



Status of Women in India

This editorial is based on [“Is moral policing the newest deterrent to female labour force participation?”](#) which was published in Hindustan Times on 19/08/2022. It talks about the current status of Women in India and their workforce participation.

For Prelims: Female Infanticide, Glass Ceiling, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme, Ujjawala Yojna, Swadhar Greh, One Stop Centre, Constitutional Provisions Related to Women Empowerment

For Mains: Status of Women in India, Areas of Concern Related to Women in India, Recent Government Schemes Related to Women Empowerment, Women Led Development

The form and extent of **work**, [political participation](#), **levels of education**, **state of health**, **representation in decision making bodies**, [access to property](#) etc. are some relevant indicators of status of the individual members in a society. However, not all members of a society, especially **women**, have equal access to the factors which constitute these indicators of status.

[Patriarchal norms](#) restrict Indian women's **education and employment choices**, from the choice to acquire education to the entry into the workforce and to the nature of work.

Let us understand where women, who constitute almost half of the country's citizenry, stand today in the fight for **freedom, dignity, equality and representation**.

What Does the Constitution Say About Women Empowerment?

- The **principle of [gender equality](#)** is enshrined in the Indian Constitution.
 - The Constitution not only guarantees **equality** to women, but also provides the **State with the power to take measures of positive discrimination in favor of women** in order to mitigate their cumulative socio-economic and political disadvantages.
- **Women have fundamental rights to not be discriminated on the grounds of sex ([Article 15](#)) and get equal protection under the law. ([Article 14](#))**
- It also imposes a [fundamental duty](#) on every citizen to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

What are the Areas Where Women have Done Exceptionally Well in India?

- For years, women have suffered the injustice and prejudice of society. But today, with the changing times, **they have made a name for themselves**. They have **broken the shackles of**

gender stereotypes and stood to achieve their dreams and goals. For instance:

- **Social Activist:**
 - **Sindhutai Sapkal** (Padma Shri 2021) - Raising Orphaned Children
- **Environmentalist:**
 - **Tulsi Godwa** (Padma Shri 2021) - Encyclopaedia of Forest
- **Defence:**
 - **Avani Chaturvedi** - First Indian Woman to fly a solo fighter aircraft (**MiG-21 Bison**)
- **Sports:**
 - **Mary Kom** - First woman from the country to win a medal in boxing at the Olympics.
 - **PV Sindhu** - First Indian woman to claim two Olympic medals (Bronze- Tokyo 2020) and (Silver- Rio 2016).
 - **Indian Women's Cricket Team** - Finalist, Commonwealth Games 2022
- **International Organisations:**
 - **Gita Gopinath** - First Woman Chief Economist at the **IMF** (International Monetary Fund).
- **Space Technology:**
 - **Tessy Thomas** - Missile Woman of India ([Agni-V missile](#) project)
- **Education:**
 - **Shakuntala Devi** - Guinness World Record for Fastest Human Computation.
 - **Shanan Dhaka** - **AIR 1** National Defence Academy Entrance Examination (**1st Women's Batch of NDA**)
 - **Top 3 All India Ranks** were achieved by female candidates in **UPSC Civil Services Examination 2021**.

What are the Current Areas of Concern Related to Women in India?

- **Gap in Male Female Literacy Rate:** Despite the government's effort to ensure equality of opportunity for education for both men and women in our society, the [literacy rate](#) of women in India, **especially in rural areas**, still remains very poor.
 - **Schools in rural India are at considerable distances** and in absence of strong local law and order, women find it unsafe to travel long distances for schooling.
 - Traditional practices like [female infanticide](#), [dowry](#), and [early marriage](#) have also contributed to the problem as many families find it economically unviable to educate the girl child.
- **Role Stereotyping:** Still a large section of our Indian Society considered the **roles of men as taking all the financial responsibilities and work outside**.
 - **Gender role stereotyping** attributed to women have generally led to prejudice and **discrimination against women**.
 - For example, women may be considered to be less reliable as workers because of their **child-rearing functions**.
- **Differentiation in the Socialisation Process:** In many parts of India, especially in rural regions, there are still different **socialisation norms** for men and women.
 - Women are expected to be soft-spoken, calm, and quiet. They should walk, talk, sit and behave in a certain manner. Whereas men ought to be confident, loud, and could display any behaviour as per their wish.
- **Representation of Women in Legislature:** The [representation of women in different legislative bodies](#) remains low across India.
 - According to the report of [Inter-Parliamentary Union \(IPU\) and UN Women](#), India ranks **148 out of 193 countries** in the number of elected female representatives in parliament.
- **Safety Concern:** In India, despite of continuous efforts in the field of Safety, women are threatened by various acts via **feticides**, [domestic violence](#), [rape](#), [trafficking](#), [forced prostitution](#), [honour killings](#), [sexual harassment at workplace](#) etc.
- **Period Poverty:** a lack of access to **sanitary products**, **menstrual education** and hygiene and sanitation facilities necessary to properly manage menstruation.
 - According to a [United Nations Children's Fund \(UNICEF\)](#) study conducted in 2011 only **13% of girls in India are aware of menstruation before menarche**.

- **Glass Ceiling:** Women not only in India but across the globe face a social barrier preventing women from being promoted to top jobs in management.

What are the Recent Government Schemes Related to Women Empowerment?

- [Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme](#)
- [Ujjawala Yojna](#)
- [Swadhar Greh](#)
- [Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana](#)
- [Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme](#)
- [One Stop Centre](#)

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Better Education Opportunities: Giving education to women means giving education to the whole family.** Education plays an important role in building self-confidence among women.
 - It also enables people to change she/her status in society. **Education enables and builds confidence to make decisions in a better way.**
 - The **Education policy needs to be more inclusive** to ensure girls right to education and their right to be free from discrimination within educational institutions.
 - Also, **education policy should target young men and boys to positively change their attitudes towards girls and women.**
- **Skilling and Micro Financing:** Skilling and **micro financing** can get women financially stable and therefore she is no longer dependent upon others in the society.
 - Training women in non-traditional skills with market demand, creating more public and private sector jobs for women is important for **financial empowerment.**
- **Women's Safety:** A multi-sectoral strategy to **raise awareness among women** about the current government initiatives and mechanisms should be devised to ensure the safety of women throughout the country.
 - **Panic Button, Nirbhaya Police Squad** are some good steps in the direction of women's safety.
 - **The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013** was enacted to ensure safe working spaces for women and to build an enabling environment that respects women's right of equality of status and opportunity.
- **Specified Actions at the Lowest Level of Governance:** There is a need to **devise, support and promote projects at the lowest level of governance**, to bring more inclusivity in governance and improve the status of women in India. For instance:
 - **Swagatam Nandini (Katni, Madhya Pradesh):** This initiative was launched with an objective of celebrating the birth of girls.
 - With a small procession to celebrate the arrival of the daughter, parents of newborn baby girls are felicitated with baby kits under the **Ladli Lakshmi Scheme.**
 - **Nanhe Chinh (Panchkula, Haryana):** Encouraged by **Anganwadi Workers (AWWs)**, baby girls are brought to local AWCs by their families.
 - Their **footprints are outlined on a chart paper and are put up on the wall of the AWC** with the mother's and baby girls' names.
- **Incentives in Education:** In order to curb **higher dropout rate among girls**, there is a **need for providing relatively higher financial incentives for higher education.**
 - **Reward should be given to villages/districts that are able to attain equal child sex ratio** through education, information and communication campaigns.
 - Additional emphasis should be laid on **e-governance** so that there is a timely check on the expenditure released by the centre and various state governments for scholarships for girl students.
- **Improvement in Basic Amenities at Rural Level:** Improvement in basic infrastructure can reduce domestic work burdens.
 - For instance, domestic work for rural women often includes arduous tasks such as fetching water and fuelwood. **Piped drinking water and clean natural gas (already improving)**

will reduce this load.

- **From Women Development to Women Led Development:** Women should be **reimagined as architects of India's progress and development**, rather than being passive recipients of the fruits of development.
 - The ripple effects of **Women Led Development** are undeniable as an educated and empowered woman will ensure education and empowerment for future generations.

Drishti Mains Question

What are the roadblocks in improving the status of women in India? Highlight some major government initiatives related to Women Empowerment.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. Two of the schemes launched by the Government of India for Women's development are Swadhar and Swayam Siddha. As regards the difference between them, consider the following statements: (2010)

1. Swayam Siddha is meant for those in difficult circumstances such as women survivors of natural disasters or terrorism, women prisoners released from jails, mentally challenged women etc., whereas Swadhar is meant for holistic empowerment of women through Self Help Groups.
2. Swayam Siddha is implemented through Local Self Government bodies or reputed Voluntary Organizations whereas Swadhar is implemented through the ICDS units set up in the states.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q.1 "Empowering women is the key to control population growth". Discuss. **(2019)**

Q.2 Discuss the positive and negative effects of globalization on women in India? **(2015)**

Q.3 Male membership needs to be encouraged in order to make women's organization free from gender bias. Comment. **(2013)**