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## Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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### Abstract

*Gender equality is a political, philosophical and cultural concept. The idea of gender equality is to eliminate oppression in the form of any sexual differentiation of roles in human society. Gender equality is not a unitary concept rather it constitutes diverse and multiple facets of ideas. One of them which come under liberal feminism is men and women should have equal rights, equal worth, and virtue. Sex is biologically determined and gender is socially confronted at present. The law sees and treats women the way the men see and treat women. Even state ensures male control over women sexuality at every level.*

### Key Words

*Gender, Women, Empowerment.*

### Introduction

"When women prosper, the world Prospers"<sup>1</sup>. Literal meaning of empowerment is 'to enable' which include equal accessibility and equal control over the existing resources which include material as well as intellectual aspects. Everywhere, it is now a custom to classify human community on the basis of sex that is men and women. History shows that nowhere women enjoyed absolute equality as equal to men around the world in human society. Everywhere women were subjected to inequality, discriminated and exploited. The meaning of term 'gender equality' & 'women empowerment' are different as one refers as a provision of equal status for both men and women in terms of opportunity and the latter denotes the act of enabling the suppressed gender to utilize the existing resources. Empowerment is only effective answer to exploitation, oppression and injustice. It is a wide term with neither absolute meaning nor specific direction. It is all about social transformation. It is about people and not about politicians or people having more power. Empowerment is means to an end and also an end in itself.

Women's empowerment is the process of giving them more autonomy and control over their life. This can involve giving women the freedom to make decisions about their own health and well-being, as well as the ability to fully engage in the political and economic processes. Women's empowerment is crucial because it can result in a variety of advantageous outcomes, such as higher economic growth and development, enhanced health and well-being, and more gender equality.

Indicators Women empowerment (15-49 years age group)	NFHS-5 (2019-21)	NFHS-4 (2015-16)
Currently married women who usually participate in household decisions %	91.0 87.7	88.7 84.0
Women who worked for past 12 months and were paid in cash%	25.0 25.6	25.4 24.6
Women who own house/land (alone/jointly) %	38.3 45.7	43.3 38.4
Women having bank account that they themselves use %	80.9 77.4	78.6 53.0
Women having mobile phone that they themselves use %	69.4 46.6	54.0 45.9
Women of age 15-24 years who use hygienic protection method during menstrual period %	89.4 72.3	77.3 57.6

(Source: National family health survey (NFHS- 5) 2019-21)

## Types of Women's Empowerment

- **Economic Empowerment of Women:** This refers to women's ability to participate in economic activities on an equal basis with men. It includes Poverty Eradication, Micro Credit, Women and Economy, Globalization, Women and Agriculture and Support Services.
- **Social Empowerment of Women:** This type of empowerment refers to women's ability to participate fully in social and cultural life, free from discrimination and violence. It includes access to Education, Health, Nutrition, Drinking Water and Sanitation, Housing and Shelter, Environment, Science and Technology, Women in Difficult Circumstances, Rights of the Girl Child, Violence against women and Mass Media.
- **Political Empowerment:** This sort of empowerment refers to women's participation and equality with males in political life and decision-making. It entails the capacity to cast a ballot and run for office, as well as entry into positions of authority and involvement in the formulation of public policy.

## Legal Rights for Women in India in India

Women have received a number of legislative protections over the years to advance gender equality and advance their own interests. The following are some of the most significant legal rights that Indian women can enjoy:

- **Right to Equality:** Article 14 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to equality to all citizens, regardless of their gender.
- **Right to Education:** The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, makes it mandatory for all children, including girls, between the ages of 6 and 14 to receive education.
- **Right to Work:** The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, ensures that men and women receive equal pay for the same work.
- **Right Against Sexual Harassment:** The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, provides a framework for addressing complaints of sexual harassment at the workplace.
- **Right to Property:** The Hindu Succession Act, 1956, was amended in 2005 to give equal inheritance rights to daughters in Hindu families.
- **Right to Marriage and Divorce:** The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, gives women the right to seek divorce on various grounds, including cruelty and adultery.
- **Right to Health:** The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, provides women with paid maternity leave and other benefits during pregnancy and childbirth.
- **Right Against Domestic Violence:** The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, provides legal protection to women from physical, emotional, and verbal abuse by their spouses or relatives.

## Challenges Facing Women Empowerment in India

In a survey conducted in 2022, around 88% of working women said they had to forgo a portion of their pay in order to have more job flexibility in India. Furthermore, about 27 percent of the respondents struggled to convince their bosses. The biggest problems still involve gender discrimination, violence against women, and unequal remuneration. Female foeticide and infanticide continue to be major issues, especially in rural regions. Due to the high number of sexual assault and harassment cases that are recorded each year, women's safety and security is also a major concern. The problems and difficulties are described below:

- **Discrimination:** In India, discrimination against women is a common occurrence in a variety of settings, including the workplace and the family. Because of this, it may be challenging for individuals to take advantage of educational and job possibilities, which may result in unfair treatment and lower compensation.
- **Lack of Access to Education and Employment:** Women in India encounter major obstacles to employment and education. For instance, according to data from the World Bank, only around 50% of women in India are employed, compared to almost 80% of men. This is caused in part by societal and cultural restrictions that keep women from working, as well as a lack of access to education and training.
- **Gender-based Violence:** India suffers greatly from gender-based violence. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, India has approximately 428,278 incidences of violence against women that were registered in 2021. Along with dowry-related violence and female infanticide, this also includes instances of physical and sexual assault. 31 677 female rapes were reported in 2021 alone, which is a worrying statistic.
- **Poverty:** Many Indian women, especially those who live in rural regions, are poor. Women who are poor may find it difficult to obtain an education and a job, as well as face additional difficulties like poor health and malnutrition.
- **Disparities between Urban and Rural Areas:** In India, rural women frequently face more obstacles to empowerment. They might be more socially isolated and more susceptible to gender-based violence, for instance, and they might have fewer access to health care and education.
- **Limited Mobility:** Women's empowerment in India may be hampered by a lack of mobility, which includes limitations on their freedom of movement and access to transportation restricted.
- **Lack of Legal and Political Support:** Women in India also have limited access to legal protections and services, as well as limited political and legal support, including little representation in the Government.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, women empowerment is a vital movement that strives for gender equality and the full realization of women's rights. By empowering women, we can create a more inclusive, equitable, and prosperous world for all. It requires collective action, policy reforms, and a shift in societal attitudes to dismantle barriers and create an enabling environment where women can thrive and contribute to society's progress.

## Suggestions

To address these challenges, concerted efforts are needed at individual, community, national, and international levels. It requires collaboration among Governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector to implement policies and programs that promote gender equality and empower women. It also involves raising awareness, challenging societal norms, and fostering a supportive environment that values and respects women's rights and contributions

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