

Significance of Women Empowerment for Vikasit Bharat @2047

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Abstract

Women empowerment has emerged as an indispensable pillar in India's developmental discourse, especially in the context of the national vision of Vikasit Bharat @2047. The idea of a developed India by 2047, celebrating a century of independence, places women at the heart of the country's social, economic, and political transformation. This article argues that mainstreaming gender equity is not only a matter of social justice but also crucial for harnessing the country's full developmental potential. Drawing on policy analysis, empirical evidence, global frameworks, and literature, this essay explores the multifaceted significance of women's empowerment and its centrality to India's journey towards self-reliance, innovation, sustainability, and equitable progress.

Keywords: Women Empowerment; Gender Equity; Vikasit Bharat 2047; Sustainable Development; Social and Economic Transformation

1. Introduction

India stands at a historic threshold as it charts the aspiration to become a developed, inclusive, and sustainable nation by 2047 coined as "Vikasit Bharat @2047" (NITI Aayog, 2023). This long-term vision encapsulates momentous goals of economic growth, technological leadership, social justice, and environmental stewardship (Government of India, 2020). Within this ambitious framework, women's empowerment becomes essential, not simply as a moral concern but as an economic and strategic necessity. Women constitute almost fifty percent of India's population (Census of India, 2011) and, as such, represent not just the beneficiaries but potent change agents whose participation is critical for inclusive development. Despite constitutional guarantees and a vibrant policy landscape, Indian women still face marked underrepresentation in political, economic, and technological spheres (NITI Aayog, 2021). Empowerment, in this context, entails eliminating barriers to women's participation, ensuring access to education and healthcare, protection of rights, and equitable opportunities in leadership and public life (Sen, 1999). Given the multifaceted challenges and profound opportunities, reassessing and reimagining women's empowerment is essential for realizing the promise of Vikasit Bharat @2047. Defining Women Empowerment Prominent scholars and global agencies have articulated women's empowerment as the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices, particularly in contexts where this ability was previously denied (Kabeer, 2016). This involves equal rights, opportunities, agency, access to resources,

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and the capacity to influence decision-making at all levels (Duflo, 2012; UN Women, 2022). The imperative is clear: gender justice must be not only a societal value but also a pragmatic instrument for national progress.

2. Significance of Women Empowerment in Nation-Building

While India has made substantial progress in reducing gender gaps, persistent disparities across economic, social, and political domains hinder the country's potential. The following dimensions underscore the significance of women's empowerment:

2.1 Economic Growth

India's journey toward becoming a developed nation is heavily contingent on leveraging the underutilized economic potential of its women. According to the World Bank (2023), India's female labor force participation rate (LFPR) hovers around 24%, among the world's lowest, despite women representing a majority of the informal workforce (World Bank, 2023). Several studies, including those by McKinsey Global Institute (2015) and IMF (2018), estimate that equal participation of women in the workforce could add \$700 billion or more to India's GDP by 2025 (World Bank, 2023; Duflo, 2012). Entrepreneurship among women is a particularly dynamic force for economic change, fostering innovation, creating jobs, and promoting social mobility (Agarwal, 2018). However, barriers such as limited property rights, lack of credit access, gender wage gaps, and occupational segregation impede progress (Government of India, 2018). Strategies to bridge these gaps ranging from microfinance schemes (Stand-Up India) to policy initiatives like Mahila Shakti Kendra are critical drivers of economic empowerment (UN Women, 2022).

2.2 Political and Democratic Strength

Political empowerment is fundamental for deepening democracy and increasing governance effectiveness. Reservation policies in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), enabled by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, have established women as significant stakeholders in grassroots governance (Government of India, 2021). Evidence shows that increased representation correlates with greater attention to health, education, water, and community welfare (Singh & Gupta, 2020). Nevertheless, women's participation remains limited in higher political offices comprising just 14.4% of Lok Sabha seats in 2019 (IPU, 2021). Expanding representation through quotas and support mechanisms is essential for advancing transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability (OECD, 2021).

2.3 Education and Knowledge Economy

The education of girls and women is universally recognized as a force multiplier for social and economic progress. Literate and skilled women are more likely to participate in the labor market, contribute to innovation, and invest in health and education for their children (Sen, 1999; Government of India, 2020). National policies like NEP 2020 emphasize gender inclusion, STEM education, and vocational training for girls and women, recognizing their role in bridging the skill divide for a knowledge-driven economy (Government of India, 2020).

However, challenges of access, dropout rates, and cultural resistance, especially among marginalized groups and in rural areas, persist (NFHS-5, 2021). Addressing these requires not just universalization of primary and secondary education but also targeted interventions in higher education, digital literacy, and lifelong learning (Agarwal, 2018).

2.4 Health and Well-Being

Women's health spanning reproductive, maternal, and general physical and mental well-being is integral to their empowerment and, by extension, national development (UN Women, 2022). Maternal mortality rates, malnutrition, anemia, and inadequate reproductive health services continue to undermine progress, particularly among disadvantaged communities (Government of India, 2021).

Empirical findings indicate that investments in maternal and child health yield high returns in terms of improved workforce productivity and societal well-being (Duflo, 2012). The success of schemes like Pradhan Mantri Matru

Vandana Yojana and Mission Indradhanush depends on robust implementation, community outreach, and awareness-building (World Bank, 2023).

2.5 Social Transformation and Gender Justice

Cultural norms and patriarchal structures curtail women's independence and perpetuate discrimination and violence (Kabeer, 2016; Singh & Gupta, 2020). Empowered women are vital change agents reducing gender-based violence, encouraging equitable family structures, and challenging stereotypes (UN Women, 2022). Case studies across sectors underscore that when women lead in community development, outcomes are more holistic and sustainable (NITI Aayog, 2021).

3. Scope of the Study

This study examines the broad and interconnected domains in which women's empowerment can shape India's trajectory towards *Viksit Bharat @2047*. The analysis covers the following:

Political: Representation, leadership, legal frameworks. Economic: Labor force participation, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion. Social/Cultural: Health, family, traditions, gender norms. Educational: Literacy, skills, higher education, digital access. Technological: STEM participation, digital literacy, innovation. Urban-Rural Divide: Recognizing uneven progress and diverse challenges. Policy and Legal: Constitutional and policy frameworks national and international (SDGs). This multidimensional approach is designed to elucidate the varied impacts, challenges, and potential trajectories for gender-equitable growth and sustainable development in India.

4. Hypotheses

Based on the objectives and framework of the study, the following hypotheses have been proposed: Women empowerment significantly contributes to the realization of *Viksit Bharat @2047*. Economic participation of women has a direct positive correlation with India's GDP growth and inclusive development. Political empowerment of women enhances transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in governance. Digital literacy and access to technology are key determinants of women's empowerment in the 21st century. The attainment of SDGs, particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality), is essential for India to achieve the vision of a developed nation by 2047.

5. Research Methodology

The study utilizes a qualitative, descriptive-analytical methodology, employing documentary and comparative analysis of secondary data. Key sources include: Government reports: NITI Aayog, Ministry of Women and Child Development, National Family Health Survey (NFHS), Ministry of Finance. International publications: UN Women, United Nations, World Bank, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Academic literature: Books, research articles, policy analysis. Surveys: NFHS-5, SDG India Index, Gender Gap Reports.

Data analysis is informed by theoretical perspectives from development studies, feminist economics, and public policy, enabling a critical and holistic assessment of progress and gaps in women's empowerment.

6. Review of Literature

A vast body of literature attests to the central role of women's empowerment in achieving inclusive and sustainable development: Sen (1999), in "Development as Freedom", famously contends that gender equality is foundational to both intrinsic justice and effective development. He asserts that freedom and agency for women translate into better social outcomes and economic growth. Duflo (2012) presents empirical evidence establishing that increases in women's empowerment, especially in education and labor participation, positively impact economic growth and familial well-being. Duflo also highlights multifaceted obstacles legal, social, and institutional.

Kabeer (2016) explores patriarchal power structures, proposing that empowerment arises when women have opportunities for agency and participation. The analysis highlights the multiplicity of constraints, from discriminatory laws to social stigma. Singh and Gupta (2020) track India's usurious journey in gender equity policy and practice,

documenting progress as well as implementation bottlenecks. NITI Aayog (2021, 2023), in its "SDG India Index" and "Strategy for New India @75", underscores women's empowerment as a cornerstone of inclusive national growth and innovation. Women (2022) & World Bank (2023) present global evidence that closing gender gaps in workforce and entrepreneurship generates transformative developmental benefits. Government Schemes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Ujjwala Yojana, Mahila Shakti Kendra, Matru Vandana Yojana, and Mission Shakti are widely scrutinized for their impact and implementation challenges. While constitutional and programmatic frameworks have been put in place, gaps remain especially in implementation, cultural acceptance, adequate resourcing, and digital parity (OECD, 2021; World Bank, 2023). Innovative and targeted strategies are required to accelerate progress.

7. Challenges to Women Empowerment in India

Despite robust frameworks, the road to empowerment is fraught with structural obstacles:

7.1 Cultural and Social Barriers

Patriarchal traditions sanction practices like early marriage, dowry, preference for sons, restriction on mobility, and rigid gender roles (Kabeer, 2016). These social norms are deeply entrenched and perpetuated by education systems, media, and religious institutions. Gender-based violence, harassment, and safety concerns further constrain women's participation in public and economic life (Singh & Gupta, 2020; UN Women, 2022).

7.2 Economic Barriers

Wage disparity, "glass ceilings," limited asset ownership, and lack of formal employment continue to undermine women's economic aspiration (Duflo, 2012; Government of India, 2018). The informal sector disproportionately absorbs women, exposing them to exploitation and lack of legal protection (World Bank, 2023). Access to credit, technology, and markets is often stymied by discriminatory practices.

7.3 Political Barriers

Women remain critically underrepresented in Parliament (14%), state assemblies, and leadership posts across sectors (OECD, 2021). Tokenism, lack of mentorship, and hostile political environments impede effective participation. While quotas at the local level (33% reservation) have yielded positive results, expansion to higher echelons of government remains contentious (Singh & Gupta, 2020).

7.4 Technological Barriers

Digital gender gaps access to mobile phones, internet, and digital skills are stark, especially in rural and marginalized populations. This exclusion perpetuates educational and economic disparities and limits participation in emerging fields like STEM, AI, and data science (Government of India, 2020; UN Women, 2022).

7.5 Safety Concerns

Incidents of sexual harassment, trafficking, domestic violence, and unsafe public and workspaces are serious impediments (UN Women, 2022; NFHS-5, 2021). Societal reluctance to report, inadequate support mechanisms, and slow judicial processes aggravate the vulnerability (NITI Aayog, 2021).

8. Constitutional and Policy Framework

India's constitution is among the most progressive globally regarding gender equality: Articles 14, 15, 16, and 39: Guarantee equality before law, prohibit discrimination, ensure equal opportunity in public employment and advocate for material welfare. 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments: Mandate one-third reservation for women in local self-governance.

- **Key Schemes and Initiatives**

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao: For girl child education and survival. Ujjwala Yojana: LPG connections for rural women. Mahila Shakti Kendra: Empowerment through community participation. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana: Maternal health benefits. Stand-Up India: Promoting women entrepreneurship. Mission Shakti: Holistic women safety and empowerment. Digital Empowerment: Nari Shakti Portal, e-governance, and financial inclusion programs (NITI Aayog, 2023). International Commitments: UN SDGs, especially Goal 5 (Gender Equality). Despite these, actual outcomes remain mixed, necessitating robust monitoring, evaluation, and reform (Agarwal, 2018).

9. Linkages: Women Empowerment and Vikasit Bharat @2047

9.1 Economic Transformation

Women's increased economic participation is directly linked to poverty reduction, higher aggregate demand, and sustainable growth (World Bank, 2023). Whether as entrepreneurs, professionals, or workers, empowered women contribute significantly to economic diversification, innovation, and resilience (Duflo, 2012).

9.2 Political and Governance Outcomes

Effective and inclusive democracy demands genuine participation of women in decision-making. Evidence from PRIs and other institutions shows that women-led leadership prioritizes social welfare, transparency, and grassroots development (Singh & Gupta, 2020). Enhanced political empowerment boosts public trust and legitimacy.

9.3 Social and Cultural Change

Breaking patriarchal chains not only advances justice and equality but also fosters healthier, more educated, and vibrant communities (Kabeer, 2016). Social transformation, in turn, creates ripples that affect every domain reducing violence, improving health, and promoting equality.

9.4 Technological and Digital Futures

For Viksit Bharat @2047 to be an innovation hub, women's participation in STEM, digital sectors, AI, and the future workforce is critical (Government of India, 2020). Bridging the digital divide will ensure that technological progress is broad-based and inclusive.

9.5 Environmental and Sustainable Development

Women, as custodians of community and environmental knowledge, play a vital role in natural resource management and climate adaptation. Their participation is essential for achieving the SDGs, especially those related to sustainability and equity (Agarwal, 2018).

10. Findings

From detailed analysis and review of literature and policy, the following findings stand out: There exists a strong correlation between women's empowerment and improved national development indicators (Sen, 1999; World Bank, 2023). Implementation, not policy design, remains the most significant bottleneck to effective empowerment (Kabeer, 2016; UN Women, 2022). Women leadership has demonstrably positive impact on welfare, governance, and accountability at all levels (Singh & Gupta, 2020). Digital empowerment and entrepreneurship are pivotal game-changers for integrating women into the national growth story (Government of India, 2020). The vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 is unattainable without bold and sustained investments in and commitments to women's empowerment (NITI Aayog, 2023).

11. Suggestions and Recommendations

To realize the promise of Viksit Bharat @2047, targeted interventions and reforms are required on multiple fronts:

- **Education First**

Achieve universal female literacy, prioritizing marginalized and rural communities (Government of India, 2021). Expand the reach and quality of STEM education and vocational training for girls, ensuring seamless progression to higher education (Government of India, 2020). Strengthen mentorship, guidance, and bridge programs for dropouts and disadvantaged learners.

- **Economic Inclusion**

Ensure equal pay for equal work, and close the gender wage gap through stringent monitoring and reforms (World Bank, 2023). Expand financial literacy, guarantee access to credit, and support women entrepreneurs through targeted incentives (Stand-Up India). Facilitate land and asset ownership through legal reforms and awareness-building (Agarwal, 2018).

- **Political Empowerment**

Introduce and enforce at least 33% reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies, exceeding the minimum where possible. Foster leadership training, mentorship, and supportive environments for women candidates (Singh & Gupta, 2020).

- **Digital Empowerment**

Launch nation-wide digital literacy campaigns for women, focusing on rural and marginalized groups (NITI Aayog, 2023). Integrate AI, coding, data science, and e-commerce training in public education and workforce upskilling (Government of India, 2020).

- **Legal Safeguards**

Ensure stringent enforcement of laws against sexual harassment, domestic violence, and trafficking. Strengthen reporting mechanisms, support services, and speedy redressal (Government of India, 2021).

- **Healthcare Investment**

Expand access to comprehensive reproductive, maternal, and mental health programs. Improve healthcare infrastructure in rural areas and for vulnerable populations (UN Women, 2022).

- **Cultural Change**

Launch sustained media campaigns promoting positive role models, challenging stereotypes, and championing gender equality. Integrate gender sensitivity into school curriculums and community mobilization (Kabeer, 2016).

12. Conclusion

Women's empowerment is not only the cornerstone of social justice but the very bedrock upon which the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047 must be built. A nation that sidelines almost half of its population cannot aspire to true prosperity, innovation, or moral leadership. Empowered women drive economic growth, deepen democracy, nurture knowledge, and safeguard human dignity. The centenary of India's independence provides a unique opportunity to right historic wrongs and invest in a future where every woman is free, empowered, and equal. The challenge is formidable but achievable, requiring bold leadership, societal commitment, and relentless pursuit of equity. Ultimately, empowering women is not charity; it is a national strategy and a moral imperative that will shape India's destiny on the global stage.

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