



Women Empowerment and Gender Equality in India: A Strategic Imperative for Viksit Bharat

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Abstract:

Women's empowerment and gender equality are critical to achieving *Viksit Bharat 2047*, India's vision of a developed and inclusive nation. This research examines the effectiveness of gender equality policies and legal frameworks in enhancing women's workforce participation, the socio-economic and cultural barriers impeding their progress, and the role of digital inclusion and financial independence in fostering sustainable development. Using a qualitative content analysis, the study evaluates India's constitutional provisions, labour laws, and government initiatives, such as *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, Stand-Up India, and the Maternity Benefit Act (2017). Findings indicate that while India has strong gender-focused policies, their implementation remains weak, particularly in rural areas. Women's workforce participation stands at only 25%, significantly lower than the global average, due to patriarchal norms, wage disparities, workplace discrimination, and unpaid domestic labour. Additionally, political representation (10.8%) and leadership roles in economic and technological sectors remain limited despite legal mandates. The study highlights that digital access, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy can be transformative tools for gender empowerment, yet limited digital literacy (only 40% Smartphone ownership among rural women) and financial barriers restrict progress. The research recommends stronger policy enforcement, targeted financial inclusion programs, and cultural shifts to support women in decision-making roles. Future research should explore intersectional gender challenges, the long-term impact of government schemes, and the role of men in gender advocacy. Addressing these issues holistically will be essential in making gender equality a reality for *Viksit Bharat 2047*.

Keywords: Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality, Viksit Bharat 2047, Workforce Participation, Digital Inclusion, Policy Implementation.

Introduction:

The empowerment of women and gender equality is ingrained in India's vision for *Viksit Bharat @ 2047*, a fully developed nation by the centenary of its independence. For this vision to become a reality, however, women must participate fully in economic, social and political life to realize inclusive and sustainable development. However, further towards its economic and social well-being yet contributing to gender gap continues to be one of the most persistent challenges confronting the nation despite legislative and policy initiatives. Context: Gender inequality in India in socio-cultural practices and religious. Nevertheless, progress has been made over the years and with globalization, urbanization and increased legal protection system, India has seen improvements in women's access to education, employment, and political representation. But despite all this, we still have challenges and we have to fight to ensure that gender-based discrimination has no more place in our society, and also to ensure that women fully participate in nation-building.

Background

We cannot achieve gender equality if we leave half the world behind, it is a moral imperative, but it is also an economic one. Research suggests regarding India, closing gender gap in labour force participation can contribute to widening India's GDP (World Economic Forum, 2023). Women's participation in decision-making positions, scrolling public and private, has been associated with better governance, greater economic productivity, and higher social well-being. Nonetheless, Indian women still struggle against barriers to leadership positions, equal pay, and safe working environments, despite these benefits. Women in various fields earn far less than their male equivalents for completing similar jobs (International Labour Organization, 2021), and instead of facing a meritocracy-based challenge, they confront a systemic underlining (Wills, 2023). These factors limit women's mobility as well as their decision-making power, contributing to economic dependence and diminished agency, since

the social norms around gender roles constrain their capabilities.

Education is one of the primary ways to attain gender equality, and female literacy has significantly improved in the country over the last few decades. Despite measures like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* aimed at increasing girls' enrolment in schools, dropout rates remain high due to marriage at a young age, absence of sanitation facilities and economic constraints (Ministry of Women and child development, 2022). Ensuring access to higher education and vocational training is imperative for empowering women with skills needed for the changing job market. Yet, gender inequalities continue in STEM domains and professional disciplines, restricting ladies' access to high-paying and leadership-oriented professions. Addressing this gap demands targeted policy initiatives, scholarships, mentorship programs, and awareness campaigns to challenge the gender bias that discourages women from entering traditionally male-dominated fields.

Another domain deeply affected is workforce participation, where gender disparity the national progress. Although the participation of women in India's workforce has experienced ups and downs over the years, recent trends indicate a downward trajectory, especially in the rural sector (National Sample Survey Office, 2022). Unpaid care work, absence of maternity benefits, workplace harassment and inadequate facilities for childcare are some of the main factors that push women out of the workforce. With a large percentage of Indian women engaged in the informal sector, which constitutes an unregulated space with little job security and social protection, there are limited work options available. In particular, labour laws must be strengthened, equal pay for equal work must be ensured, and family-friendly workplace policies must be promoted so that women can increase their economic participation. Incentives for Financial Independence: "Access to finance" is a prominent barrier to women's empowerment yet has so much potential to boost their workforce participation.

Political participation is an essential aspect of women's empowerment, and yet women hold an insufficient proportion of political decision-making positions. While there are constitutional provisions for political reservations for women in the local governance, their representation in state and national legislatures is quite limited (Election Commission of India, 2023). Patriarchal institutions, socio-political hurdles, and absence of political mentorship force women away from becoming active participants within the governance structure. Given the gap, the implementation of affirmative action policies to increase women's representation in leadership positions, as well as offering gender-sensitive political training, and conducting public

awareness campaigns, can help bridge this divide. Active participation of women in policy-making secures that domains like gender-based violence, reproductive rights and economic empowerment receive adequate resources and attention. Gender-based violence and abuse is a major challenge women face on their way to empowerment in India. The rights and safety of women are still being undermined by crimes like domestic violence, sexual harassment, honour killings or human trafficking (National Crime Records Bureau, 2022). Sure, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (2013) provide for legal protection, from domestic violence as well as sexual harassment respectively, but the implementation of these measures remains weak due to lack of awareness, societal stigma and poor law enforcement practices. Response mechanisms must be secure and track gender justice accountability in judicial processes, and policing must be gender sensitive. These factors, as well as activism and education in the community aimed at creating an awareness of patriarchal frameworks, can empower a culture of respect and equality. The intersection of gender with caste, class, geographic location, and other factors magnifies this inequality. Women with disabilities, those from the rural and marginalized communities, encounter even further impediments in receiving an education, accessing healthcare, and finding better job opportunities. Policies to empower women should take an intersectional approach, aware of the varied experiences and challenges faced by different categories of women. It is also critical to ensure that all individuals have equal access to resources, legal protections, and social welfare programs that support gender equality in tangible, systemic ways.

Gender Equality Technology and digital inclusion provide opportunities for advancing equality. Digital revolution has enabled the access of education, financial services and employment to women. Intervention initiatives such as the Digital India programs have aimed to address the digital divide; however, digital literacy and internet access remains uneven, especially among rural women (NITI Aayog, 2023). Doing so will mobilize the world towards helping the women in the emerging economies and developing countries take charge of their own lives by encouraging them to join in the digital economy through targeted training programs, initiatives, campaigns, digital literacy initiatives, and online entrepreneurship.

Gender equality must be achieved to ensure the vision of *Viksit Bharat @ 2047* and the seamless integration of women into all realms of development. It will require concerted effort of legal, policy and social awareness and economic empowerment interventions towards dismantling

structural barriers. It is the responsibility of governments, the business sector, civil society and the individual citizen to all do their part to foster an atmosphere in which women can fully contribute as equal partners in nation building. For the empowerment of women transcends issue of gender parity; it is about harnessing the full potential of half the population to fuel economic growth, social progress and sustainable development. Moving towards its centennial, nothing will be more important from that moment on for India than looking back and ensuring that gender equality remains at the forefront of ensuring an inclusive, prosperous future for everyone.

Problem Statement

Gender inequality continues to thrive in India despite a plethora of legal protections and policy measures in place to redress the same, which poses serious challenges to the vision of *Viksit Bharat @ 2047*. Although many progressive laws have been enacted, including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), the Maternity Benefit Act (1961, amended in 2017), and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (2013), the implementation of these laws is still variable across the state. Women still face structural barriers, cultural norms and institutional inefficiencies that keep them out of economic, social and political participation. More than lack of laws, what perpetuate gender-based discriminatory practices is entrenched patriarchal mindsets, regulatory loopholes and socio-economic constraints that render real change impossible.

The wide gap between gender-sensitive policy formulation and implementation is one of the main reasons of the persistence of gender inequality. The report on *Women in the Workforce for Viksit Bharat @ 2047* states that while different policies exist for women's employment, women are still underperforming in the workplace due to a lack of equal progress, as systemic barriers such as wage gaps, workplace discrimination (both verbal and physical) and lack of maternity benefits continue to plague women. The informal sector, where a large proportion of women are employed, is still largely unregulated, providing low job security as well as limited access to social welfare schemes. Financial dependency on male members of the family further restricts their economic autonomy, thereby reinforcing orthodoxy regarding gender roles. Political representation is another important field in which a gender gap persists. It also highlights the progress women have made in governance, but notes there are few women in leadership roles. Women do not often gain access to effective mentoring or receive support owing to socio-political barriers, and may be hampered by institutional biases. Such lack of representation

exacerbates systemic inequalities, as well as, the development of policies sensitive to gender.

Moreover, violence against women poses a serious challenge for women empowerment. Citing domestic violence, workplace harassment and even honor killings, the report said incidents of violence against women remained a threat to survivors even in the face of tough laws. Social stigma, lack of awareness, and fear of retaliation are some of the reasons many victims never seek legal recourse. The law enforcement agencies are not gender-sensitive trained, which results in mismanagement of cases and starvation of conviction rate. Gender inequality is also perpetuated by cultural and societal norms. Women are the primary care givers, that stereotype continue to dominate, denying women opportunities in education, work, and leadership. Ingrained biases lead to lower rates of female participation in STEM fields, entrepreneurship and politics. And, it is their unpaid household chores and caregiving responsibilities that are being neglected in any economic policy, which further marginalises them in the labour market. Digital and technology inequalities contribute further to the gender injustice problem. According to the *Women in the Workforce for Viksit Bharat @ 2047* report, limited access to digital resources amongst women, especially in rural areas, is preventing them from capitalising on online education, financial services and remote work opportunities. Despite efforts like Digital India, the gap remains, and cultural restrictions with a lack of digital knowledge mean that most women do not take advantage of these resources.

Literature Review

Women's empowerment and gender equality are at the core of development discourses across the world, and India is no exception. With the country aspiring for a *Viksit Bharat 2047*, the contribution of women to the social, economic and political domains is crucial. Many researchers have examined these and other issues related to legal, economic, educational and socio-cultural dimensions of gender equality in India over the years. This literature review brings together existing research on the theme, summarising key findings, controversies, policy U-turns and gaps in the evidence on the topic of women's empowerment.

Women Empowerment and Legal and Policy Framework

Bathrim, H. (N.D.). Their studies focus on constitutional and legal provisions to ensure gender equality in India. Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution guarantee equal rights by prohibiting all kinds of gender discrimination as well as promoting affirmative action for women. In addition, one-third of seats at the local governance level are reserved for women under the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments (1993), resulting in

an increase of women in decision-making roles (Singhal, 2015). But even when provisions do exist, implementation often falls short. Note that on the other hand, while India has strong legal provisions, the poor enforcement and socio-cultural restrictions on women's rights have limited its effectiveness (Jameel, 2025). Besides constitutional support, there exist various legislations are there to secure the rights of women. Several laws, including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act (2017), and Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (2013) play a pivotal role in ensuring gender justice. Lata & Lata (2016) add, that a lot of women continue to be unaware of their rights and are especially unaware in rural India, and that, this leads to under-reporting of gender-based violence and workplace discrimination. The government's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative has sought to do this as has Stand-Up India, Mahila Shakti Kendra and other initiatives to promote social and economic empowerment for women. While some programs have shown promise, they have often not reached marginalized communities, particularly in rural and tribal areas (Sharma, 2024).

Economic Empowerment and Participation in the Workforce

A large body of literature studies how economic empowerment drives gender equality. According to Singh & Sahni (2024), increasing the participation of women in the labour force is a must for Viksit Bharat@2047. According to the World Bank (2023), India continues to have one of the lowest female labour force participation rates in the world at 25%, despite several government efforts in this direction. Wage disparity and occupational segregation are some of the biggest obstacles to women's workforce participation. According to Mohapatra (2018), women in India earn 19% less than their male counterparts, with the gap increasing at senior positions. Furthermore, many women are jammed into low-paid informal sector employment, which does not offer job security, social benefits, or legal protections. Another debate is about entrepreneurship and financial inclusion. Women-led startups and self-help groups (SHGs) are the next big thing; Priyadharshini & Muthusamy (2022) explain that they have been instrumental in economic empowerment. In contrast, according to Ravichandiran & Paramasivan (2024), the limited availability of credit, the absence of mentorship and social barriers impact a women entrepreneur's achievements. Another essential concern is the double burden of work women are expected to juggle work life with the responsibility of keeping the house. According to the Ministry of Labour and Employment (2024), affordable childcare, strict working policies and poor maternity benefits

contribute to challenging work conditions for women.

Education and Skill Development as Vehicles for Empowerment

It is generally agreed on that education is a powerful enabler of women's empowerment. According to Dhiman (2024), education provides the fi-nest avenue to gain economic independence and women who attain higher education are believed to face fewer constraints, exercise decision-making power and experience higher levels of social mobility.

Nonetheless, there are still gender gaps in higher education where fields like STEM, the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, have a female enrolment disproportionate underrepresentation. Research has also looked at obstacles to educating women. According to Bhatia & Singhal (2024), the concern over early marriage, safety, and adherence to societal norms are often the factors that restrict girls from obtaining secondary and higher education. Moreover, Oza (2024) argues that digital education and online learning platforms has the potential to bridge the gender gap in education, if implemented among the rural and underprivileged women

Power in Decision-Making and Political Representation

It is essential for women's participation in politics and governance to be established in order to ensure gender-sensitive policies. Studies show that more women in leadership positions means improved development outcomes in areas like health, education, and social welfare (Jameel, 20125). Although there is a constitutional reservation of 33% seats for women in the Panchayati Raj institutions, women continue to be under-represented in parliament and the corporate sector.

Women have 10.8% of seats in India's national legislature:

Padder (2023) finds the global average is 25%. Patriarchal norms and political violence also inhibit women from engaging actively in governance. In this context, some go as far as suggesting gender quotas in political parties and corporate boards as a solution. Dwivedi et al. (2024) suggest that making women's representation in leadership roles a legal obligation could catalyze progress on gender equality endeavours. But those critics say quotas are not enough by themselves. Mentorship programs, political training and changes to the caste system are also needed for true empowerment.

Obstacles based on gender and socio-cultural aspects

Gender-based violence (GBV) continues to be a significant challenge against the process of empowerment of women.

The domestic violence that affects millions of women; workplace harassment that extends to millions of women; honour killing as brought out by Rathirane (2024). Many crimes against women went unreported due to stigma in society and lack of faith in justice system (Lata & Lata, 2016) With the #MeToo movement and digital activism booming, **Literature Review Summary Table**

there has been more focus on the issues of gender-based violence (GBV), but legal frameworks still need to have stronger enforcement mechanisms. Prakash and Jameel (2025) recommend the establishment of fast-track courts and survivor support programs that can facilitate victims' access to justice.

No.	Originating Information (Author, Year)	Framing of the Research (Objective & Theoretical Perspective)	Scope of the Research (Key Focus Areas)	Research Outcomes (Findings & Contributions)
1	Bisiriya, S. O. (2025)	Examines India's economic trajectory for Viksit Bharat 2047 through globalization and demography	Economic growth, demographic dividend, globalization impact	Highlights the need for strategic investments in labour force and industrial diversification
2	Dhiman, B. (2024)	Evaluates the role of education in empowering women and its impact on gender inequality	Gender disparities in education, women's empowerment through learning	Finds that education enhances decision-making power and financial independence but still faces structural biases
3	Jameel, A. (2025)	Proposes a rights-based approach for achieving gender equality in Viksit Bharat 2047	Human rights, participatory governance, gender justice	Advocates for integrating human rights into policy frameworks for sustainable development
4	Kumar Singhal, V. (2015)	Analyzes historical and policy perspectives on women's empowerment in India	Government policies, constitutional provisions, legislative reforms	Highlights policy gaps and need for more effective implementation
5	Lata, K. & Lata, S. (2016)	Investigates gender inequality and social exclusion in Mewat district, India	Economic disparities, cultural constraints, women's rights in rural India	Finds that traditional norms and lack of economic opportunities hinder women's empowerment
6	Ministry of Labour and Employment (2024)	Government advisory on increasing female workforce participation	Legal protections, workplace policies, gender-sensitive labour reforms	Suggests better enforcement of labour laws and workplace diversity measures
7	Oza, P. (2024)	Examines the role of the Social Development Index in India's development	Social equity, sustainable development, gender inclusion	Emphasizes the importance of gender-sensitive social policies
8	Rathirane, Y. (2024)	Explores decision-making power as a factor of women's empowerment	Household decision-making, financial autonomy, cultural influences	Finds a strong correlation between decision-making power and empowerment
9	Sharma, A. M. (2024)	Proposes collective action strategies for women's empowerment	Intersectionality, community-driven empowerment models	Advocates for holistic approaches integrating cultural and economic factors
10	Vision IAS (2024)	Reviews historical and current challenges faced by Indian women	Political participation, economic independence, health & education	Identifies systemic barriers and suggests policy interventions
11	Bhatia, A. K. & Singhal, G. (2024)	Examines women's role in achieving Viksit Bharat 2047	Women in decision-making, economic participation	Finds that increased participation in governance and economy is crucial for development
12	Manna, A. (2024)	Investigates gender equality among tribal women	Land rights, economic independence, education	Identifies legal gaps and suggests reforms for better tribal women inclusion
13	Mohapatra, B. (2018)	Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and women's empowerment in India	Private sector role in gender equality, workplace diversity	Finds that CSR policies can be instrumental in reducing workplace gender gaps
14	Padder, A. H. (2023)	Analyzes the role of governance in women's empowerment	Political representation, policy implementation, legal frameworks	Highlights slow progress in political empowerment despite legal provisions

15	Priyadarshini, J. & Muthusamy, S. (2022)	Examines the intersection of gender equality and economic participation	Women in STEM, entrepreneurship, financial literacy	Recommends targeted financial and skill development programs for women
16	Ravichandiran, G. & Paramasivan, C. (2024)	Assesses gender equality goals within India's sustainable development	SDG 5 implementation, policy effectiveness	Suggests stronger policy enforcement and public-private partnerships
17	Dwivedi, T., Joshi, J. V. & Ghosal, M. (2024)	Reviews policy targets for Viksit Bharat 2047	Governance, economic growth, gender inclusion	Suggests a gender-focused developmental roadmap
18	Singh, A. & Sahni, H. (2024)	Examines workforce participation trends for Indian women	Job opportunities, wage gaps, labour laws	Finds that labour market reforms are necessary for achieving gender equity
19	Bisiriyu, S. O. (2025)	Discusses India's demographic dividend as a development driver	Population growth, human capital investment	Suggests enhancing women's role in the workforce for economic growth
20	Jameel, A. (2025)	Advocates a human-rights-based approach to India's development	Women's rights, legal frameworks, governance	Finds that integrating gender-sensitive policies leads to better development outcomes

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the impact of gender equality policies and legal frameworks on women's workforce participation in India, assessing their effectiveness in achieving the vision of *Viksit Bharat @ 2047*.
2. To examine the socio-economic and cultural barriers that hinder women's empowerment and leadership roles in political, economic, and technological sectors.
3. To explore the role of digital inclusion, financial independence, and entrepreneurship in enhancing women's participation in India's economic growth and sustainable development.

Research Questions

1. How effective are the existing legal frameworks and government policies in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in India?
2. What are the major socio-economic, cultural, and institutional barriers preventing women's full participation in decision-making roles across different sectors?

Analysis

Methodology:

The analysis of the existing literature on women's empowerment and gender equality in India for *Viksit Bharat 2047* follows a systematic review approach to identify recurring themes, strengths, weaknesses, and knowledge gaps. The selected sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, policy documents, and scholarly books that explore gender equality, economic participation, legal frameworks, and socio-cultural barriers. A qualitative content analysis was used to examine key variables such as legal rights, economic participation, education, political representation, and gender-based violence. By categorizing the findings under these themes, the study identifies patterns and areas requiring further

exploration. The theoretical lens is drawn from feminist legal theory, gender and development (GAD) approaches, and intersectionality theory, which emphasize how legal frameworks, socio-economic conditions, and cultural norms shape women's experiences.

To critically examine the literature, a comparative analysis was conducted to highlight discrepancies in research findings, differences in policy impact assessments, and gaps in theoretical applications.

This involved:

1. Evaluating the impact of laws and policies on women's empowerment and identifying challenges in implementation.
2. Assessing socio-economic data to understand women's participation in the workforce and decision-making roles.
3. Reviewing qualitative case studies that illustrate lived experiences of women from diverse backgrounds.
4. Contrasting international best practices with India's gender policies to identify areas of improvement.

This method ensures a holistic understanding of how gender equality can be advanced in India, addressing barriers and proposing reforms to align with the vision of *Viksit Bharat 2047*.

Discussion of Literature

While the existing literature on women's empowerment in India covers reasonably well the direct legal, economic and social perspectives, among the major strengths, is in-depth assessment of policy measures and impacts. Past studies, such as Singhal (2015) and Jameel (2025), have explored how legal provisions and constitutional frameworks have made gender equality easier. There is research on economic participation that underpins the

importance of financial independence in women's empowerment (e.g., Singh & Sahni, 2024).

Moreover, Dhiman (2024) and Bhatia & Singhal (2024) highlight how education can break the traditional notions of gender and can help women to be a part of many fields, including STEM. These studies demonstrate measurable progress made in women's literacy rates, labour force participation and decision-making over the past few decades.

In addition, studies on political representation like Padder (2023) add to this valuable information by showing the increasing governance of women in political field effect "increased women in political governance" The literature's reliance on empirical studies, statistical analysis, and qualitative case studies increases credibility and provides data-driven insights into trends of gender equality.

It is, however, important to highlight strengths, weaknesses and limitations of the literature. The lack of intersectionality is one of the major gaps. While many studies talk about gender inequality, they do not make a more nuanced analysis by looking at how caste, class, rural-urban and religious factors come together with gender oppression. Although the place of household decision-making in empowerment is acknowledged in Rathirane (2024), the study does not examine the relationship between socio-economic status and decision-making power

Another drawback is limited assessment of policy implementation. Manifold studies highlight legal frameworks and government schemes but often lack on-ground evaluation of policy impact. Lata & Lata (2016) explain that due to a lack of awareness campaigns and bureaucratic inefficiencies, many women do not know about their legal rights but very few studies discuss how to fill this knowledge gap.

Furthermore, studies on economic empowerment are often too urban-centric, failing to capture the realities faced by rural women, tribal communities and women in the informal economy. While Mohapatra (2018) and Priyadarshini & Muthusamy (2022) analyze workplace gender gaps and women entrepreneurship, they do not adequately cover the predicament of female agricultural workers and daily wage earners.

Impact of Digital Technology on Women Empowerment: One of the major gaps existing in the literature is the impact of digital technology on women empowerment. Digital education, fintech solutions, and online entrepreneurship have opened up new opportunities for women. Relatively few studies consider how digital literacy programs and e-governance initiatives can reduce gender gaps, especially in rural areas.

Another key deficiency is the absence of studies on the long-term impact of government schemes. Programs such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and Stand-Up India are subjects of heated discussions, but most studies are limited to short-term impacts and do not trace the long-term impact of such policies for sustainable changes in gender equality over decades.

The literature is not only lacking in gender equality movements, but also the role of male allies in gender equality movements. Onto the men's agenda while gender advocacy tends to focus on the initiatives for women, research must consider what men can do in order to prioritise gender-sensitive policymaking, contributing to workplace diversity and assuming household responsibilities in a way that accelerates progress towards gender parity.

Lastly, cross-country comparisons are scarce. That is, while global frameworks like the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) guide how countries adopt gender policies, studies rarely, if ever, analyze how India's approach compares with best practices from other parts of the world, such as in Scandinavian (Nordic) or East Asian economies where gender parity is higher.

Synthesis of Ideas

Synthesising insights gleaned from legal studies, economic research and sociological perspectives leads to a coherent argument on how India would take strides towards gender equality. The legal framework exists, but as studies show, implementation needs to be improved and awareness campaigns are important. Legal provisions are there but failed execution because of cultural barriers and lack of monitoring (Jameel 2025; Lata and Lata, 2016). So, a multi-stakeholder approach, including government agencies, civil society and educational institutions, is necessary to turn existing laws into actual empowerment.

On the economic side of the matter, financial empowerment is an important driver to gender equality. For Viksit Bharat 2047 to be a success, research suggests, female integration in the workforce has to be higher. We must take a holistic approach to tackling the issue that includes gender-neutral hiring policies, flexible work arrangements, and financial incentives for women-owned enterprises. Reinforcing this type of intervention in workplace environments have been studied by Singh & Sahni (2024) and Mohapatra (2018).

Women empowerment is significantly driven by educating and skilling women. According to research conducted by Dhiman (2024) and Bhatia & Singhal (2024), higher education increases the participation of women in the economy and the political arena. But, issues such as early marriage, digital illiteracy, and gender stereotypes in STEM fields need to be tackled.

In addition, social norms and cultural shifts are key. History shows that legal and economic reforms alone do not lead to gender equality unless they are accompanied by change in social mindsets. Media Representation, Community Engagement, and Gender-Sensitive Education Rathirane (2024) and Sharma (2024) highlight these three themes in approaching the inclusion of women in golf.

Analysis of Findings Based on Research Objectives and Questions

Research Objectives

Objective 1: Analyzing the Impact of Gender Equality Policies and Legal Frameworks on Women's Workforce Participation in India

The Constitution of India and the legal system have in place the necessary elements to support gender equality. Articles 14, 15 and 16 confer equal rights, protection against discrimination and equal opportunity in employment to women. There also exists provisions provided by laws like the Equal Remuneration Act (1976), Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act (2017) and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013) to endeavour a safer and equitable work environment for women (Singhal, 2015).

Notwithstanding these legislative safeguards, women's workforce engagement in India is poor: only 25% of women are in formal employment, as opposed to the world figure of 47% (World Bank, 2023). Policy implementation has been weak, especially in rural regions where knowledge of legal entitlements is limited Bhatia & Singhal (2024).

In contrast, countries with real success in closing gender gaps, like the Scandinavian countries and East Asian economies, have implemented higher workplace policy enforcement, better childcare support, and flexible help routines to allow more women to enter or remain in the labour force (Mohapatra, 2018).

Objective 2: Examining Socio-Economic and Cultural Barriers to Women's Empowerment and Leadership

Despite legal provisions, deeply embedded socio-cultural norms continue to hinder women's advancement in political, economic, and technological fields. Lata & Lata (2016) found that in rural India, patriarchal family structures, restrictive social norms, and lack of access to education prevent women from exercising decision-making power.

- a. Political Participation: Women hold only 10.8% of seats in the Indian Parliament, far below the global average of 25% (Padder, 2023). Even in Panchayati Raj institutions, where 33% of seats are reserved for women, decision-making is often influenced by male family members.
- b. Economic Barriers: Women are concentrated in low-paying, informal sector jobs, with a gender

pay gap of 19% (Priyadharshini & Muthusamy, 2022). Workplace discrimination, lack of childcare support, and unpaid domestic labour prevent women from entering and staying in formal employment.

- c. Technology and Digital Divide: In technological fields, women make up only 28% of India's STEM workforce, despite performing equally well in education (Dhiman, 2024). Cultural expectations and lack of mentorship prevent women from pursuing leadership roles in technology-driven industries.

Objective 3: Exploring the Role of Digital Inclusion, Financial Independence, Digital technology is opening new opportunities to empower women.

Yet access to digital tools and financial services is unequal between men and women. According to Oza (2024), only 40% of the women in Rural India own a smartphone which restricts their access to e-learning, e-commerce and even online financial services. Entrepreneurship is considered a driving force of economic independence, but challenges such as lack of credit, bureaucracy, and cultural stereotypes exist for women entrepreneurs. Some government programs, such as Stand-Up India, and the Mudra Yojana Scheme, have tried to fill the gaps, but according to Ravichandiran & Paramasivan (2024), a large number of women find it difficult to get loans due to the lack of collateral and financial knowledge (Prabha, 2018).

Women's financial independence especially in rural areas has benefited from self-help groups (SHGs) and microfinance activities. According to Singh & Sahni (2024), there have been increased savings, investments in small businesses, and economic security due to SHGs but it is still a challenge to scale these initiatives and keep the financial literacy momentum going.

Research Questions

Question 1: How Effective Are the Existing Legal Frameworks and Government Policies in Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment?

Existing policies, including gender-based reservations, labour laws, and economic incentives, have had a mixed impact on women's empowerment.

Workplace Policies:

- a. The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act (2017) extended maternity leave to 26 weeks, benefiting working mothers. However, many private-sector employers view this as a financial burden, discouraging them from hiring women (Mohapatra, 2018).
- b. The Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act (2013) mandates Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs), but many companies either fail to set them up or discourage complaints (Jameel, 2025).

- c. Government Schemes and Economic Inclusion:
- Programs like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* have improved girls' education, but their impact on long-term employment and leadership roles remains unclear.
 - Stand-Up India has provided funding for women-led startups, yet many women struggle with financial literacy and business networking opportunities (Sharma, 2024).
- d. Implementation Gaps:
- Lack of awareness, bureaucratic hurdles, and social resistance prevent effective enforcement of many gender-related laws (Lata & Lata, 2016).
 - Women from marginalized backgrounds (Dalit, tribal, rural women) face additional barriers in accessing legal protections.

Question 2: What Are the Major Socio-Economic, Cultural, and Institutional Barriers Preventing Women's Full Participation in Decision-Making Roles?

Despite policy measures, structural barriers continue to limit women's advancement in leadership roles across sectors.

Cultural and Social Barriers:

- Patriarchal Norms:** Many families prioritize male career aspirations over female education and employment. This is evident in lower female labour force participation in high-growth sectors (Priyadarshini & Muthusamy, 2022).
- Safety Concerns:** Fear of harassment discourages many women from traveling to work, participating in politics, or taking leadership roles (Dhiman, 2024).
- Economic Constraints:**
- Wage Disparities:** Women in India earn 19% less than men on average, limiting their financial independence (Mohapatra, 2018).
- Limited Access to Credit:** Female entrepreneurs face higher loan rejection rates due to lack of collateral and financial literacy gaps (Ravichandiran & Paramasivan, 2024).
- Institutional Barriers:**
- Political Representation:** Even with 33% reservation in local governance, many female representatives act as proxies for male relatives, reducing actual decision-making power (Padder, 2023).
- Workplace Bias:** Women are underrepresented in senior management roles, and gender biases in hiring and promotions persist (Jameel, 2025).

The research findings indicate that while India has made significant progress in gender equality through legal reforms and economic policies, systemic socio-cultural barriers continue to limit women's full participation in leadership and decision-making roles. Strengthening policy enforcement, promoting financial literacy, and addressing cultural attitudes

toward gender roles will be essential for achieving the vision of *Viksit Bharat 2047*.

Conclusion:

Summary of Findings

This study has tried to take into account the association of women empowerment and gender equality with the goal of *Viksit Bharat 2047* and it also highlights some of the legal, economic, educational and socio-cultural aspects leading to gender equality in India. The analysis shows that even though India has all the cover for gender equality by legal means in place, their impact is still limited by implementation, awareness, and cultural acceptance of gender equality among the people. But in addition to the lack of participation in economic opportunities in labour markets the study also says it is important to have different measures of gender equality based on economic empowerment in labour markets, the wage gap, financial inclusion and unpaid domestic work.

Moreover, education is recognised as a key enabler of women's empowerment, as studies have shown that increased literacy and skills development improve women's employment opportunities and their decision-making authority. Yet, socioeconomic barriers, early marriage and insecurity continue to limit education for many women. Political representation is another vital area of concern, with women's participation in governance and leadership roles being low despite constitutional provisions around reservation.

It also identifies gender-based violence as an ongoing struggle not uncommon to both countries, worsened by poor implementation of legislation, stigma in society, and cultural acceptance of violence. My second point is that a critical gap in existing research is lack of intersectional analysis which can capture the realities of women who belong to different caste, class, religion, and rural-urban divides. To overcome these barriers, a confronting approach must be employed that encompasses legal, economic, educational, and cultural dimensions in order to build a truly inclusive society.'

Implications

The findings of this research have broader implications for gender studies, policy-making, and socio-economic development.

- Policy and Governance:** The study emphasizes that legal provisions alone are insufficient to ensure gender equality. Stronger policy implementation, awareness campaigns, and community engagement are needed to bridge the gap between legislation and social reality.
- Economic Development and Growth:** Enhancing women's workforce participation can significantly contribute to India's economic growth. Research suggests that closing the gender gap in labour force participation could

add billions to India's GDP. Therefore, gender-sensitive economic policies should be prioritized.

- c. Education and Skill Development: Given the strong link between education and empowerment, investment in STEM education for women, vocational training, and digital literacy programs should be expanded.
- d. Social and Cultural Transformation: Societal attitudes must shift to challenge traditional gender roles. Public awareness campaigns, inclusive media representation, and grassroots activism can help reshape cultural perceptions of women's roles in society.
- e. International Comparisons and Best Practices: The research highlights the need for comparative studies with countries that have successfully implemented gender-equal policies. India can learn from Scandinavian models of gender equity and East Asian economic policies to improve its approach.

Future Research

While this research provides a comprehensive analysis of gender equality in India, several areas require further exploration:

- a. Intersectionality and Diversity in Gender Studies: Future research should explore how caste, class, rural-urban divides, and religious identities intersect with gender inequality. A more nuanced analysis can help tailor policies to diverse groups of women.
- b. Long-Term Impact of Government Programs: While initiatives like *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* and *Stand-Up India* are widely discussed, longitudinal studies are needed to assess their long-term impact on gender equality and economic inclusion.
- c. The Role of Digital Technology in Women's Empowerment: Research should examine how digital platforms, fintech solutions, and AI-driven educational tools can empower women, particularly in rural areas.
- d. Male Ally ship in Gender Equality: Most research focuses on women's initiatives, but the role of men in gender advocacy, workplace inclusion, and policy-making remains underexplored. Studies should investigate how engaging men can accelerate gender equality efforts.
- e. Comparative Gender Policies: India's gender policies should be compared with successful models from other countries to identify best practices and innovative solutions for improving gender equity.

Achieving *Viksit Bharat 2047* requires a transformative shift in gender policies, economic structures, and cultural mindsets. Women's empowerment is not only a human rights issue but also a key driver of national development. A holistic

approach, combining legal enforcement, economic inclusion, educational access, and cultural transformation, will be necessary to ensure that India becomes a truly developed and gender-equal nation by 2047.

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