

Role of Gender Equality and Empowerment for Viksit Bharat@2047

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Abstract

Gender equality and women's empowerment stand as central pillars in the vision of Developed India @ 2047, which aspires to make India a fully developed, inclusive, and equitable nation by its centenary of independence. This research paper explores the role of gender equality as a driver of economic growth, social progress, and sustainable governance. It analyses India's progress in gender empowerment through education, employment, health, and political participation while identifying persistent structural and cultural barriers. The study further highlights key policy frameworks such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and the Women's Reservation Bill (2023), alongside recommendations for strengthening institutional mechanisms and inclusive growth. Drawing upon reports from the World Bank, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Government of India policy documents, this paper emphasizes that gender equality is not merely a moral imperative but an economic necessity for realizing the vision of Developed India by 2047.

Keywords: Gender equality, women's empowerment, economic development, India 2047, policy framework, NEP 2020, SDG 5

Introduction

India's vision for Developed India @ 2047 is a roadmap for economic prosperity, social justice, and technological advancement. The initiative, launched by the Government of India, aims to transform the nation into a global leader in innovation, sustainability, and inclusive development. However, achieving this ambitious goal depends on ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens, particularly women, who constitute nearly half of India's population (World Bank, 2024).

Gender equality—defined by the United Nations (UN) as the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men—is essential for inclusive growth (UN Women, 2023). Women's empowerment, which entails the expansion of their ability to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions, is a prerequisite for achieving both gender equality and national development. Studies show that countries with higher levels of gender equality tend to achieve faster economic growth, better governance, and higher human development indices (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Despite progress in education, health, and political participation, India continues to face challenges such as gender-based discrimination, wage gaps, and low female labour-force participation. Therefore, understanding and addressing the role of gender equality and empowerment is essential for realizing the vision of a developed India by 2047.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Global Perspective

Globally, gender equality has been recognized as a cornerstone of sustainable development. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) emphasizes achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls by 2030. Research by the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2022) indicates that gender

parity in the workforce could increase global GDP by nearly 35%. Similarly, McKinsey Global Institute (2023) found that closing gender gaps in work could add \$12 trillion to global GDP by 2030.

2.2 National Context

India has made notable progress toward gender equality over the past two decades. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) (2019–21) reported improvements in women's literacy, reproductive health, and decision-making power. However, female labour-force participation remains low, hovering around 32% in 2023 compared to 77% for men (World Bank, 2024).

Key national policies and frameworks addressing gender issues include:

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (2015): Aimed at improving the child sex ratio and promoting girl-child education.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: Introduced a Gender Inclusion Fund to support equitable access to education for girls and transgender students (Ministry of Education, 2020).

National Policy for Women (Draft 2016): Focused on economic empowerment, health, and safety.

Women's Reservation Bill (2023): Reserves one-third of seats in Parliament and State Assemblies for women, promoting political empowerment.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Amartya Sen's Capability Approach provides the theoretical foundation for understanding empowerment as an expansion of freedoms and choices. Empowerment increases women's capabilities to participate in economic and social life, leading to higher national productivity and improved governance (Sen, 1999).

3. Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative and analytical research approach based on secondary data from credible national and international sources. Data were gathered from:

Government policy documents (NEP 2020, Economic Survey 2023–24)

Reports from the World Bank, IMF, UNDP, and UN Women

Surveys such as NFHS-5 and National Sample Survey (NSSO)

Scholarly journals and think-tank publications

The study adopts a descriptive method to examine the interlinkages between gender equality, empowerment, and national development, and a comparative perspective to analyze India's progress relative to global benchmarks.

4. Current Status of Gender Equality in India

4.1 Education and Literacy

Education is the foundation of empowerment. India's female literacy rate increased from 65.5% in 2011 to 70.3% in 2021 (Census of India, 2021). The NEP 2020 emphasizes inclusive education through gender-sensitive curricula and scholarships for girls. However, dropout rates remain higher among rural and marginalized communities due to poverty, early marriage, and safety concerns (UNESCO, 2023).

4.2 Economic Participation

According to the World Bank (2024), India's female labour-force participation rate (FLFPR) stands at around 32%, among the lowest in the G20. Contributing factors include limited job opportunities, safety issues, lack of childcare, and unpaid care work. Women often engage in informal or unpaid labour, reducing their economic independence. Studies by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023) highlight that closing the gender gap in employment could increase India's GDP by 27%.

4.3 Political Empowerment

India ranks among the top countries in the number of women elected to local governance positions, thanks to the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments reserving 33% of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions. However, women's representation in Parliament has been around 15%, which the Women's Reservation Bill (2023) seeks to address (Government of India, 2023).

4.4 Health and Well-Being

NFHS-5 (2021) shows progress in maternal health indicators, with institutional births rising to 89% and contraceptive use improving. Yet, challenges persist in nutrition, mental health, and access to reproductive healthcare, particularly in rural areas.

4.5 Safety and Social Norms

Gender-based violence, child marriage, and harassment continue to hinder empowerment. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2023) reported that crimes against women increased by 4% over the previous year, reflecting both higher reporting and persistent violence. Changing societal mindsets through education and community programs is essential for long-term change.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Economic Dimension

Gender equality contributes directly to economic growth by increasing labour productivity and innovation. When women participate in the workforce, household incomes rise, and consumption patterns diversify. A World Economic Forum (2023) study found that every 10% increase in female labour participation could boost India's GDP by 0.7%. Empowering women entrepreneurs also promotes job creation in rural and semi-urban areas.

5.2 Social Dimension

Social empowerment involves access to education, healthcare, and decision-making. Empowered women are more likely to educate their children, leading to improved intergenerational outcomes (UNDP, 2023). Gender equality also enhances community resilience, reduces poverty, and promotes social harmony.

5.3 Political Dimension

Political representation enables women to influence policy decisions that affect their lives. Evidence suggests that female leaders prioritize education, healthcare, and sanitation, yielding better developmental outcomes at the local level (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). Thus, ensuring women's representation at all levels of governance is vital for inclusive decision-making.

5.4 Technological and Digital Inclusion

Digital empowerment through access to technology and internet connectivity is a key enabler of gender equality. The Digital India initiative and programs like PM Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan are helping

women in rural areas acquire digital literacy. However, the gender digital divide remains significant—only 33% of Indian women have internet access compared to 57% of men (ITU, 2023).

6. Challenges to Gender Equality and Empowerment

Despite progress, several challenges persist:

Low Labour-Force Participation: Cultural norms and care responsibilities restrict women's employment.

Gender Pay Gap: Women earn approximately 20% less than men for similar work (ILO, 2023).

Educational Dropouts: Economic constraints and early marriage hinder girls' education.

Unpaid Care Work: Women perform over 75% of unpaid household work, reducing their economic opportunities.

Safety Concerns: Violence and harassment discourage women from pursuing education and jobs.

Digital Divide: Limited digital access impedes participation in modern economic activities.

7. Policy Recommendations

To achieve gender equality and empowerment by 2047, the following strategic interventions are proposed:

7.1 Education and Skill Development

Strengthen implementation of NEP 2020's Gender Inclusion Fund.

Expand vocational and digital skill programs for women in emerging sectors like AI, robotics, and renewable energy.

Provide safe transportation and hostel facilities to reduce dropout rates.

7.2 Economic Empowerment

Promote women-led enterprises through credit facilities under Mudra Yojana and Stand-Up India.

Mandate gender pay equity in the private sector.

Develop childcare and flexible working policies to retain women in the workforce.

7.3 Political and Legal Empowerment

Ensure timely implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill (2023).

Strengthen legal frameworks against domestic violence and workplace harassment.

Establish leadership programs to train women for political and administrative roles.

7.4 Technological and Digital Empowerment

Expand digital infrastructure in rural areas.

Provide subsidized mobile and internet access for women.

Launch nationwide campaigns for digital literacy and cybersecurity awareness.

7.5 Social Awareness and Behavioral Change

Promote gender-sensitivity education in schools.

Engage men and boys in equality campaigns to challenge stereotypes.

Encourage media to portray positive images of empowered women.

8. Roadmap to Developed India @ 2047

By 2047, India envisions itself as a fully developed nation where gender parity is achieved in all spheres. The roadmap includes:

Achieving 100% female literacy by 2035.

Increasing female labour-force participation to 50% by 2047.

Ensuring equal pay for equal work across all sectors.

Attaining one-third representation of women in Parliament and state legislatures.

Closing the digital gender gap through universal internet access.

If implemented effectively, gender equality could add \$700 billion to India's GDP by 2047 (McKinsey, 2023).

9. Conclusion

Gender equality and women's empowerment are the twin engines of India's transformation into a developed nation by 2047. Empowering women strengthens economies, improves governance, and enriches societies. India has made commendable progress through education reforms, policy innovations, and grassroots initiatives. However, significant gaps remain in workforce participation, safety, and social inclusion.

To realize the vision of Developed India @ 2047, gender equality must be mainstreamed across all development policies and programs. Empowered women will not only transform their families and communities but will also serve as the architects of a prosperous, resilient, and inclusive India.

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