

Inclusive Growth through Women's Empowerment: A Roadmap to Viksit Bharat 2047

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DOI:10.37648/ijps.v21i02.006

¹Received: 30/11/2025; Accepted: 31/12/2025; Published: 07/01/2026

Abstract

As India moves closer to commemorating a hundred years of independence in 2047, the goal of creating a "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India) has become a major theme in national discussions. This article investigates how empowering women is indispensable for reaching this national aspiration. Although the country has achieved significant milestones, persistent gender inequalities especially in education, healthcare, and workforce participation remain significant challenges. The GYAN framework, which centers on Garib (the poor), Yuva (youth), Anna data (providers), and Nari (women), shapes the policy foundation for India's vision in 2047. Within this approach, boosting women's participation and leadership is identified as a vital element for national advancement. However, deep-rooted structural obstacles and prevailing societal attitudes continue to limit gender equality, with particularly strong effects in educational and employment sectors. Addressing these obstacles demands deliberate policy measures, including enhanced access to education, improved healthcare provisions, greater financial autonomy for women, and supportive policy reforms. Such interventions are essential for fostering gender parity and ensuring lasting progress on the path to equality.

Keywords: *Women's Empowerment; Viksit Bharat 2047; Gender Equality; Policy Innovation; Social Reform; Education; Employment Participation*

1. Introduction

The year 2024 marked a defining phase in India's political and developmental landscape, drawing global attention as the nation prepared for a landmark election. This period was closely linked with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Amritkal, a golden era envisioned to transform India from a developing to a developed nation. At the heart of this vision lies the ambitious goal of building a \$30-trillion economy and positioning India as a leading global power. The concept of Viksit Bharat or "Developed India" goes far beyond a slogan; it represents a comprehensive roadmap to guide the country's economic, social, and technological progress.

Viksit Bharat aims to create an inclusive growth model in which every citizen can participate and benefit. The government has placed strong emphasis on entrepreneurship, business-friendly reforms, and innovation-driven initiatives such as Make in India, Digital India, and Start-up India. Infrastructure development is central to this vision, with large-scale projects focusing on railways, highways, ports, and digital connectivity. Programs like the Smart Cities Mission, Bharatmala, Sagarmala, and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana showcase India's commitment to sustainability, connectivity, and affordable housing.

The vision also extends to social welfare and equality. Initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat for healthcare, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan for sanitation, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao for gender equality, and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana for

¹How to cite the article: Shridhar K (2026); Inclusive Growth through Women's Empowerment: A Roadmap to Viksit Bharat 2047; *International Journal of Professional Studies*; Vol 21, Special Issue 2, 44-50; DOI: <http://doi.org/10.37648/ijps.v21i02.006>

financial inclusion are designed to empower marginalized communities and ensure universal access to essential services. Environmental sustainability plays an equally important role, with landmark missions like Jal Jeevan and the National Solar Mission promoting renewable energy, water conservation, and eco-friendly practices.

A notable aspect of Viksit Bharat is the use of technology to strengthen governance and streamline service delivery. Aadhaar-based systems and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanisms have improved transparency, minimized leakages, and ensured that welfare benefits directly reach the intended citizens. The emphasis on gender equality within this framework reflects the belief that the holistic development of the nation depends on equal opportunities for women.

India's progress under this vision is already visible in its rapid economic growth, technological achievements, and growing global prominence. Modi's ambitious roadmap is designed to unlock India's full potential, driving the nation toward inclusive prosperity, cultural resurgence, and a strong international standing. Against this backdrop, the present paper seeks to explore the impact of the Viksit Bharat vision on women, identify key challenges in its implementation, and suggest practical strategies to overcome these barriers.

2. Objectives of the Study

The present paper is guided by the following key objectives:

- To examine the role and influence of the Viksit Bharat vision in shaping opportunities and empowerment for women in contemporary India.
- To analyze the major challenges and barriers that women continue to encounter in social, economic, and technological domains under the current developmental framework.
- To recommend innovative strategies and policy interventions that can effectively address these challenges and promote inclusive participation of women in nation-building.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, employing content analysis to critically examine existing literature on women's empowerment and its contribution to the realization of the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision. A wide range of secondary sources, including academic journals, government publications, policy reports, and international indices, were systematically reviewed to identify both the challenges and the enabling factors shaping women's empowerment in India.

The analysis is structured around India's developmental priorities, with particular emphasis on the Nari Shakti pillar, which highlights the centrality of women's participation in nation-building. The study also draws insights from contemporary frameworks such as the GYAN model, aligning them with current socio-economic realities to provide a holistic understanding of women's role in advancing inclusive growth.

4. Review of Literature

The discourse on women's empowerment in India has undergone significant evolution over the past two decades, shaped by scholarly research, policy interventions, and international frameworks. This literature highlights the multidimensional nature of empowerment, spanning education, economic participation, health, governance, and technology.

Sushma Yadav and Anil Dutta Mishra (2006), in *Empowerment of Women in India: A Critical Analysis*, provide a comprehensive overview of women's empowerment across key sectors such as education, health, and political participation. Their work critically examines government initiatives and outcomes, establishing an early foundation for understanding the role of national policies in promoting gender equity.

Reema Nanavaty (2007), through *Women, Work, and Empowerment in India*, explores the link between economic independence and broader social and political empowerment. The study emphasizes that sustainable empowerment is contingent upon financial autonomy, echoing the principles of the GYAN framework and the concept of Nari Shakti.

K. Shanthi's edited volume *Women and Development: Issues and Challenges* (2009) brings together diverse perspectives on structural barriers and opportunities for women's development. It underscores the complex, multidimensional challenges that continue to shape women's empowerment in India.

Saraswati Raju and Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt (2011), in *The Gendered Terrain of Development: Politics, Policy, and Everyday Life*, analyze the impact of policies on women's everyday realities. Their work highlights how entrenched social norms and systemic inequalities limit women's access to education and labor markets, providing critical insights for gender-focused policy analysis.

Sharit K. Bhowmik (2012), in *Women and Work in India: A Critical Discourse* examines gendered dynamics within India's labour market, drawing attention to employment inequalities. Bhowmik demonstrates that economic empowerment serves as a catalyst for broader social transformation, a perspective aligned with India's vision for Viksit Bharat 2047.

Naila Kabeer (2013), in her article *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in India: Key Challenges and Policy Responses* published in *Economic and Political Weekly* evaluates the effectiveness of policy mechanisms in addressing gender disparities. She emphasizes the need for holistic reforms to enhance women's participation in governance and the economy.

Shobha Rani Dash (2014), through *Gender Inequality in India: A Case for Inclusive Growth*, underscores that systemic reforms in education, labour, and healthcare are essential for achieving inclusive growth and fulfilling the objectives of Viksit Bharat.

Anjali Ghosh (2015), in *Financial Inclusion and Women's Empowerment in India* (*International Journal of Social Economics*), highlights the transformative potential of financial literacy and access, showing that economic participation strengthens women's decision-making power and resilience.

Uma Shankar Jha (2016), in *Women's Economic Participation and Empowerment in India* (*Indian Journal of Gender Studies*), provides empirical evidence on the determinants of women's labour force engagement, advocating policy interventions, workplace reforms, and skill development as enablers of empowerment.

Sanjay Kumar (2018), in *Healthcare Access and Gender in India* (*Journal of Health Management*), emphasizes the critical role of equitable healthcare access in fostering holistic empowerment and well-being.

Recent Studies (2019–2025) have expanded the focus to technological and digital dimensions of empowerment. Singh & Mehta (2020) illustrate how digital literacy enhances women's access to education, entrepreneurship, and civic participation. Joshi (2022) demonstrates the role of start-ups and digital platforms in generating employment opportunities for women. Reports by the World Bank (2023) and NITI Aayog (2024) underscore the importance of women's leadership in climate resilience, sustainability, and achieving the Viksit Bharat 2047 vision.

Collectively, this body of research affirms that women's empowerment is inherently multidimensional. Progress has been notable across sectors; however, persistent structural inequalities necessitate ongoing policy innovation and inclusive growth strategies to ensure women remain at the center of India's developmental trajectory.

5. Challenges

Empowering women in the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 still faces notable hurdles. Deep-rooted social norms and gender stereotypes continue to restrict equal access to education and employment. Infrastructure gaps, inadequate safety measures, and limited digital access further hinder women's full participation in public and economic life. Persistent wage disparities, underrepresentation in leadership, and unequal access to healthcare add to the complexity. Overcoming these challenges requires sustained policy reforms, digital inclusion, gender-sensitive infrastructure, and cultural transformation to ensure equitable opportunities for all women.

5.1 Individual-Level Challenges

In contemporary India, women continue to face barriers rooted in traditional gender roles and entrenched societal norms. These cultural expectations often restrict their opportunities in education, employment, and leadership, thereby reinforcing inequality despite notable progress. Girls in rural and marginalized communities remain disproportionately disadvantaged due to poverty, gender bias, inadequate infrastructure, safety concerns, and limited access to higher education.

Healthcare access presents another critical challenge. Women continue to experience geographical, economic, and cultural barriers in seeking medical care. Issues such as maternal mortality, reproductive health, breast cancer, and mental health often remain underfunded and stigmatized, leading to delayed diagnosis and poor outcomes. Even as public health programs expand, the persistence of stigma and limited resources underscores the urgent need for inclusive, gender-sensitive healthcare policies.

5.2 Organizational-Level Challenges

At the organizational level, gender inequality is evident in persistent pay gaps, limited representation in leadership, and workplace biases. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024, India continues to rank low in gender wage parity, with women earning nearly 20% less than men for comparable work. Pay inequity, occupational segregation, and discriminatory practices in hiring and promotion exacerbate these disparities.

The "glass ceiling" effect further restricts women's upward mobility. Despite some progress, only about 18% of board seats in NSE-listed companies were held by women as of 2024. Workplace cultures that favour male leadership, unconscious bias, and lack of structured mentorship programs reinforce this underrepresentation. Additionally, workplace harassment remains a pressing concern, with surveys indicating that a significant proportion of women still experience harassment despite legal protections.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach: organizations must enforce zero-tolerance policies against harassment, strengthen gender diversity at senior levels, ensure pay transparency, and promote work-life balance through flexible work arrangements and family support initiatives.

5.3 Industry-Level Challenges

Across industries, women remain unevenly represented. While they form a large share of the workforce in sectors such as education and healthcare, participation in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), finance, and manufacturing remains disproportionately low. By 2025, women account for only about 16% of India's STEM workforce, reflecting deep-rooted stereotypes that discourage women from entering high-paying, male-dominated industries.

Women entrepreneurs also face systemic barriers. Limited access to venture capital, mentorship, professional networks, and financial support continues to hinder their growth. Reports indicate that women-led startups in India receive less than 3% of total venture capital funding, despite the launch of government programs such as Stand-Up India, Mudra Yojana, and Digital India Start-up Support.

Policy reforms promoting gender diversity have been introduced, yet enforcement gaps and weak compliance slow progress. Collaborative action from policymakers, corporations, and civil society is essential to dismantle sectoral barriers, encourage women's participation in high-growth industries, and ensure equal opportunities across all sectors of the economy.

6. Strategies

India has adopted a multi-dimensional strategy to empower women across health, education, employment, entrepreneurship, governance, and social participation. These initiatives are designed to advance gender justice, ensure equality, and strengthen women's active role in shaping the nation's socio-economic, political, and cultural progress. Integrated Support Services: A nationwide network of One-Stop Centres now provides integrated assistance

to women, offering legal aid, medical care, counselling, and rehabilitation support. By 2025, these centres have assisted more than a million women, demonstrating their growing impact.

Education and Gender Sensitization: The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) program has contributed to an improved sex ratio at birth, moving from 918 to 933 females per 1,000 males, while the National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes gender-sensitive curricula. Girls' enrolment in higher education has reached parity with boys, with women now comprising 43% of students in STEM fields, signalling a positive shift towards gender balance in science and technology. **Financial and Digital Inclusion:** Economic empowerment is being driven by initiatives such as the JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile), where over 55% of Jan Dhan accounts are held by women. Programs like the Pradhan Mantri Grameen Digital Saksharta Abhiyan have enabled more than half of their women participants to achieve digital literacy, bridging the gender digital divide.

Strengthening Rural Women's Collectives: Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have become a cornerstone of women's empowerment, connecting nearly 100 million women and transforming rural livelihoods. Additionally, over four crore houses under government housing schemes have been registered in women's names, strengthening their social and economic status. **Healthcare and Maternal Support:** Maternal health has improved significantly, with the maternal mortality ratio declining from 167 to 97. Programs such as ASHA and the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana have provided essential healthcare and financial support to millions of mothers, enhancing both maternal and child health outcomes.

Entrepreneurship and Start-Up Ecosystem: Financial inclusion for women entrepreneurs has been boosted by initiatives such as Mudra Yojana, which provides collateral-free loans, and Stand-Up India and Start-up India, which reserve dedicated funds for women-led businesses. However, access to venture capital funding for women entrepreneurs remains an area requiring stronger policy focus.

Basic Amenities and Well-being: The government has prioritized women's well-being through initiatives ensuring access to clean cooking fuel (Ujjwala Yojana), safe drinking water (Jal Jeevan Mission), and household sanitation. These efforts reduce the time burden on women, allowing greater participation in education, employment, and community life. Affordable menstrual hygiene products, available at just ₹1 per pad and exempt from tax, have also improved health and dignity for women and girls.

Women in Leadership and Governance: Women's representation in decision-making is expanding. The Women's Reservation Bill 2023 has reserved one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies for women, creating space for stronger political participation. India also leads globally in civil aviation, with women making up 15% of the country's pilots, well above the world average. Currently, more than 1.4 million women serve as elected representatives across local bodies, shaping policies at the grassroots level.

Budgetary Commitment: Reflecting this comprehensive approach, the government allocated over \$40 billion (2024–25 Union Budget) for women-centric programs, signaling a clear investment in advancing gender equality and inclusive growth.

7. Impact

Women's empowerment in India continues to play a transformative role in shaping the nation's progress across social, economic, political, and cultural spheres. In the context of Viksit Bharat @2047, empowering women is no longer just a social priority but a national strategy to ensure inclusive and sustainable development.

By enhancing access to quality education, expanding economic opportunities, and supporting women through targeted initiatives, India is witnessing a new era where women contribute significantly to nation-building. Economically, empowered women strengthen the labor force, drive entrepreneurship, and hold leadership positions across sectors. Their participation improves household incomes, boosts GDP, reduces poverty, and enhances resilience within families and communities. Gender equality has consistently been linked to higher productivity and sustainable growth, making women key contributors to India's economic future.

Socially, empowerment has a profound multiplier effect. Women with access to resources are more likely to reinvest in education, healthcare, and nutrition, breaking cycles of poverty and improving the quality of life for future generations. Maternal and child health indicators continue to improve, with greater awareness of healthcare, nutrition, and hygiene contributing to declining mortality rates and stronger family well-being. In education, women serve as catalysts of change, ensuring better opportunities not only for themselves but also for their children, thereby fostering intergenerational progress.

Politically, women's empowerment enhances democratic governance. The Women's Reservation Bill 2023, reserving one-third of seats in legislatures, is a landmark step that ensures stronger representation of women's voices in policymaking. This shift is expected to result in more inclusive laws, gender-sensitive governance, and policies that reflect the needs of diverse communities.

Culturally, empowered women challenge entrenched stereotypes, foster equality, and promote values of respect and dignity. Their growing presence in STEM fields, startups, and innovation ecosystems has brought fresh perspectives, accelerated technological advancement, and strengthened India's global competitiveness. Additionally, women play a vital role in environmental sustainability by advocating climate-conscious practices and championing community-led resource conservation. At a broader level, women's empowerment fosters peace, harmony, and social cohesion. By breaking barriers and ensuring equal opportunities, India is not only promoting justice and human rights but also unlocking the collective potential of half its population. As the nation moves toward its centenary of independence in 2047, empowered women stand as pivotal agents of transformation, driving India toward a more equitable, resilient, and prosperous future.

8. Conclusion

Women's empowerment is no longer just a moral responsibility but a strategic driver for realizing the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. Bridging gender gaps in education, leadership, and workforce participation requires sustained policy reforms, inclusive opportunities, and stronger enforcement of equality measures. By expanding access to quality education, promoting entrepreneurship, and ensuring women's representation in governance, India can unlock the full potential of its female population. The impact of empowerment goes beyond economic progress it strengthens communities, fosters inclusive decision-making, and nurtures a more resilient society. As the nation moves toward its centenary of independence, prioritizing gender equality will not only accelerate development but also ensure that India emerges as a truly equitable, prosperous, and progressive nation where every citizen can thrive.

9. Future Scope of the Study

Future research on women's empowerment in India should move toward actionable, evidence-based policy recommendations that address persistent disparities in education, healthcare, digital inclusion, and workforce participation. Longitudinal and comparative studies will be essential to assess the long-term impact of initiatives such as skill development programs, entrepreneurship support, access to affordable credit, and gender-responsive workplace policies on women's economic participation and leadership. In the present context of rapid technological and socio-economic transformation, exploring the role of digital platforms, green economy opportunities, and artificial intelligence in promoting gender equality offers significant scope. Furthermore, region-specific studies that account for cultural, social, and economic diversities across states will provide deeper insights to design inclusive strategies, ensuring that empowerment initiatives are both context-sensitive and sustainable.

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