

## Women Empowerment and Indian Federal Structure: Advancing Towards Equality

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### Abstract

*In a patriarchal system, empowering women is not always simple. In India, women's vulnerability is a persistent problem. However, if we examine the pre-independence and, more importantly, the post-independence history of women's emancipation, we will discover how significantly the Constitution, Judiciary, Administration, and the Central and State governments contributed to the advancement of women. In order to determine how women are being given a voice at the centre of our society, this article conducts a thorough review of the laws and policies of the Indian Constitution and Governments. Due to the protections, security, and involvement in numerous fields, their journey has been rather exciting as they have entered the centre from the periphery. Only the effective execution of projects and plans started by the Central and State Governments makes such a journey possible. This essay considers the factors that have contributed to the advancement of women and girls in contemporary society.*

**Key words:** Empowerment, Constitution, Judiciary, Centre, Periphery.

### 1. Introduction

Even if there are examples of independent women from the Vedic period up until the present, the reality in pre- and post-independence India is quite different. Prior to independence, men held the upper hand and exercised authority through patriarchal mind-set and construct, which further marginalised women from a socioeconomic perspective. Women were subjected to a number of social restrictions, including as the Sati System, Childhood Marriage, Polygamy, and others, and were only ever thought of as mothers and housewives. These events furthered the darkness for the female race. People like Ram Mohan Roy and Vidyasagar spearheaded the movement to restore women to the prominence they deserve. But it wasn't until Indian freedom and the Constitution's implementation that the real transformation took hold. With the introduction of the Indian Constitution, women's access was reestablished. An equal standing for men and women in social, economic, and political spheres is provided by the constitution. As a result, if we read through the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Duties, and Directive Principles, we will discover how gender inequality is combated and equality is encouraged. In addition to directing the state to take action to give women more authority, the constitution also makes provisions for women's empowerment. In a federal democratic setting, the constitution and laws guarantee women's rights, and most importantly, the Supreme Court, who is the Constitution's watchdog, works with other parties to resolve disputes.

### 2. Objectives of the Study

1. To locate the status of women in Indian context.
2. To figure out the provisions available in the constitution and within the federal governance in ameliorating the status of women.

3. To find out how the Central and State Government policies and projects are fighting gender inequalities in India.
4. To understand how several laws and Acts are contributing to the empowerment of Women.

### **3. Methodology used**

This study is qualitative in nature and is based on a number of secondary sources; hence, examples related to the subject are used. The objectives are derived through logical analysis in a descriptive way. Census reports, Internet sources, newspapers, documents are used for gathering data.

### **4. Post-Independence Acts Restoring Women's Status**

Even though India has a long history of conservatism and patriarchy, many steps were taken under British rule to improve society and address the female demographic catastrophe. The Bengal Sati Regulation by Lord William Bentinck in 1829 was a historical choice that for the first time altered the perception of women. Hindu Widow Remarriage Act, 1856 is one law that dealt another blow to society's patriarchal structure. Apart from this, the Woman Property Right Act of 1937 and the Child Restriction Act of 1929 laid the groundwork for modern social reformers like Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, and others who continued the march towards empowering women even after independence. In addition to the constitutional provisions, other laws protecting the interests of women were passed, and the last 50 years have seen significant advancements for women. One of Dr. Ambedkar's most important initiatives to protect women's rights was the Hindu Code Bill (1956). In order to improve them, laws like as the Hindu Succession Act, Anti Dowry Act, Equal Pay Requirements, and Right to Divorce have been created. To address gender bias at the grassroots level, the National Commission for Women was founded in 1992 and the Indecent Representation of Women (Prevention) Act was passed in 1986.

### **5. Equality for Women: Provisions in the Indian Constitution**

The preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties, and directive principles of the Indian Constitution all reference the idea of gender equality. The Indian Constitution includes various measures to end social, economic, educational, and political discrimination in addition to granting women equality. The Preamble's main terms, such as "Democratic," "Justice," "Liberty," "Equality," and "dignity of the individual," effectively build a society devoid of all forms of prejudice. Fundamental rights are those that are necessary for a person to grow and express their self. The constitution's fundamental rights support the ideas of equality and democracy. Additionally, laws accredit and protect these. The aforementioned rights, which apply to everyone regardless of class, creed, or gender, unquestionably play a crucial part in addressing gender disparity issues. The court uses Writs to protect the rights even if the women are denied these opportunities. Fundamental rights prevent patriarchal oppression of women from taking place.

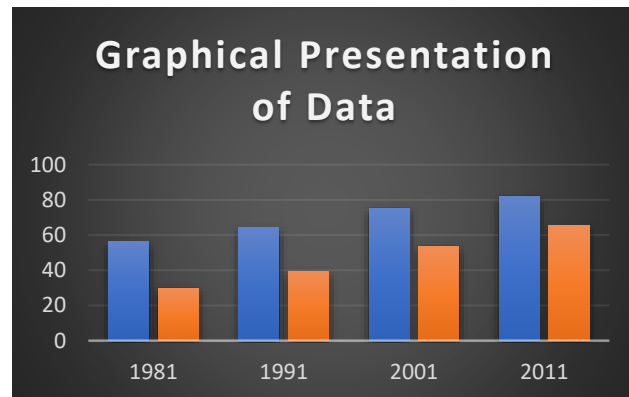
Articles that affirm gender equality and make provisions for women's empowerment include: 'Equality before the law' and 'equal protection of the law' are guaranteed for all Indian citizens under Article 14. Additionally, discrimination on the basis of religion, ethnicity, caste, sex, or place of birth is outlawed by article 15. Article 16 also guarantees equal opportunities for employment in the public sector. A notable strategy for involving all children in the formal education system is the introduction of article 21A. The Directive Principles protect and guarantee gender equality and non-discrimination. The maternity leave provisions in Article 42 are fair and humane. These provisions unquestionably aid in the overall advancement of women. The fundamental obligations reserve honour and respect for women of all races. The provisions for seat reservations and the division of duties in the panchayats for women are made explicit in the sub articles of article number 243. The 73rd amendment made guaranteed that women had equal access to and participation in the political system. This stipulates the reservation of one third of the total number of seats for women.

## 6. Education and Women Empowerment

When the tool of education is used well for women, the journey from the peripheral to the centre can be completed fully. In India, one of the most crucial weapons for empowering women is education. Women's lack of education has a detrimental effect on society. Therefore, the value of education in changing women's behaviour in every area broadens and encourages positively in society. They can maintain their status by responding to challenges and challenging traditional discourses thanks to education. One important tool for removing current barriers and building a strong social foundation for women is education. The incredible progress made in include more girls in schools and universities demonstrates how gender inequity is being challenged and a counter narrative is being built. A centripetal movement has been created during the past ten years and throughout the long history of empowering women through education. Although there has been a noticeable improvement in women's educational achievement over the previous several decades, which is essential for placing women at the "centre" of society, despite the fact that the literacy rate between men and women in India was historically very low. In 2001, West Bengal had a male literacy rate of 75.26% and a female literacy rate of 53.67%. (Census, 2001) However, in 2011 the male rate rose to 82.14%, whereas the female rate jumped to 65.46% (census2011) women. Here, it is clear that the percentage of women has changed significantly more than that of men. The literacy rate for men has increased by 6.88%, while the rate for women has climbed by 11.79%. This information demonstrates how women are advancing and contributing in the educational sector. Additionally, the use of state and federal government programmes and the proper application of laws has allowed for the publication of these images. To combat gender inequality, such positive transformation is absolutely required. According to the Sample Registration Survey for 2018, there has been a noticeable rise in the average number of women between the ages of 15 and 49 who are literate since 2016. In order to transform society, women must have the same educational opportunities as men. According to the National Policy on Education from 1986, education should be used as "agent of fundamental change in the status of women." With the accompanying diagram showing rates from 1981 to 2011, let's observe how literary rates, particularly for women, have improved.

**Fig.1**

Particulars	1981	1991	2001	2011
Male	56.38	64.13	75.26	82.14
Female	29.76	39.29	53.67	65.46
Male Female Gap	26.62	24.84	21.59	16.68



Source: Census of India, 2011 ■ Female ■ Male

According to the data, there has been a decline in the percentage of divergences in literacy rates since 1981, which is crucial for closing the gender gap in literacy rates. This pattern indicates that we will soon reach the target of a male to female literacy ratio, which will undoubtedly improve women's emancipation.

### 6.1. Schemes promoting women empowerment: Centralized initiatives

According to the guidelines established in articles 15(3) and 39(A), the Central Government develops a number of plans and programmes over time to strengthen women socially, economically, mentally, and

politically. Here, I'll list a few efforts by the central government that have helped women advance in society.

Welfare Schemes:

1. To grant loans to Indian women with modest incomes, the **Rastriya Mahila Kosh** was established in 1993.
2. To provide moms and their children with health care services in 2009, the **Mother and Child Tracking System** went into effect. There were also available programmes like the Conditional Maternity Benefit and the Indira Gandhi Matruva Sahyog Yojana.
3. **Swadhar Greh** (2001) is an initiative to provide temporary housing for homeless girls and women who are left alone due to family problems, violent crimes, mental trauma, or social ostracism. Sabala is another initiative for adolescent girls and offers various services to make them self-reliant, physically fit, and vocationally trained.
4. **The Beti Bachao** one of the most recent government projects, **Beti Padhao**, was launched in 2015 with the goals of protecting girls from sex discrimination and gender bias, advancing women's education, and encouraging girl engagement. Therefore, the goal of this plan is to protect the survival and security of female children in infancy while also promoting equal rights and eradicating gender bias.
5. **The Sukanya Samridhhi Yojna** is a special initiative by the Indian government to encourage parents of girls to generate money for their daughters' future education and marriage costs.
6. Through community involvement, **Mahila Sakti Kendras** empower rural women and foster an environment where they can reach their full potential. This plan operates at the national, state, district, and block levels.
7. The Support to **Training and Employment Programme (STEP)** is geared towards wage labourers, daily employees, and people who are living in poverty. This programme offers marginalised women the chance to develop their skills in order to find employment and generate revenue.
8. **NIRBHAYA** is named for a daughter of India who endured horrifying violence on Delhi's streets. This programme works to end violence against women and girls in public areas like buses, trains, and streets. For the benefit of women's protection and safety, money is being raised. This undertaking concerns about the use of technology and optimum use of existing infrastructure.
9. **The National Mission for Women's Empowerment** seeks to empower women on all levels. Women are protected from all forms of violence thanks to this central government programme that guarantees their economic empowerment.
10. The **Nari Sakti Puraskar** is a national honour given in appreciation of outstanding contribution towards the empowerment of women. This award was given for the first time in 1999 as the Stree Sakti Puraskar. This yearly honour is granted to women or organisations who have made a significant contribution to the cause of empowering women by the Ministry of Women and Child Development of the Government of India. This award was given to 15 accomplished women in 2019 by President Ram Nath Kovind.
11. **NARI Web Portal**: In 2018, Maneka Gandhi, the Union Minister for Women and Child Development, unveiled a website with details on the programmes accessible to women. The National Repository of Information for Women is known as NARI. This website provides information about 350 various programmes in the areas of social support, decision-making, housing, health, employment, and education. The She-Box Portal also deals with workplace sexual harassment cases and provides rapid fixes for these issues.
12. **CBSE Udaan**, a programme that aims to boost the number of girls enrolled in engineering colleges nationwide by providing study resources to those who qualify. This programme aims to increase the participation of women in the workforce and to motivate them to seek higher education.
13. The **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana**, an initiative sponsored by the Indian government that provides cash transfers to expectant and nursing mothers.

14. **Mahila Coir Yojana**, a programme to improve quality and skill levels, is being implemented to support the coir business, which employs many people, mostly women. This industry needs to be revived, and possibilities for small- and large-scale industries alike must be provided. This Yojana sets up a three-tiered training framework for skill improvement. With a focus on quality and productivity, this programme aids in the introduction of innovations. Mahila Coir Yojana provides opportunities for self-employment to rural women artisans.

**Fig.2: Central Government Based Initiatives**



There are numerous additional initiatives and programmes run by the Indian government at the national level that work to remove gender disparities and elevate women in society. The aforementioned programmes not only address gender inequality, but they also make it obvious how to rid society of vices while preserving the rights and safety of women.

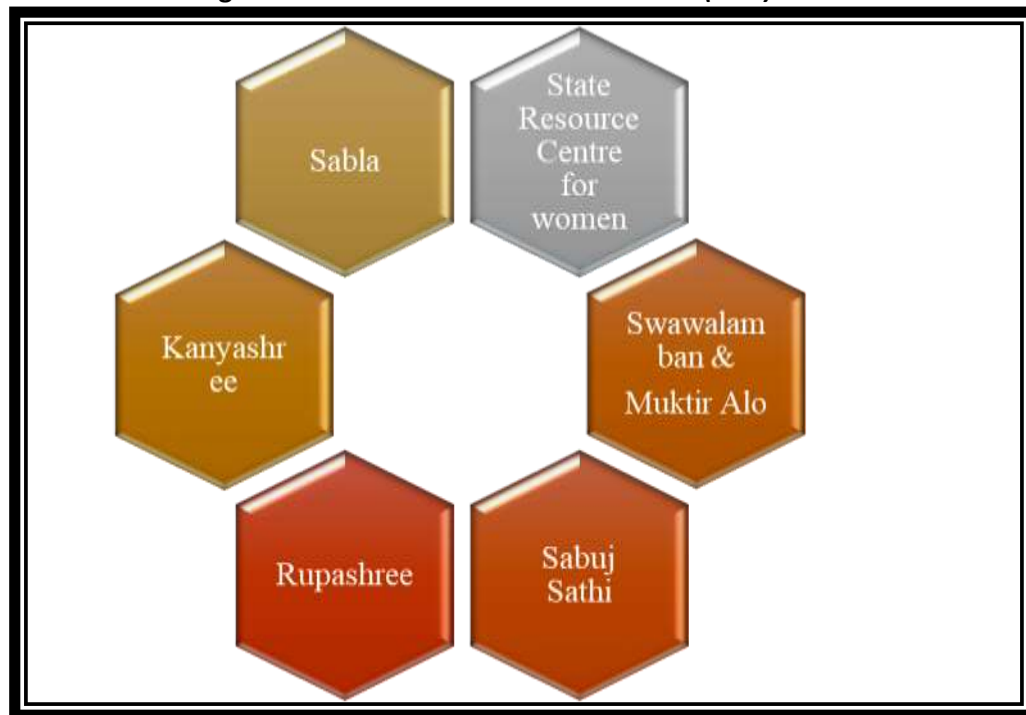
### **6.2. Schemes promoting women empowerment: State Government based initiatives (W.B)**

For the women who are marginalised, the West Bengal Department of Women Development and Social Welfare offers a number of programmes and platforms from which they can assert their position. Therefore, the following are a few policies that are in charge of women's growth and their migration from the margins to the centre.

1. One of the crucial programmes for adolescent females that provides them with social security is **Kannyashree Prakalpa**. This project's main goal is to end issues like child marriage and encourage education among young people. This project places a lot of emphasis on including women financially and socially, and the UNESCO has recognised this project's efforts.
2. **SABLA** is used to promote diet and health among adolescent girls to counteract physical activity. In addition, awareness of other topics and life skills are developed. The state of West Bengal collaborates with federal programmes like the Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana to enhance the nutritional and health condition of underserved women who are pregnant and nursing. Additionally, there are different initiatives to support Self Help Groups.
3. All of the women's development programmes are administered out of the **State Resource Centre for Women**, which also serves as a coordination hub.

4. In addition to the main **Swawalamban programme**, the west Bengal government also runs the **Swawalamban Special** and **Muktir Alo** programmes to support underprivileged people in finding alternate sources of income and vocational training. There are numerous social security programmes in place in the state for the elderly, widows, and pensioners.
5. Programmes like **Sabuj Sathi** assist students in rural and urban areas with easy access to transportation to school. In West Bengal, the number of girl students has risen in recent years thanks to the distribution of cycles.
6. **Rupashree** is a significant programme for women. This programme offers a one-time financial reward of \$25,000 to economically disadvantaged households for marriage-related expenses.

**Fig.3: State Government based initiatives (W.B)**



The number of girls enrolled in schools is rising steadily, and security measures have significantly improved during the past few years. Women are stepping up and participating actively in a number of activities as a result of the policies that have been implemented correctly. Concern for women is highly valued in West Bengal, and initiatives are implemented to create a Bengal where women will take the lead. *Ami Pragati*, *Ami Kanyashree*, the project's slogan, supports women's empowerment, and Bengal is pushing forward to restore women's status in society by transferring knowledge, offering possibilities for economic development, and ensuring their social security.

### **7. Conclusion**

The federal functioning structure in order to improve the status of women in India is outlined and attempted in this writing. The discussion above demonstrates that various programmes for the welfare of women were started by the Indian Central Government, particularly after India gained its independence. In an effort to improve the situation, both the Central and State Governments participated according to the same rules. While the programmes have evolved through time, the goal of returning the rights of women to them has not. The constitution serves as a shield for women, and the government and

administration work tirelessly to remove gender discrimination in society. Laws and regulations are passed by the Central and State legislatures to ensure rights of women.

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