after the welfare and boost the morale of female population in the country.

Women and Relocation

“If India wants more women in the workforce, we need to think more about their migration”⁷. An issue which contributes to a falling FLFP is the problem of relocation which is faced by women in many parts of our country. There are occasions when a girl has to stay away from her house to pursue higher studies or take up a high paying job. But this relocation of a female is resisted by the male members of the family due to the social fabric of our society which instils fear among the women when staying alone away from their home. Women are generally encouraged to stay at homes and carry on with their studies or take up part-time jobs before they are married and they could move out with their spouse.

It is a fact that most of the women in India are granted very limited decision-making powers when it comes to making selection of careers or selection of institutions for higher education. They need to take the permission of all elders in the family which include grand-parents, father, elder brother and sometimes the panchayat body of their villages for arriving at a final decision. The women are burdened with the responsibility of taking care of their off-springs and other house- hold chores. She continues to be deprived of the accessibility to modern Wi-Fi and internet-enabled smartphones and laptops which could be utilised for undergoing online courses for higher education, skill up-gradation, selection and application for jobs. The rural women, mostly continue to stay away from the advantages provided by the information and communication technologies as compared to urban women. The migrant workers who come to cities in search of jobs are mostly employed in the informal sectors and suffer from poor housing conditions, identity crisis and lesser wages as compared to their male co-workers.

There are various organisational impediments in our society with preconceived

mind-set, which suffer from inertia. The result is that inspite of various reforms initiated by the government institutions, the process continues to remain in a vicious circle and there is no change in the status of women, especially when decisions related to relocation is concerned for better job opportunities or higher education. Needless to say, the civic society should understand and comprehend the women power and their envisaged contribution to our economy. Women should be encouraged and guided to move out of their homes to bigger cities, both within and outside the country in search of jobs which could offer them better pay and privileges. While it may be incorrect to assume that mere formulation of policies for women empowerment would make the desired changes in their stature, the government and non-government organisations along with the leadership in the public and private sector must endure collective responsibility and ownership for the implementation of these policies. This would promote economic empowerment of women in India wherein they could focus on their education, skilling and better job opportunities.

Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

“The recent pandemic Covid-19 pushed women back by decades and India can't be ‘atmanirbhar’ without bailing out the women population first”⁸. When the pandemic broke out, a large amount of women population in India did not have jobs in the well-regulated formal sectors of the economy. For those women who were employed in informal sectors, their employment had maximum impact and many lost their jobs. The government rolled out some schemes for the employment of these women so they could continue to earn some wages. However, the adequate policy outreach was not there to cover women who were staying in rural as well as urban areas and work in informal sectors. This was done to benefit several women who had lost their jobs in the wake of this pandemic and suffered from hunger and poverty. The public distribution of food grains for the poor and suffering women was done till the economy revived to alleviate the misery and sufferings to some extent. Also, the

government transferred some amount of money in the bank account of those women who have lost their jobs and were living below the poverty line.

While people continued to take precautions in the absence of a vaccine against the Covid-19 virus, most of the schools were closed and online classes were conducted. In homes, the domestic helpers were not allowed entries in the houses due to imposed protocols of maintaining social- distancing, as a result of which most of these helpers returned to their villages in the absence of jobs. This added on to the responsibilities of women who were already carrying out unpaid care activities in their homes. With many organizations having reverted to online working culture, women employees who are not tech-savvy or those who did not have access to the internet at their place of residence lost their jobs. Many women quit their jobs or took a break as it became difficult to manage both household and office work at the same time. Many professions which had a majority of women workers like hospitals and hotels closed down in interim due to huge losses incurred during the lockdown period. The situation only improved somewhat after the vaccination of employees was done on a large scale. The huge business losses incurred by the private sector and the owner of these firms forced them to take up stern measures and this reduced the reemployment of the female workers when the businesses opened up due to associated tradeoffs like investments in safe and healthy work environment, and benefits like maternity absence and child care benefits which would have added to the expenditure of the already cash-starved companies. Thus, the after-effects of this pandemic were felt more by the women workers as compared to the male workers.

The imminent loss of economic freedom and purchasing power of women, who are drivers of 70 per cent of consumer purchase decisions, could have a detrimental impact on businesses trying to recover from lockdown losses”⁹. All the stakeholders of the Indian economy like government and non-government organisations, public and private sector functionaries had to initiate actions so that the requirements of women are met in these difficult

times and they did not lose their social and economic autonomy as a result of the environment created by the pandemic.

Conclusion

Women-led development is not just a pathway to gender equality but a strategic approach to national economic growth. By fostering economic empowerment through inclusive policies, education, and financial access, India can harness the potential of its female workforce to drive sustainable and equitable development. The findings of this study emphasize the need for continued investment in women's economic participation to create a more resilient and prosperous nation.

Empowering women economically is not merely a social necessity but an economic imperative that can transform India's developmental trajectory. With concerted efforts from the government, private sector, and civil society, India can create an inclusive growth model where women play an integral role in shaping the nation's future. This research highlights that true economic empowerment of women goes beyond financial independence—it paves the way for greater social equity, improved quality of life, and long-term national prosperity.

Women empowerment is generally perceived as giving women a choice of work, education and right to make their own decisions. Gender parity is conceived as provision for equal rights and privileges for men and women in all spheres of life. Women face and deal with a variety of challenges in everyday life which is not only an impediment for the growth and prosperity of that particular women but also affects the social and economic progress of the society at large. Progress is being seen in the attainment of gender parity, albeit at a very slow pace and it would take many years to ensure the involvement of women in all spheres of economic activities which in turn would delay their economic empowerment. While a large number of resources are expended towards curbing discrimination against women, the same capital and energy could be better utilised for the welfare of the society, if it could be

overcome. The reality is that while new laws and policies are being enacted for protecting the interests of women in India, incidents of sexual harassment at home and work, dowry, pay disparity in jobs, etc continue to be in the limelight every day. While it takes years for justice to be delivered to a woman who is raped in India, the death sentence is only awarded by the court in rare cases. The affected women continue to suffer from the trauma of the heinous crime committed against her for years together. The judicial process in India needs to deliver justice to the affected woman promptly. Women have proved their worth in the field of science, medicine, defence, arts and culture and in all other fields where they participate. Whether it is women empowerment, gender parity or gender justice, women themselves have to voice their rights in society. Though the entire process could start at home by inculcating good values among the children and making them aware of these issues. Parents should not differentiate between a male and a female child in their upbringing, which would be a first step towards making the lives of girls comfortable in society.

Talking about women empowerment in 2025 even after numerous commissions, legislations, and even a ministry, may sound cliché, but it is still an important issue today and has deeper connotations than one might even imagine. We must remember that India is not just Delhi or the metro cities and the women in India are not represented by the handful of successful women that we very well know. Many women are still languishing in anonymous darkness and they are the ones who need to be empowered and need cognizance. There are many success stories of women entrepreneurs that come from progressive states like Gujrat and Rajasthan which sometimes do make us believe that all is well even in rural India. But is that not a strong paradox when we talk of states like Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa where women empowerment is put on the back-burner as issues such as poverty, education and infrastructure do not take priority. Overpopulation, unemployment and lack of education vis-a-vis women's issues form a vicious circle. The thought process, for example, 'more children mean more hands that earn'. This idea propels poor people to have more and more

children. They fail to understand that it only means more mouths to feed and thus condemning them to a life of misery and poverty. Women are the worst sufferers in this cycle. Education can be the only panacea.

The present society needs to be answerable to girls who grow up and become adults tomorrow raising some pertinent questions like, why shouldn't they be allowed to join the National Defence Academy? or get commissioned in combat arms of Indian Army like Infantry and Armoured Corps? Women in India require an environment that is secure and supportive of their advancement and empowerment. Their potential to grow should not be constrained by fake barriers created in the society which create fear and anxiety among them. Women need to be encouraged and given a level playing field with men through the implementation of affirmative policy action. Given the right enablers, the sky would be the limit for the growth of Indian women. The policymakers in the government have taken various steps to ensure gender parity in all spheres of activity in India for inclusive development.

To encourage more women to work, their safety at the place of work would have to be ensured. The Sexual Harassment Act, 2013 was enacted to inculcate a fearless working environment for all women employed in various sectors of the economy in India. Empowering women would help in taking advantage of the demographic dividend existing in the country. Women would be able to participate in public life and nation-building when they are educated and have equal employment opportunities. The infrastructure to improve health care services for women has been a priority of successive governments in India, which has resulted in a decrease in the maternal mortality rate. The central and the state governments are lending their full support towards this sector which would ensure a healthy and prosperous future for Indian women in the coming years.

There are very few females who are occupying top managerial positions in companies in India. Also, the number of women-led start-ups is very less. The government is bringing

out various schemes to encourage women entrepreneurs as this would act as a motivation for other women and help in the creation of more jobs, thus leading to their economic empowerment. Women would be able to visualize the problems existing within a business firm or a family from a different perspective and offer unique solutions. The economic and social status of women in India has also improved due to the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 which allows her to inherit property, which was earlier constrained. The aim of women-led development in our country would be achieved if we can harness the potential of nearly half the population through their empowerment.

The revolution brought by information and communication technology in India has helped in spreading awareness about women's issues and their rights among a large number of otherwise oblivious population. The women's demand for gender parity and employment opportunities are heard and supported at all levels, thus prompting the central and state governments to enact various policies for their social well-being and empowerment. The beliefs and attitudes prevalent in the Indian society for the last so many years are changing due to the positive impact and reach of print and electronic media, which serve as enablers of change management.

The qualitative indicators of women empowerment would include enhanced confidence levels through gain in knowledge, awareness on women's rights and issues, better infrastructure for unpaid care activities, respect in family and society, reduction in sexual harassment of women at home and workplaces, and her ability to influence decisions within and outside her home. The quantitative indicators of women empowerment would include increased political participation, an increase in sex ratio, a decrease in female foeticide numbers, better skill and educational qualifications, a higher number of women entrepreneurs, a large number of women in senior management positions, higher financial independence and ownership of valuable physical assets.

For an 'Atmanirbhar' Bharat to fructify, women cannot be left behind in participating

in the growth of our nation. Society needs to follow the principles of gender equality and inclusive growth for all-round growth and prosperity. The government institutions and non-government bodies need to play a mutually supporting role in guiding the policy formulation and implementation in the country for hastening the process of women empowerment. Women themselves need to take the first step forward and fight for their rights and privileges as enshrined in the Constitution of India.

India has a huge chance of increasing its GDP if it can achieve gender parity. The economic growth of India in the past two decades has been phenomenal and has been recognised by major powers in the world. The key reasons for this success are huge investments in providing job-oriented quality education and investment in health infrastructure which has resulted in a reduction in maternal mortality rates. India should target its economic growth by utilising the tremendous potential of its women force which needs to be harnessed by the public and private sector collectively. The expenditure on women-specific schemes should not be construed as a drain on the social welfare budget. Increasing employment and leadership opportunities for women could greatly enhance the value of the companies by increasing their growth and effectiveness. The economic policies in India should aim to enhance women participation in the workforce that would stimulate growth in India.

The women themselves have to initiate the process of constructing an enabling ecosystem around them. They should overcome the barriers to communication when talking to their friends, relatives or peers at workplaces. They should clearly express their desired career trajectory and grab opportunities to realise it.

Key Findings

- 1. Women Work Force acts as Catalyst for Economic Growth:** Increased female labor force participation has significantly contributed to India's GDP growth. Women-led

enterprises, particularly in micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), have driven job creation and innovation. Women's involvement in industries such as textiles, handicrafts, agriculture, and technology has led to increased productivity and economic diversification.

2. Focussed Government and Policy Interventions: Initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Mudra Yojana, Stand-Up India, and the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement have played a significant role in financial inclusion and entrepreneurial support for women. These programs have provided access to credit, training, and market linkages, enabling women to become economically self-sufficient.

3. Challenges Exist: Gender wage gaps, cultural barriers, and limited access to capital continue to hinder women's economic participation. The informal sector remains a significant employer of women, often lacking job security, fair wages, and social protections. Additionally, lack of digital literacy and limited access to technology act as barriers to women's economic empowerment in a rapidly digitizing economy.

4. Success Stories are Happening around us: Women-led enterprises in sectors like handicrafts, technology, and agriculture have demonstrated scalable models for sustainable development, emphasizing the role of financial literacy and digital inclusion. Notable examples include rural women entrepreneurs who have leveraged e-commerce platforms to sell their products globally and technology-driven women-led start-ups that are breaking barriers in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

5. Criticality of Education and Skill Development: Education is a fundamental enabler of economic empowerment. However, disparities in female literacy rates, especially in rural areas, pose a challenge to women's ability to participate fully in economic activities. Vocational training and digital literacy programs have proven effective in equipping women with marketable skills.

6. Impact and Influence of Women in Leadership Roles: Women in leadership positions, whether in politics, business, or community organizations, have a multiplier effect on

economic development. Their presence in decision-making roles influences policies that are more inclusive and supportive of women's empowerment.

Recommendations

“While gender barriers have softened to a large extent at the workplace, India Inc. still has a lot of ground to cover when it comes to ensuring an enabling environment for women at work”¹⁰. There are many complaints which are received from women who are working in the corporate sector on issues like prejudices and side-stepping at their offices. While women are excelling and out-performing their male counterparts in many areas, they continue to be paid less and are not compensated in the same manner even though they have proved themselves to be more competent. While the number of women who are employed in the corporate sector is gradually increasing, the number of women in top managerial positions in this sector is very less. “As per the Prime Database, in 2019, out of 1,814 chief executives and MDs of NSE-listed companies in India, only 67, or 3.69% are women”¹¹. While many deserving women candidates at the entry-level could be groomed to assume leadership roles, there is a lack of conducive environment which promoted the growth of women employees in the private sector companies. The government and the private sector need to remove this anomaly and help deserving women to rise to top positions in the company. This would help India is moving from women development to women- led development, as has been the vision of the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi.

Women have to overcome a major obstacle of returning and catching up with their work post maternity break. “The government can create an enabling environment for women by extending provisions of Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 to the informal sector and facilitating measures like flexible leave and working hours, enhanced childcare support and other steps that would incentivize shared caregiving between both parents”¹². To overcome the

problems of becoming redundant during the breaks due to fast-changing technology, women should take out time and refresh their knowledge by subscribing to online courses which have been facilitated by advances in information and communication technology.

Special tax benefits and certain policy implementation concessions could be given to companies where the strength of female workers is above a certain percentage as decided by the policymakers. “It must also aim to encourage more women to take up science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects, which would help in expanding the pool of available female talent in STEM- focused jobs, where currently women are highly underrepresented”¹³. Its implementation would require a well-planned and dedicated campaign to enlighten the girls and their parents on the need to change their thought process and perceptions of stereo-type issues embedded in society.

The policies formulated by the leaders in the private sector should be devoid of any gender bias and encourage women to rise to leadership positions. After the recruitment of suitable women in organisations, they should be periodically skilled and groomed for higher positions and assuming greater responsibilities. There should be a level playing field between the male and female employees in the company to climb the ladder of growth and success. This would help women in realising their potential and contribute effectively towards the growth of the organisation and the nation.

The male employees in the organisation should be sensitised to encourage female colleagues and not see them as a threat. There should be a spirit of healthy competition among all the employees under the strict supervision of the top management with no place for gender bias. An inclusive growth could only be achieved in an organisation when there is support from all the employees for the same irrespective of gender. Female workers who excel in their professions could be suitably awarded by the companies in the form of out of turn promotions or cash incentives. This would encourage lower, middle and top-level executives to work harder and excel, to prove their worth in the company. Their success stories would

then be imbibed by other women inside and outside the organisation and would act as a catalyst of women empowerment in the society at large.

The organisations must follow a zero-tolerance policy towards cases of sexual harassment against women and the top management must accordingly formulate the rules and regulations for dealing with such cases. Gender parity needs to be encouraged in the work culture for maximising the effectiveness of human potential in the organisation. Recruitment rallies carried out should be free from any bias against the women and only the deserving candidates should be selected irrespective of their sex. Women-specific development programmes could be conducted by specialists in the field to groom them for senior managerial positions in the company. Effective women entrepreneurs could be requested to share their success stories with the female employees in the organisation who could act as a role model for others.

“Entrepreneurship is another avenue for boosting the participation of women in the workforce and opening up opportunities for them, wherein the government can provide easier access to finance the aspiring woman entrepreneurs”¹⁴. Women entrepreneurs would inspire so many other women to become socially and economically empowered and it may ultimately lead to the beginning of a cycle of several women success stories. This will lead to women-led development of the nation.

Several initiatives would have to be taken by various government and non-government organisations to encash the opportunity for growth of India’s GDP. Some of these initiatives could be the creation of more employment options for women, the conduct of professional skilling courses for women, expanding the reach provided by internet and communication technology to women in rural areas, give a boost to women-led start-ups and provision of requisite infrastructure to overcome the time consumed by women in unpaid care activities. The social and political activists along with the policymakers in India would have to spearhead women development specific campaigns.

The business industry in India would need to be equal participant in helping women seeking jobs in attaining industry standards in terms of skills, ideas, marketing and effective decision making. This would act as a catalyst for the growth of women empowerment in India and would help them to take lead in social, political, economic and legal fields. Women need to be taught micro-finance and economic factors which affect the markets thus enabling them to survive in volatile conditions created by contingencies like the Covid-19 pandemic. The employers can instill confidence in women regarding their protection against physical abuses when staying away from their homes for work by investing in this area.

“For India to move from a process of women development to women-led development, there is a need for comprehensive policy recommendations which could stem from certain factors which have the potential to transform women’s role in the economy and the society”¹⁵. This would require changing the status quo in existing cultures and traditions in our society and re-jigging of the constituents of the political institutions of power.

The recommendations based on my research are summarized below:

- **Policy Enhancements**

- The government should bring in requisite policies and reforms to regulate the informal sectors of the economy and the female workers there should be given social security as is available to those working in the formal sectors.
- The majority of the women in India are employed in informal sectors and the measures would largely benefit them.
- Strengthening gender-responsive budgeting, improving access to credit for women entrepreneurs, and enhancing legal protections against workplace discrimination. Government schemes should be expanded with better outreach and implementation to reach marginalized women.

- Women's day should be celebrated every year to create an awareness in the society about her achievements and rights to ensure their safety, growth and confidence at all times.

- **Capacity Building**

- Expanding skill development programs tailored to women's needs, fostering leadership training, and encouraging mentorship networks.

- Special focus should be given to STEM education and digital literacy for women to equip them for high-growth industries.

- There should be more focus on enhancing the infrastructure and curriculum of educational infrastructure in remote areas and adequate provision should be made for female teachers and safe transportation of girls to school and back.

- The state administration and panchayat heads should be mentored to talk to family heads so that they allow deserving women to relocate and find suitable education and work for themselves, without the fear of insecurity.

- **Technological Integration**

- Leveraging digital platforms for financial inclusion, market access, and knowledge-sharing among women entrepreneurs. This includes promoting fintech solutions tailored to women's financial needs and ensuring equal access to technology and internet services.

- **Community and Private Sector Engagement**

- Encouraging corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and public-private partnerships to support women's economic ventures. Large corporations should create inclusive hiring and supplier diversity programs to integrate more women into the formal economy.

- The expenditure on women-specific schemes should not be construed as a drain on the social welfare budget. Increasing employment and leadership opportunities for women could greatly enhance the value of the companies by increasing their growth and effectiveness.

- Religious institutions and local community leaders should take lead in changing the mind-set of Indian men towards their attitude towards women.

- The patriarchal society in India should be sensitised by regular programmes for adjusting to an environment where women inclusivity and empowerment exists. Simultaneously, the empowered women should be able to meet their responsibilities towards family along with economic independence and education.

- **Enhanced Social Support Systems**

- Improving childcare facilities, maternity benefits, and workplace policies that allow women to balance professional and personal responsibilities. Community-driven childcare models can enable more women to enter and remain in the workforce.

- The employers should enforce policies related to the welfare of women such as maternity leave, child care facilities like allowing mothers with breastfeeding toddlers to office and recognition of good work by the institution of awards for female workers in the company. This would ensure that women can manage their work-home balance effectively.

- Domestic workers like female maid-servants, washer-ups and cooks should be brought under the ambit of government security to protect their pay and medical expenses.

- **Legal Reforms and Awareness Campaigns**

- Strengthening laws related to property rights, workplace harassment, and gender-based violence, along with awareness campaigns to educate women about their legal and economic rights.

- The legislation to provide inheritance and ownership rights to women over property and finances should be practised under the watchful eyes of the law-makers. Women should be made aware of their rights and policies regarding this.

- All the government policies and reforms should be based on the principle of gender equality thus giving the women confidence to challenge the status quo in society and

workplaces.

- The government should provide more tax relief to women who are entrepreneurs so that they get time to stabilise and break even.

Validation of Propositions

After doing my research work, I conclude that several measures are in place to ensure the economic empowerment of women in India and there is progress seen in social, legal and political spheres as well, in last few years. However, the results are still not fully visible in the nation as a whole, especially in the marginalized segments of population and rural areas. India needs to continue on this path of women empowerment by helping more and more women to gain more important and senior management positions in the formal sectors of the economy. Women in rural areas and those who lack basic skills are generally employed in the informal sectors of the economy, which needs to be regulated and brought under the cover of government laws of social security in letter and spirit. The propositions of this dissertation, thus, stand validated and it is also observed that there is still a need for further focused efforts for ensuring increased inclusive economic empowerment of women in India.

Areas for Future Research

India as a nation needs to find innovative methods and learn from Western countries to overcome the barriers created for women empowerment because of the patriarchal nature of our society. Women have to take lead in the formulation and effective implementation of gender-neutral policies and reforms. Due to the wide geographic spread our country, advances made in e-learning tools could be made use of in gaining educational qualifications, skills and seeking employment opportunities. There is still scope for enhancing women participation in social, economic, legal and political spheres in India. Also, as we move ahead in our journey the specific sector and segment-based studies need to be conducted to find the impact of the ongoing institutional efforts on the overall empowerment of the women

population of India.

¹ “Female Labour Force Participation in India Fell to 26% in 2018: Report - The Hindu,” accessed September 13, 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/business/female-labour-force-participation-in-india-fell-to-26-in-2018-report/article26467857.ece>.

² “Gender Equality: Women’s Economic Empowerment - UN India.”

³ “Gender Equality: Women’s Economic Empowerment - UN India,” accessed August 21, 2024, <https://in.one.un.org/unibf/gender-equality/>.

⁴ “Gender Equality: Women’s Economic Empowerment - UN India.”

⁵ “Gender Wage Gap Highest in India, Women Are Paid 34% Less than Men: ILO | Business Standard News,” accessed January 04, 2025, https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/gender-wage-gap-highest-in-india-women-are-paid-30-less-than-men-ilo-118112701048_1.html.

⁶ “How Can India Reverse Falling Female Workforce Participation?”

⁷ “If India Really Wants More Women in the Workforce, We Need to Think More About Migration,” accessed August 31, 2020, <https://thewire.in/women/women-india-migration-work>.

⁸ “India Can’t Be ‘Atmanirbhar’ without Bailing Women out First,” accessed September 04, 2024, <https://theprint.in/opinion/india-cant-be-atmanirbhar-without-bailing-women-out/442894/>.

⁹ “Women Drive Majority of Consumer Purchasing and It’s Time to Meet Their Needs | Inc.Com,” accessed September 5, 2020, <https://www.inc.com/amy-nelson/women-drive-majority-of-consumer-purchasing-its-time-to-meet-their-needs.html>.

¹⁰ “Boosting Women’s Participation in the Workforce,” accessed September 4, 2024, <https://www.fortuneindia.com/opinion/boosting-womens-participation-in-the-workforce/103578>.

¹¹ “Corporate India: At Only 3%, Corporate India Is Still Struggling to Bring Women to the Top,” accessed September 4, 2024, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/company/corporate-trends/at-only-3-corporate-india-is-still-struggling-to-bring-women-to-the-top/articleshow/68589499.cms>.

¹² “Women in India’s Informal Sectors Continue to Remain Outside Maternity Benefit Coverage | Eleventh Column,” accessed September 14, 2024, <https://www.eleventhcolumn.com/2020/07/17/women-in-indias-informal-sectors-continue-to-remain-outside-maternity-benefit-coverage/>.

¹³ “4 Ways to Encourage More Women to Enter STEM | Machine Design,” accessed September 14, 2024, <https://www.machinedesign.com/community/article/21837847/4-ways-to-encourage-more-women-to-enter-stem>.

¹⁴ “Development of Women Entrepreneurs In India | by Shadhin Kangal | Medium,” accessed December 20, 2024, <https://medium.com/@eduarticle/development-of-women-entrepreneurs-in-india-533e89866f55>.

¹⁵ “Factors That Affect Women’s Economic Empowerment,” accessed August 29, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/ten-factors-affect-womens-economic-empowerment>.