

## Women's Empowerment in India: Challenges and Concerns

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### Abstract

In contrast to earlier times, women faced mistreatment, even living as slaves during the post-Vedic and Epic periods. Since gaining independence, India has enacted or modified numerous laws specifically aimed at women and has launched a wide range of programs to promote women's advancement and economic freedom across various sectors. The women's movement, bolstered by a robust network of NGOs with a strong grassroots presence and a deep understanding of women's issues, has played a significant role in inspiring initiatives for women's empowerment. Today, women are increasingly seeking to comprehend their societal roles and are becoming more aware of sexual inequalities that pervade all aspects of life, actively pursuing ways to combat these injustices with pride and dignity. Currently, a majority of Indian women have achieved upliftment and emancipation, enjoying equal status with men in various domains—political, social, domestic, and educational—allowing them the freedom to pursue any career or profession.

This paper aims to explore the conceptual framework of women's empowerment within the Indian context. It places particular emphasis on the various initiatives undertaken to promote women's empowerment and offers recommendations to enhance the drive for women's empowerment in India, thereby facilitating further progress in this area.

**Keywords:** Women's Empowerment, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Gender Disparities, Financial Independence, Educational Empowerment.

### Introduction

Empowering women is crucial for achieving positive development outcomes and enhancing well-being, which is rooted in the ability to pursue what one values and has reason to value. Various organizations have distinct roles to fulfill in this area. In addition to childbearing, childrearing, and managing household responsibilities around the clock, many women from middle and lower socioeconomic backgrounds now need to work outside the home to help support their families. The economically advantaged and educated women enjoy some degree of freedom, but they represent a small minority and can be seen as exceptions. The importance of women's empowerment cannot be overstated. The traditional societal perspective on women's status requires a comprehensive reorientation (Aadi, 2025). This is the foundational step, and gradually, women's empowerment can be achieved thereafter. It would be disingenuous to claim that no progress has been made thus far. However, a heightened awareness and widespread education, particularly focusing on women's education, is urgently needed. Numerous challenges exist, and they

must be addressed at the grassroots level. Strategies should be both openly and subtly developed, with active participation from NGOs encouraged (Panigrahi & Satapathy, 2014), and government leadership, along with innovative legislative measures, should be established to tackle these challenges and achieve meaningful results.

In this initiative, it is essential to empower women socially, economically, educationally, and politically, enabling them to make independent decisions regarding their education, mobility, economic independence, political engagement, public speaking, and awareness to assert their rights (Rao, 2018). The women's movement, along with a vast network of NGOs, has a robust grassroots presence and a profound understanding of women's issues, which has played a significant role in fostering initiatives aimed at women's empowerment. Today, women are striving to comprehend their roles in society and are increasingly recognizing sexual inequalities across all aspects of life, actively seeking ways to combat these injustices with pride and dignity.

## Literature Review

Empowerment involves the acquisition of power that enables individuals to exercise personal freedom and make choices that enhance their lives and well-being (Sen & Batliwala, 2023). Enrichment refers to the development of women's self-perceptions beyond mere economic independence, as a transformative process facilitated by education (Sridevi, 2005). Women often face limited access to opportunities that would allow them to achieve personal financial independence, which necessitates empowerment (Mosedale, 2005). The empowerment of women presents a global challenge due to the discrimination they frequently face, particularly in developing nations (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Sharma and Das (2021) have described empowerment as a process that connects women's economic empowerment with their personal financial independence, extending it to social empowerment that allows women to focus on enriching their own lives and those of others. Despite their significant contributions to the development of their families, communities, and economies in various capacities, women are often excluded from opportunities to achieve financial independence through decent, well-paying jobs that require specific skills (Shiradkar et al., 2023).

## Objective

The primary objective of the current study is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the conceptual framework surrounding women's empowerment specifically within the Indian context.

- Empowering women in diverse sectors and communities throughout India.
- These initiatives focus on promoting gender equality, improving access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for women.
- Key challenges and fundamental aspects regarding women's empowerment.

## Research Methodology

The proposed research is primarily based on the analysis of secondary data (Mohajeri & Karami, 2025). This information has been meticulously gathered from various sources, including working papers and research studies addressing the multifaceted aspects of women's empowerment. Additionally, the study incorporates articles published in reputable academic journals, offering valuable insights and findings on the subject. Relevant data has also been sourced from the official websites of key Government of India

bodies, such as the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Women and Child Development. By synthesizing these diverse sources, the research aims to present a comprehensive overview of the current state of women's empowerment in India while identifying significant issues and challenges within this critical area.

## Women Empowerment: Conceptual Framework

Empowerment is a complex, multi-dimensional concept that encompasses various aspects and layers. It is characterized as the sensation that ignites psychological energy to achieve personal objectives.

Empowerment fundamentally relies on two key factors that play a crucial role in its realization: a) the capacity for power to evolve and adapt over time, and b) the capacity for power to expand and increase its sphere of influence. Understanding these factors is essential to comprehending how empowerment operates in various contexts. A deep analysis of the concept of women's empowerment reveals three significant indicators that serve as measures of progress in this area. These indicators include: the ability to make financial decisions; the capacity to make informed decisions regarding matters related to children; and the ability to engage in social activities. These domains encompass elements that contribute to the holistic empowerment of women and highlight the multifaceted nature of this crucial issue.

Women's Empowerment (Kumar & Singh, 2021) is a process aimed at enabling women to gain social, economic, educational, and political strength, allowing them to make independent decisions about their education, mobility, economic autonomy, political involvement, public speaking, and awareness to assert their rights within the home, community, society, and country, ultimately leading to the acquisition of 'power'. In addition to educational and economic empowerment, it is essential to foster changes in women's mobility, social interactions, and intra-household decision-making processes.

## Effective Measures for Women's Empowerment Via Social Empowerment

Awareness programs need to be established to inform women, especially those from underrepresented communities, about their rights and the resources available to them. These programs should not only focus on legal rights but also encompass health, education, and

economic opportunities that empower women to make informed decisions about their lives. By providing comprehensive information and support, we can help women understand their entitlements and navigate the systems that affect them, ultimately fostering a more equitable society.

It is essential to promptly eradicate the social stigmas linked to child marriage, female foeticide, child abuse, and child prostitution. These issues are deeply rooted in cultural norms and societal expectations, which often perpetuate cycles of violence and discrimination against women and girls. To combat these stigmas effectively, we must engage in community education initiatives that challenge harmful beliefs and promote gender equality. This involves not only raising awareness about the legal implications of such practices but also encouraging open dialogues within communities to shift perceptions and attitudes. By addressing these issues head-on, we can create a safer and more supportive environment for all women and children, ensuring their rights are respected and upheld.

#### **Via Education**

Education serves as a vital instrument for social change, playing a crucial role in empowering women by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and self-assurance required to engage fully and effectively in the development process. This empowerment is not only beneficial for the individual women but also for their families and communities, as educated women are more likely to contribute positively to economic growth and social stability. Nevertheless, despite the undeniable importance of education, in many developing nations, women's literacy rates remain considerably lower than those of men, highlighting a significant gender disparity that must be addressed. It is essential to foster gender sensitivity in educational policies and practices to ensure that women and girls have equal access to learning opportunities. Additionally, monitoring the dropout rates among girls is crucial, as understanding the reasons behind these dropouts can inform targeted interventions. Implementing corrective actions, such as providing scholarships, creating safe learning environments, and promoting community awareness about the value of educating girls, is vital to overcoming these barriers and ensuring that women can fully participate in the

educational landscape and, by extension, in the broader development process.

#### **Via Economic Engagement**

The quantitative involvement of women in the workforce is crucial not only for tackling the unequal poverty levels faced by women but also as a significant measure to enhance household income and promote economic growth. The Government of India allocated a substantial amount of funds to support women with entrepreneurial ideas, enabling them to secure loans to establish their own businesses and generate independent income. This initiative has led to a notable improvement in the status of women in India, with many now occupying high-ranking positions in government offices. This demonstrates that women can excel even beyond men when provided with the right opportunities. Women's participation in the workforce is vital for addressing the unequal poverty levels among them and serves as a fundamental step towards increasing household income and fostering economic development.

The Indian Government has set aside a considerable amount of funds to encourage women with business ideas to obtain loans, allowing them to start their own enterprises and achieve financial independence. As a result, the status of women in India has significantly improved, with numerous women now holding prominent positions in government roles. This illustrates that women can outperform men when given the chance. The involvement of women in the workforce is essential not only for mitigating the high poverty rates among them but also as a critical step towards boosting household income and facilitating economic progress. To support this, the Government of India has allocated a reasonable amount of funding to assist women with business ideas in securing loans to launch their own businesses, thereby enabling them to achieve financial independence. Consequently, the status of women in India has seen remarkable advancements, with many women now in high-ranking positions within government offices. This proves that women can excel beyond men when provided with opportunities.

#### **Via Political Empowerment**

Effective political participation (Kattimani & Puttaswamy, 2019) is fundamentally rooted in the principle of fair representation, particularly when it comes to the inclusion of women in both formal and informal decision-making bodies. This representation is not merely a matter of numbers; it is essential for ensuring that women's voices,

perspectives, and experiences are adequately reflected in the political landscape. Furthermore, it is crucial that women are not only present in these decision-making arenas but are also actively engaged in the development of policies that significantly affect the socio-economic conditions of the communities to which they belong. Their involvement is vital for creating policies that are equitable and responsive to the diverse needs of all members of society. By fostering an environment where women can contribute meaningfully to discussions and decisions, we can enhance the quality of governance and promote social justice, ultimately leading to more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

### **Significant Challenges Related to Women's Empowerment in India**

To achieve women's empowerment and equality, it is essential that women possess the autonomy to make their own choices free from coercion or violence, and that they have the opportunity to engage more fully and equally in society.

Gender equality guarantees that women have the same opportunities, rights, and responsibilities across all areas of life. This, in turn, signifies equality in viewpoints, equal chances, financial autonomy, and equal access to resources. Gender equality ensures that women enjoy identical opportunities, rights, and duties in every aspect of life. Consequently, this entails equality in perspectives, equal opportunities, financial independence, and equal access to services.

To effectively tackle any issues related to women, it is essential to first identify and understand the various roles they occupy within society. This determination is influenced by a multitude of factors, including age, whether they come from an urban or rural background, their social standing, and their level of education. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences and challenges faced by women. Although women as a whole may share numerous common interests and aspirations, it is important to recognize that their choices and opportunities can differ significantly from one region to another, reflecting the diverse cultural, economic, and social landscapes in which they live. Furthermore, certain groups of women, such as those from marginalized communities or those facing specific socio-economic challenges, require more focused attention and tailored interventions to effectively address their unique concerns and needs. By acknowledging these differences and prioritizing the voices of these

specific groups, we can work towards more equitable solutions that truly empower all women.

While education is essential for everyone, it holds even greater significance for girls. It empowers them with knowledge about their rights and privileges, enhances their awareness of healthcare, and equips them to be better caregivers. An educated mother is more capable of providing care for her family. The government has recognized that investing in girls' education contributes to a significant decrease in poverty.

Women's empowerment encompasses all aspects of daily life, including the right to education, health, and equal standing in the workplace. It should also incorporate political empowerment, ensuring that women have equality in fundamental human and legal rights, access to resources, and equal opportunities in employment and income generation.

### **Government Initiatives**

#### **Government Policies and Schemes**

- Kanyashree Prakalpa: A program designed to lower the incidence of child marriage and enhance educational opportunities for girls.
- Rupashree Prakalpa: A program aimed at offering financial support for both marriage and education.
- Lakshmir Bhandar: A program intended to provide financial aid to women for various requirements.
- Anandadhara Scheme: A program focused on organizing impoverished women in rural regions for self-help initiatives and vocational training.
- WB Matri Shakti Bharosa Card Scheme: A proposed initiative to deliver monthly financial support to women, anticipated to evolve into a significant women's welfare program by 2026.

These programs are part of a comprehensive strategy to tackle the socio-economic issues confronting women and girls in West Bengal, thereby fostering their empowerment and overall progress.

### **Constitutional Provisions**

- Article 14 - Ensures equality before the law for all individuals.
- Article 15(3) - Allows the state to create special provisions for the benefit of women and children.
- Article 16 - Guarantees equal employment opportunities for all citizens in relation to state positions.

- Article 39(a) - Directs state policy towards ensuring that both men and women have the right to adequate means of livelihood.
- Article 39(d) - Mandates equal pay for equal work for men and women.
- Article 42 - Requires the state to establish just and humane working conditions and maternity benefits.
- Article 51A(e) - Encourages every citizen of India to promote harmony and reject practices that undermine the dignity of women.

### **Key Challenges**

Numerous challenges hinder the advancement of women's rights in India, including:

- Transforming societal attitudes towards women.
- Fostering feelings of inferiority, subservience, and domesticity in young girls, particularly in rural, tribal, and economically disadvantaged families, which affects their education and growth.
- The low enrollment rates of girls in schools and their role as secondary caregivers, taking on household responsibilities such as caring for siblings, are critical issues that require attention in India.
- Ineffective laws and amendments are fundamental problems, as the root issue lies in a societal attitude that is heavily biased against women.

### **Suggestions**

The empowerment of women can only be realized through the enhancement of their economic and social status, which requires the implementation of specific social and economic policies aimed at significantly transforming women's education and empowerment in India.

- Initiatives must be undertaken to improve women's health, particularly to lower maternal mortality rates in regions lacking adequate medical facilities.
- Awareness programs should be established to educate women, especially those from marginalized communities, about their rights.
- There must be strict enforcement of existing programs and laws to eliminate societal malpractices.
- The Ministry of Education, at both the Central and State levels, should devise strategic measures to effectively address the high dropout rates among girls, particularly in rural areas, with the goal of achieving zero dropout rates.

- Women should be given the opportunity to work, along with sufficient safety and support to facilitate their employment.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of the Government's declaration of 2001 as the year of women's empowerment (Aggarwal & Jain, 2014) is to ensure that women have equal opportunities alongside men in all spheres of life. This initiative is not merely a symbolic gesture; it encompasses a comprehensive strategy that prioritizes the enhancement of female literacy rates and the development of essential skills and capabilities among women. By focusing on education and vocational training, the government seeks to empower women, enabling them to achieve self-sufficiency and independence. However, despite these intentions, the Government's efforts remain insufficient, and the journey towards truly empowering women in India is far from complete. Numerous challenges still persist, including societal norms, economic barriers, and limited access to resources, which hinder progress. It is essential to remember that the entire sky will not shine brightly until the shadows and darkness affecting 'half of the sky' are removed. This metaphor serves as a poignant reminder that the empowerment of women is not just a women's issue; it is a societal imperative that requires collective action and commitment from all sectors of society. Only when women are fully empowered can we hope to achieve a brighter, more equitable future for everyone.

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