

She Rises: Empowering India's Women By 2047 Through Education, Social Mobility, And Empowerment

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ABSTRACT:

Women's empowerment is a cornerstone of India's vision for Viksit Bharat @2047—a future where the country stands as a fully developed nation. This paper explores the layered journey of empowerment, beginning with education, advancing through social mobility, and culminating in leadership and decision-making. Drawing on secondary data from government reports, surveys, and academic literature, the study identifies key achievements and persistent gaps in literacy, labour force participation, and political representation. While India has made commendable progress in female enrolment and policy frameworks, challenges such as school retention, economic inclusion, and cultural barriers remain. The paper concludes that achieving gender parity is not optional—it is essential for national development.

KEYWORDS:

Women's Empowerment, Education and Gender Equality, Social Mobility, Labour Force Participation, Viksit Bharat @2047

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Introduction

India's aspiration to become a developed nation by 2047—marking 100 years of independence—is deeply tied to the empowerment of its women. As Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla recently emphasized, “No country has developed without the participation of women. They have broken social barriers and engaged in numerous movements.” This sentiment echoes the foundational principles of the Indian Constitution and global frameworks like the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality.

Historically, reformers such as Savitribai Phule and Durga Bai Deshmukh championed women's education and leadership. Today, India's President herself hails from an Adivasi background, symbolizing the

strides made in inclusive representation. Yet, these achievements coexist with stark inequalities. India ranks 148th out of 193 countries in women's parliamentary participation, and the labour force participation rate for women remains below global averages.

Recent reports, such as the IIMA Gender Centre's district-level analysis, reveal that while 67.5% of districts show progress in decision-making and mobility, economic empowerment and work-life balance lag behind. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (2023), which reserves one-third of seats in Parliament and State Assemblies for women, marks a legislative milestone—but implementation and cultural shifts are key to its success.

This paper argues that women's empowerment must be viewed as a continuum: education lays the foundation, social mobility expands choices, and empowerment ensures agency. Strengthening this chain is not just a gender issue—it is a national imperative.

Need for the Study

Women constitute nearly 50% of India's population (Census, 2011), and their empowerment is both a matter of justice and a driver of economic growth. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (2023) ranks India 127th out of 146 countries, highlighting persistent disparities in economic participation and political empowerment.

Despite flagship programs like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Mahila E-Haat, and the Maternity Benefit Act (2017), gaps remain in translating policy into impact. For instance, while 43% of STEM graduates in India are women—the highest globally—only a fraction enter the workforce or leadership roles. This disconnect between education and employment underscores the need for integrated strategies.

Studying the link between education, social mobility, and empowerment helps identify bottlenecks and design targeted interventions. It also aligns with India's commitment to inclusive growth and the vision of women-led development.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the current status of women's education in India, focusing on literacy, enrolment, and learning outcomes.
2. To analyse how education influences women's social mobility through

- employment, income, and entrepreneurship.
3. To evaluate women's empowerment in decision-making, political representation, legal rights, and digital inclusion.
 4. To project scenarios for 2047 and recommend policy measures for achieving comprehensive empowerment.

Methodology

- Secondary data used for study
- Sources of Data: Census of India (2011), NFHS-5 (2021), PLFS (2023)
 - » Economic Survey (2023), SDG India Index (2023), EAC-PM reports
 - » World Bank Gender Data Portal (2024), IIMA Gender Centre Report (2024)
 - » Peer-reviewed journals and government publications
- Methods: Descriptive statistics, regional comparisons, graphical interpretation

Limitations of the study

- The study Reliance on secondary data
- Underreporting of unpaid work,
- Limited district-level granularity.

Education: The Foundation of Empowerment

Education is the first and most critical step in the empowerment journey. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for girls in secondary education rose from 75.5% in 2014–15 to 78% in 2023–24, reflecting steady progress. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has introduced gender-sensitive pedagogy, scholarships, and infrastructure improvements aimed at increasing female retention and performance³.

However, dropout rates remain high, especially in rural and marginalized communities. Cultural norms, early marriage, and lack of sanitation facilities are key deterrents. The NEP's emphasis on integrating gender studies and promoting female leadership in schools is a step forward, but implementation varies widely across states.

Social Mobility: Expanding Choices

Education alone does not guarantee mobility. Social mobility is shaped by employment opportunities, income generation, and entrepreneurship. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), female labour force participation in India was just 24% in 2023, far below the global average of 47%.

Programs like Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) have supported women entrepreneurs, with disbursements rising from ₹1,478 crore in 2021–22 to ₹1,814 crore in 2023–24. Yet, women-owned businesses remain concentrated in low-income, informal sectors. Access to credit, mentorship, and market linkages is limited.

Empowerment: Ensuring Agency

Empowerment is not just about participation—it is about agency. Women must have the ability to make decisions, influence policy, and access justice. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (2023) reserves one-third of seats in Parliament and State Assemblies for women, potentially transforming political representation.

Legal reforms such as the Domestic Violence Act, Maternity Benefit Act, and POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) have created safeguards. However, awareness and enforcement remain inconsistent. Digital inclusion is another frontier: while mobile penetration is high, women are 15% less likely to own a smartphone or access the internet.

Regional and Demographic Disparities

Empowerment is uneven across India. States like Kerala and Himachal Pradesh show high female literacy and workforce participation, while Bihar and Uttar Pradesh lag behind. Tribal and Dalit women face compounded barriers due to caste and geography.

District-level data from the IIMA Gender Centre reveals that 67.5% of districts show progress in mobility and decision-making, but economic empowerment is still elusive. Urban women fare better in digital access and employment, while rural women struggle with mobility and safety.

Findings of the Study

1. Education: Progress in Access, Gaps in Retention

- The Gender Parity Index (GPI) remained above 1.00 across primary (1.03), upper primary (1.02), and higher secondary (1.02) levels in

2022–23, indicating that girls are enrolling in schools at rates equal to or higher than boys.

- Despite this progress, dropout rates among adolescent girls remain high due to early marriage, household responsibilities, and lack of sanitation facilities in schools.
- The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has introduced gender-sensitive reforms, but implementation varies across states, especially in rural and tribal areas.
- Female literacy rates have improved, yet regional disparities persist—states like Kerala and Himachal Pradesh outperform Bihar and Rajasthan.

2. Social Mobility: Rising Participation, Structural Barriers

- The Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) rose from 49.8% in 2017–18 to 60.1% in 2023–24 under the “usual status” definition, suggesting increased inclusion in the workforce.
- However, most women remain concentrated in informal, low-paying sectors. Entrepreneurship is growing, but access to credit and market linkages is limited.
- The share of female-headed proprietary establishments in manufacturing, trade, and services has steadily increased between 2021 and 2024, reflecting entrepreneurial momentum.
- Programs like Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) and Mahila E-Haat have supported women entrepreneurs, but uptake is uneven due to lack of digital literacy and financial awareness.

3. Empowerment: Legislative Gains, Cultural Lag

- The Women’s Reservation Bill (2023)—officially the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act—reserves 33% of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies for women, including SC/ST categories.
- While this marks a historic legislative milestone, its implementation depends on delimitation after the next census, potentially delaying impact.
- Concerns remain about the exclusion of OBC and minority women, and whether reservation alone will translate into meaningful leadership.

- Female voter turnout reached 65.8% in 2024, nearly equal to male turnout, indicating rising political engagement.
- Women-led startups recognized by DPIIT rose from 1,943 in 2017 to 17,405 in 2024—an 800% increase, showcasing leadership in innovation.

4. Financial and Digital Inclusion: Expanding Access

- Women now hold 39.2% of total bank accounts and contribute 39.7% of aggregate deposits, with rural women accounting for 42.2% of accounts.
- DEMAT accounts held by women grew from 6.67 million in 2021 to 27.71 million in 2024, reflecting a 4.2x increase in stock market engagement.
- Despite gains, a digital divide persists: women are still less likely to own smartphones or access the internet, limiting their participation in the digital economy.

5. Regional and Demographic Disparities

- Empowerment is uneven across states and districts. Southern and northeastern states show higher indicators in education and health, while northern states lag behind.
- Tribal and Dalit women face compounded barriers due to caste, geography, and economic exclusion.
- District-level data from the IIMA Gender Centre shows that while 67.5% of districts report progress in decision-making and mobility, economic empowerment and work-life balance remain weak

Conclusion

Women's empowerment is not merely a social ideal—it is a strategic imperative for India's development. As the country approaches its centenary of independence in 2047, the vision of Viksit Bharat demands inclusive growth, where half the population is not left behind. This study underscores that empowerment is a continuum: education initiates change, social mobility sustains it, and agency completes it.

India has made commendable progress in female literacy, school enrolment, and digital access. The Gross Enrolment Ratio for girls in higher education reached 27.9% in 2023–24, and women now account for 43% of STEM graduates—the highest globally (World Bank, 2024). Yet,

the disconnect between education and employment persists.

Legislative reforms like the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (2023) and financial inclusion programs such as Mahila Samman Savings Certificate and PMMY have laid a strong foundation. However, cultural norms, safety concerns, and digital divides continue to restrict women's full participation in public life. As highlighted by the IIMA Gender Centre (2024), economic empowerment and work-life balance remain the weakest links in the empowerment chain.

To achieve gender parity by 2047, India must move beyond policy announcements to systemic transformation. This includes gender budgeting, leadership training, intersectional inclusion of marginalized women, and district-level monitoring of empowerment indicators.

Empowering women is not a siloed goal—it is a multiplier. It improves family health, boosts GDP, enhances governance, and fosters innovation. As Nobel laureate Amartya Sen noted, “Empowering women is key to building a more humane and sustainable society.” India's journey to Viksit Bharat will be incomplete unless every woman—regardless of caste, class, or geography—can rise, lead, and thrive.

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The Authors have no conflict of interest to declare that they are relevant to the content of this article.

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