

Her વિરલેષણ

Vision to અવહાર



Edited by
Women Cell
Sardar Patel University
Vallabh Vidyanagar

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Her વિશ્લેષણ: Vision to વ્યવહાર

Women Cell, Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar

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Preface

Women's empowerment remains a defining imperative of the twenty-first century, central to achieving inclusive growth, social justice, and sustainable development. Despite notable progress in education, governance, entrepreneurship, and technology, women continue to face persistent structural inequalities rooted in socio-cultural norms, economic disparities, and institutional barriers. This edited volume brings together interdisciplinary scholarly contributions that critically examine women's roles, rights, and agency across diverse domains including education, politics, technology, health, environment, media, leadership, and grassroots governance.

The chapters collectively explore both historical foundations and contemporary transformations of women's empowerment in India and global contexts. Several contributions foreground education as a cornerstone of empowerment, revisiting ancient knowledge systems, modern policy frameworks, and digital inclusion. Others examine women's leadership in governance, entrepreneurship, dairy cooperatives, community development, and environmental sustainability, highlighting women as active change-agents rather than passive beneficiaries. The volume also addresses emerging challenges of the digital age—artificial intelligence, cyber safety, media representation, and health transitions—while critically assessing their implications for gender equity.

In consonance with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, this volume emphasizes equity, inclusion, multidisciplinary learning, and gender justice through research-driven scholarship. It reflects NEP 2020's call for integrating traditional wisdom with contemporary knowledge, fostering ethical use of technology, and strengthening higher education's societal responsibility. By aligning with national priorities such as *Viksit Bharat 2047* and the Sustainable Development Goals, this book aims to contribute meaningfully to academic discourse, policy formulation, and practice.

It is hoped that this volume will serve as a valuable resource for teachers, researchers, students, policymakers, and development practitioners, encouraging evidence-based decision-making and reinforcing the transformative role of women in shaping a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable society.

Prof. (Dr.) Niranjan Patel

Vice Chancellor,

Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar.

Acknowledgements

This book on *Women Empowerment* entitled “*Her વિશ્લેષણ - Vision to વ્યવહાર*” would not have been possible without the encouragement, support, and cooperation of many distinguished individuals and dedicated contributors.

First and foremost, I express my profound gratitude to Prof. (Dr.) Niranjan Patel, **Hon. Vice Chancellor** of Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar for his visionary leadership, unwavering support, and encouragement throughout the conceptualization and publication of this work. His commitment to advancing women’s issues has been a constant source of inspiration. I am deeply thankful to Dr. Bhailalbhai Patel, **Registrar**, Sardar Patel University for his valuable support and facilitation of the administrative processes that were instrumental in bringing this book to fruition.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the **members of the Women’s Cell** for their enthusiasm, collaborative spirit, and steadfast dedication to the cause of women’s empowerment. Their insightful inputs and organizational support greatly enriched this project.

My sincere thanks go to **all the authors** who contributed their thoughtful and impactful articles to this volume. Your expertise, passion, and commitment to women’s issues have shaped the core of this book, making it a comprehensive and meaningful resource. My sincere thanks go to all the **reviewers** for their inputs for improving the articles.

I am especially grateful to **Dr. Komal Vyas** for her exceptional assistance with the formatting and overall presentation of this book. Her meticulous attention to detail and technical support ensured that the manuscript reached its final polished form.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge everyone whose encouragement and support have contributed to this endeavour.

With deep appreciation,

Dr. Darshana Dave

Convenor,

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Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar.

Introduction

In contemporary societies characterized by rapid socio-economic transformation and expanding knowledge ecosystems, women's empowerment has emerged as both a critical developmental imperative and a fundamental human rights concern. Access to education, resources, decision-making spaces, and institutional support systems plays a decisive role in enabling women to participate meaningfully in social, economic, and intellectual life. This edited volume is anchored in the premise that sustainable and inclusive development is unattainable without the empowerment of women across diverse domains.

The book comprises twenty-five peer-reviewed research papers contributed by faculty members of postgraduate departments from the disciplines of Science, Social Sciences, and Humanities at Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat, reflecting a rich interdisciplinary engagement with the theme. Collectively, the contributions offer empirical insights, theoretical reflections, and policy-oriented analyses that seek to advance scholarly discourse and inform practice in the field of women's empowerment. In the following section the brief of each article in the book has been narrated.

Artificial Intelligence and Women Empowerment: A Transformative Nexus in the 21st Century - *Jonita Roman, Rupam Gupta, Priti Sajja*

This article critically examines Artificial Intelligence (AI) as both a challenge and an opportunity for women's empowerment in the 21st century. Despite technological advancement, hidden gender biases persist across personal, professional, and social spheres. The study analyses AI integration in career advancement, safety, health, entrepreneurship, education, and governance, drawing on case studies and research evidence. It argues that when ethically designed and inclusively implemented, AI can reduce barriers, enhance well-being, and create new pathways for women navigating multiple roles in a digitally evolving society.

Women as Change-Agents in India's Household Waste Practices - *Nisha Dubey, Darshana R. Dave*

This qualitative study explores women's central role in shaping household waste management practices in India. Anchored in mindful consumption and social practice theories, it analyses women's decisions across product lifecycles and their contribution to SDG 12 and SDG 5. Findings from Gujarat reveal embedded reuse traditions, infrastructural constraints, and emerging

environmental mindfulness. The study positions women as critical actors in driving sustainable consumption and facilitating transitions toward circular economies through everyday household practices.

Milk, Sweat, and Equality: Women in Dairy as Agents of Change for Bharat 2047 - *Asmita Hemantkumar Vyas, Kamini Shah, Nishit Vyas, Dharti Rami*

This study highlights the transformative role of women in Gujarat's dairy sector, positioning them as key contributors to rural livelihoods and economic growth aligned with *Viksit Bharat 2047*. Drawing on the Amul movement and cooperative models, it shows how women's participation has improved incomes, reduced poverty, and enhanced social equity. Despite ongoing challenges, the paper advocates targeted interventions in credit, digital skills, and gender-sensitive policies to strengthen women-led dairy enterprises as models of inclusive rural development.

Global Gender Perceptions Towards Oil and Gas Sector's Environmental Practices - *Sarah E. Mohabir, Yogesh C. Joshi, Darshana R. Dave*

This study investigates gender-based perceptions of multinational oil and gas companies' environmental CSR practices. Using the Kruskal–Wallis method, it finds that women globally express lower satisfaction than men, possibly due to higher ethical expectations and concerns about greenwashing. The paper highlights the importance of understanding gendered perceptions in CSR strategy formulation. It argues that authentic, transparent environmental practices are essential for addressing stakeholder trust and advancing sustainability goals.

Mothers for Mother Earth: Women as the Harbingers of Sustainable Consumption - *Sonal Bhatt*

This article argues that women play a vital role in promoting sustainable consumption at the grassroots level. It examines how mindful lifestyle choices, rooted in traditional practices and environmental awareness, can reduce ecological damage. While individual choices are shaped by policy and infrastructure, women's influence within families positions them as agents of environmental change. The study advocates empowering women to lead sustainability transitions, thereby contributing to environmental conservation and responsible consumption.

Women as Architects of Change: Social-Emotional Learning for Community Development - *Vishva D. Lashkari, Alka J. Macwan*

This chapter examines how Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) strengthens women's leadership and community development. It highlights competencies such as emotional intelligence, resilience, and interpersonal skills that enable women to overcome structural barriers. Addressing cultural biases and gender norms, the study underscores the need for gender-responsive education and SEL-based community initiatives. It positions women as architects of inclusive and sustainable social transformation through empowered leadership.

AI-Powered Strategies to Reduce Cybercrimes Against Women: Issues, Root Causes, and Remedies - *Monika Patel, Priti Sajja, Sonal A. Jain*

This chapter examines the growing threat of cybercrimes against women, including harassment, identity theft, and cyberstalking, in the digital era. It reviews Indian legal frameworks and analyses the role of AI in detecting harmful content, monitoring suspicious activity, and enhancing online safety. Addressing technological, cultural, and societal root causes, the study proposes remedies such as stronger legislation, digital literacy, and AI-driven moderation. It emphasizes collective responsibility in creating a safer, inclusive digital environment for women.

Women's Scientific Legacy in Higher Education: Reintegrating the 64 Kalās under NEP 2020 - *Vibha S. Vaishnav*

This article revisits the ancient Indian concept of the 64 Kalās, emphasizing their holistic and gender-inclusive educational philosophy. It highlights the overlooked contributions of women scholars such as Gargi and Maitreyi, reframing them within a scientific and interdisciplinary perspective. Aligning with NEP 2020, the paper advocates reintegrating traditional knowledge systems into modern higher education to promote inclusivity, innovation, and intellectual equity. It argues that reclaiming women's scientific legacy enriches contemporary pedagogy and gender-just education.

Beyond Marketing: Advertising's Role in Women Empowerment and Social Change - *Alkaben J. Macwan, Sweta Amrutlal Dabhi*

This paper examines advertising as a cultural force shaping gender narratives in India. It contrasts traditional stereotypical portrayals of women with the rise of "femvertising," analyzing campaigns such as Tanishq's socially conscious advertisements. The study critically questions whether such narratives genuinely

transform societal attitudes or merely commodify empowerment. By situating advertising within feminist discourse and consumer culture, the paper argues for its potential role in advancing gender justice and social change beyond commercial objectives.

A case study of social change in soda village by India's first female MBA sarpanch - Arpit Patadiya

This paper presents a qualitative case study of social change in Soda village, Rajasthan, led by Chhavi Rajawat, India's first female MBA Sarpanch. Leaving a successful corporate career, she entered grassroots governance to address socio-economic challenges through education-driven leadership. The study analyses initiatives in water management, infrastructure, sanitation, education, women's self-help groups, and community participation. It highlights the role of strategic collaboration with government, private sector, and civil society in achieving sustainable development. The findings demonstrate improved infrastructure, enhanced women's empowerment, increased civic engagement, and evolving attitudes towards women's leadership, underscoring the transformative potential of educated women in grassroots governance.

Women's Leadership: Conflict Resolution Styles and Entrepreneurial Success - Rudri Dave, Dharti Rami, Kamini Shah

This chapter explores the relationship between women's leadership styles, conflict resolution approaches, and entrepreneurial success. It highlights how women leaders employ collaborative and adaptive strategies that enhance innovation, team cohesion, and resilience. Drawing on interdisciplinary research, the study positions women entrepreneurs as uniquely equipped to navigate complex business environments. It underscores the importance of recognizing gender-responsive leadership styles in fostering sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

Beyond Tradition: The Evolving Role of Women in Indian Politics - Priyanka Patani

This paper traces the evolution of women's political participation in India, highlighting milestones from early engagement to contemporary governance. Central to the discussion is the Women's Reservation Bill, proposing 33% reservation for women in legislatures, viewed as a transformative step toward gender parity. The study situates women's political empowerment within the vision of *Viksit Bharat*, emphasizing inclusive decision-making and democratic

representation. It underscores how strengthening women's voices in politics is essential for sustainable development and a more equitable Indian polity.

Educating for Equality: The Role of Education in Women's Empowerment in Gujarat - *Mohitgiri Prafulgiri Goswami*

This article examines the status of women in Gujarat through the lens of education, highlighting progress in literacy alongside persistent socio-cultural and economic barriers. It analyses education's role in enhancing women's autonomy, health awareness, and social participation, while addressing challenges such as dropout rates, digital exclusion, and limited access to higher education. Government initiatives like Kanya Kelavani and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya are reviewed. The paper argues that inclusive, quality education remains foundational to women's empowerment and sustainable development.

Empowering Women: Advancing Rights and Expanding Opportunities - *Dipali Hasmukhbhai Gajjar, P. K. Priyan*

This research reviews the evolution of women's rights globally, acknowledging legislative progress while emphasizing persistent inequalities in employment, healthcare, and leadership. Focusing on the Global South, it applies an intersectional lens to examine how gender, class, and social structures shape access to opportunities. Using secondary data, the paper identifies gaps in representation and policy implementation. It offers recommendations for legal reforms and societal change, aiming to advance substantive equality and inclusive development for women worldwide.

Kiran Bedi: The Epitome of Woman Empowerment - *Deepalee Ambalal Mahida*

This article presents an in-depth account of Kiran Bedi's life and leadership, portraying her as a trailblazer and India's first woman IPS officer. It explores her courage, integrity, and innovative governance style, widely recognized as "Kiran Bedi's leadership model." The study highlights how her humane yet firm approach to administration challenged patriarchal norms and inspired generations. By examining her visionary leadership, the paper positions Bedi as an enduring symbol of women's empowerment and transformative public service.

The Role of Indian Women in Societal Change: A Contemporary Perspective - *Neha J. Nandaniya*

This article analyses Indian women's contributions to social transformation across economic, political, and cultural domains. It highlights progress enabled by education, policy reforms, and changing societal attitudes, while acknowledging persistent challenges such as violence, wage gaps, and entrenched norms. Drawing on contemporary literature, the study underscores the importance of sustained empowerment efforts. It argues that women's active participation is fundamental to building an inclusive, equitable, and progressive society in modern India.

Women Education in Hindu Civilisation: Past and Present - *Rita Parmar*

This paper traces the historical evolution of women's education in Hindu civilisation, from prehistoric times to the present. Drawing on Vedic, epic, and classical sources, it reveals that women once received education equal to men across diverse fields. The study notes a decline during medieval periods and examines post-independence efforts to improve female literacy. Despite progress, gender gaps persist. The paper emphasizes curriculum reform and structural change to achieve educational equity.

Challenges for Women in Health and Future Scenario - *Rupal vasant and Vaidehi Patel*

This review examines women's health through an integrated lens encompassing education, society, culture, finance, and traditional belief systems. It highlights health disparities arising from lifestyle imbalances, nutritional deficiencies, stress, and misinformation from unauthenticated digital sources, including emerging AI-based guidance. The study also discusses changing patterns in education, employment, family structures, fertility trends, and geriatric care. Emphasizing preventive healthcare, health literacy, reproductive hygiene education, and regular screening, the review advocates for an inclusive, ethical, and technology-enabled healthcare ecosystem aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat.

Sleep Quality and Women's Well-Being: A Lifespan Perspective - *Alpa Rathod, Viraj Roghelia*

This article explores the significance of sleep quality in women's health across life stages, particularly during hormonally sensitive phases such as adolescence,

pregnancy, and menopause. It highlights emerging concerns like PCOS and psychosomatic changes affecting sleep. The study emphasizes lifestyle modification and sleep hygiene as critical interventions. By adopting a lifespan perspective, it underscores sleep health as integral to women's physical and psychological well-being.

Challenges for Women in Health and Future Scenario: Building Healthier-
N.N. Solanki, F. N. Patel, S.B. Makwana, B.A. Patel

This paper critically examines women's health challenges in India across the life course, including maternal health, NCDs, and mental well-being. It identifies systemic barriers such as socio-economic inequality, cultural norms, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure. Drawing on policy frameworks and health indicators, the study advocates digital health integration, community-based care, and gender-responsive policies. It argues that improving women's health is central to achieving national development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

“डिजिटल युग में महिला सशक्तीकरण: सोशल मीडिया और तकनीक का प्रभाव”-
अमिता बी पटेल

डिजिटल युग में महिला सशक्तीकरण का महत्व अत्यधिक बढ़ गया है। तकनीकी संसाधनों का विकास और विस्तार महिलाओं के लिए वरदान सिद्ध हुआ है वे अपनी आवाज उठाने के साथ इस तकनीकी से अपने लिए कई नए रोजगारों को भी खड़ा किया है। अपनी क्षमता के अनुसार अपने लिए अवसर खड़ा कर रही है। साथ ही सोशल मीडिया के माध्यम से समाज के हर एक वर्ग के लिए जागरुकता फैलाने का कार्य सिद्ध हो रहा है। साथ ही डिजिटल साक्षरता महिलाओं को आत्मनिर्भर बनने और पारंपरिक बंधनों को तोड़ने में भी महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका का निर्वाह कर रहा है। मलाला यूसुफजई, संगीता कुमार, लीना सिद्दीकी, कृतिका शर्मा, अंकिता परमार जैसे उदाहरण हमारे लिए प्रेरणास्रोत हैं।

भारतीय शिक्षा परंपरा में स्त्रियों की स्थिति का विहंगावलोकन - अनिला मिश्रा

भारतीय शिक्षा परंपरा को दो श्रेणियों में बांटा जा सकता है। जो जीवन के विभिन्न पहलुओं को समझने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका का निर्वाह करती है। पहले में वह शिक्षा जिससे मनुष्य इस भौतिक जगत में अपना जीवन निर्वाह करने में सफल हो सके तथा दूसरी वह शिक्षा जो

उसे आध्यात्मिक स्तर पर ईश्वर से जोड़ सकें। इनके साथ ही स्त्री शिक्षा के संदर्भ भारतीय संस्कृति में स्त्रियों का कितना महत्त्व था उसे बताने के साथ साथ उस समय में गार्गी, मैत्रेयी, तारा जैसी विदुषियों का उल्लेख किया गया है। बाह्य आक्रमण, पितृसत्ता का विकास उसके परिणामस्वरूप स्त्री की दशा निरूपण तथा बदलते समय के अनुसार उनकी स्थिति में परिवर्तन आदि का निरूपण किया गया है। भारतीय शिक्षा परंपरा में स्त्रियों की भागीदारी भी विशेष रही है।

“स्त्रियों के प्रश्न और मीडिया का नजरिया” – पार्वती गोसाईं

प्रस्तुत लेख में स्त्री पक्ष के विभिन्न आयामों को उजागर करते हुए स्त्रियों से जुड़े पहलुओं पर मीडिया के सकारात्मक और नकारात्मक दृष्टि को उजागर किया है। इसका प्रारंभ स्त्री के अतीत से लेकर वर्तमान तक की स्थिति के संक्षिप्त अवलोकन से होता है। इस लेख में यह दिखाने का सार्थक प्रयास किया गया है कि किस प्रकार आज की मीडिया रीती-रिवाजों का बाजारीकरण कर रही है। जिसमें वह भावनाओं का बाजारीकरण करने से भी नहीं चूकती हैं। रीती-रिवाजों से संबंधित खबरों में प्रायः वैज्ञानिकता का अभाव होता है। साथ विज्ञापनों के माध्यम से त्योहारों के अवसर पर बाजारीकरण फैलता है। साथ ही इस लेख में मीडिया द्वारा दिखाए जा रहे स्त्री हिंसा संबंधी खबरों का भी विश्लेषण के किस प्रकार किया जाता है उसका भी निरूपण है।

આર્થિક વિકાસમાં ગુજરાતની મહિલાઓ નો ફાળો: એક અભ્યાસ - રીના વોહરા

પ્રસ્તાવના: આધુનિક ભારતમાં મહિલાઓએ રાષ્ટ્રપતિ અને પ્રધાનમંત્રી જેવા ઉચ્ચ પદો પ્રાપ્ત કર્યા છે અને સૈન્ય, વિજ્ઞાન તથા ઉચ્ચ શિક્ષણ સહિત વિવિધ ક્ષેત્રોમાં મહત્વપૂર્ણ યોગદાન આપ્યું છે. આ અભ્યાસ ખાસ કરીને ગુજરાતની મહિલાઓના ભારતના આર્થિક વિકાસમાં કરેલા યોગદાન પર કેન્દ્રિત છે. ગુજરાતનો આર્થિક વિકાસ તેની લાંબી સમુદ્રી વેપારની પરંપરા, ઉદ્યોગસાહસિક ભાવના તેમજ સહકાર અને સમજૂતી જેવા વિશિષ્ટ ગુણોમાં મૂળભૂત રીતે વેરાયેલો છે. ઐતિહાસિક દમનનો સામનો કર્યા છતાં, આજે મહિલાઓ દરેક ક્ષેત્રમાં, તેમના ઘરઆંગણાં સુધી પણ, ઓળખ અને માન્યતા મેળવી રહી છે, અને તેમનું આર્થિક સશક્તિકરણ વિકાસ માટે ઈંધણ સમાન માનવામાં આવે છે. આ લેખમાં ગુજરાતની એવી પ્રભાવશાળી મહિલાઓના સિદ્ધિઓનું વિશ્લેષણ કરવામાં આવ્યું છે જેમણે આર્થિક ક્ષેત્રમાં પોતાની ઓળખ અને સ્થાન સ્થાપિત કર્યું છે.

સ્ત્રી સશક્તિકરણ – એક વિહંગાલોકન - જિજ્ઞેશકુમાર એમ. મકવાણા

એક સ્ત્રી સમાજનો અનિવાર્ય આધારસ્તંભ છે અને તેના વિના સામાજિક અસ્તિત્વ અધૂરું રહે છે. પુરુષ અને સ્ત્રી સાથે મળીને પરિવાર, મૂલ્યો અને સામૂહિક પ્રગતિનું નિર્માણ કરે છે. પરંતુ ઐતિહાસિક રીતે સામાજિક રિવાજો, ધાર્મિક પ્રતિબંધો અને પિતૃસત્તાત્મક પરંપરાઓએ સ્ત્રી સશક્તિકરણને અવરોધ્યું છે. આજના સમયમાં પણ સ્ત્રીઓ વિવિધ પ્રકારની અસમાનતા અને હિંસાનો સામનો કરે છે. તેમ છતાં, સ્ત્રી સશક્તિકરણની માંગ સતત મજબૂત બની રહી છે. રાષ્ટ્રીય શિક્ષણ નીતિ (NEP) 2020ની સમાનતા, સમાવેશ અને લિંગ ન્યાયની દૃષ્ટિ સાથે સુસંગત આ ગ્રંથ આંતરવિષયક સંશોધન દ્વારા સ્ત્રી સશક્તિકરણના રાષ્ટ્રીય સંવાદમાં મહત્વપૂર્ણ યોગદાન આપવા પ્રયત્ન કરે છે.

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Artificial Intelligence and Women Empowerment: A Transformative Nexus in the 21st Century

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Abstract

With the advancement in the digital age, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an integral part of human lives be it personalized education, entertainment, product recommendations, house-keeping, safety, health checks and the list is unending. These advancements not only present plethora of opportunities for women empowerment but at the same time pose many challenges for their development. We are living in the digital age where apparently gender divide is not clearly visible, but it is still hidden, which challenges women. Women, irrespective of domestic, personal, professional or social responsibilities face lot of gender bias which is latent and not clearly visible at times. This article critically examines the potential of AI to lower down the barriers, improve the overall well-being and initiate new avenues for women. The article also focuses on the challenges that arise due to demographics, ethnicity and status of women globally. AI's integration into various domains such as career advancement, house-keeping, women safety, well-being, entrepreneurship, education, governance, innovation and many such have been studied and critically examined. Case studies and other research findings are compiled as a part of the study.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, Entrepreneurship, Governance, AI Ethics, Digital Inclusion

1. Introduction

The 21st-century woman is balancing careers, caregiving, and civic responsibilities. Despite significant progress in education and employment, gender inequalities persist in access to opportunities, resources, and security (UN Women, 2024). In this context, Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers both a disruptive challenge and a transformative opportunity.

AI can automate tasks, personalize experiences, and analyze vast datasets to detect inequities, but it can also reinforce biases if not ethically designed (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018). This article explores AI's role in empowering

women across diverse domains, including professional advancement, household management, healthcare, governance, and social inclusion.

2. Career Advancement: Breaking Barriers with AI

Plenty of opportunities are available for women who are keen to advance in their career. Skill building through self-paced learning and access to various educational opportunities is possible through AI with online learning platforms such as Coursera, Udacity and other such. These AI enabled systems aid in crafting personalized career paths for women by considering their specific needs and goals. AI driven apps, such as MentorHer (2024) provide customized job opportunities for women based on the field of their interest. LockedIn AI: is an AI powered career advancement app for women that designed for women to navigate the job market, enhance personal branding, provides career support, interview coaching and networking opportunities tailored for women's profession growth. Textio uses NLP to identify and eliminate gendered language from job postings. HireVue applies AI-powered interviews to evaluate candidates based on competencies, reducing reliance on subjective impressions.

3. Household Management: From Chore Automation to Smart Shopping

Housekeeping is a disproportionate burden of several tasks and is well-documented (Hochschild, et. al. 2012). AI-enabled devices can be of great help in house-keeping activities. A list of these along with their functions is given here.

- Roomba 650 robotic vacuum cleaner from IRobot (Nhizam et. al., 2021) is a tool that adapts itself to the changing conditions of the home and does the cleaning. It uses several sensors to perform this task.
- W730 WINBOT is yet another bot that has an arm that automatically cleans the glass of the homes in a single touch.
- Students of Zayed University developed 'My Household' Application that helps in managing the domestic household chores and planning of the overall routine of a household.
- The app comes with a facility to create a home task, maintains a deadline to complete the task, maintains a priority list of the tasks and sets alarm for task completion. It also keeps a track of the number of the tasks completed which helps in the management of the tasks.

I-HomeHelper (El-Ebiary, 2021) is a platform that enables people to manage their household necessities such as household chores, pet grooming, gardening, dinner planning etc. This system acts as an interface between the people who need home helpers and people who render their services.

4. Personal Well-being: AI as a Supportive Companion

Women workouts are quite different from those of men. Mental and physical well-being are cornerstones for overall well-being. The general fitness workouts under the guidance of experts generally boost the well-being of the person. Fitness apps using AI help in personalized workout plans that align with the user physical requirement. AI technology is transforming the fitness industry for women by providing customized workout routines, nutritional guidance, wearable device integration, injury prevention and recovery and comprehensive progress tracking. The table below gives a list of some such apps.

App Name	Source	Purpose of the App
Sweat	https://sweat.com/	AI driven app for fitness, specifically for women athletes.
AquaFit AI	https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.aquafit.female&pcampaignid=web_share	smart home workout for and water tracker app for women
Wild.AI	https://www.wild.ai/	hormone based training app for women that gives accurate data about one's physiology and helps improve performance
Headspace	https://www.felicity.care/	Online Counselling Therapy
Calm	https://www.calm.com/	App to manage stress, balance moods, sleep better and refocus your attention

Apart from the apps, wearables like Fitbit and Apple Watch analyze health data to support lifestyle decisions (Headspace, 2025). AI chatbots like Woebot extend accessible, low-cost mental health support, addressing gaps in healthcare access (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017).

5. Safety and Security: AI as a Guardian Angel

Technological advancements in the field of social media has benefitted the human kind, but at the same time, it creates many challenges in terms of safety

of women. Women safety is a burning issue since the past and we are trying to figure out various ways in which we can make women feel safe. Virtual assistants and chatbots are being used to make women aware about their safety needs. These tools provide instant information on the use of local helplines, self-defense mechanisms, and awareness of legal rights. This information empowers women with knowledge at their fingertips. Women Express – WoExp Artificial Intelligence (Navaneethakrishnan, M., et al, 2023) is one such application based on women security and Safety System. Some AI based women safety apps for Indian crowd are also available. Apps such as MyAmbar (2020), features a chat-bot for gender based violence, anonymous FIR filing and legal support. Another app named TrustWalk matches uses to safe mobility. Apps like Secure Her (Arisha Khan, et al 2025) uses AI for risk detection, behavioral analysis, and community-based support, while Danger Det (Ashikuzzaman, Md et al 2025) is an app that uses the deep learning model for danger detection among women and children. AI applications such as Noonlight use GPS and emergency alerts to discreetly notify authorities or contacts (Noonlight, 2025).

Smart home systems integrated with computer vision detect intrusions, while predictive policing tools identify high-risk areas for gender-based violence (World Economic Forum, 2023). While these tools enhance safety, they also raise privacy concerns.

6. AI and Women in Entrepreneurship

With artificial intelligence making an impact on entrepreneurship, there are now innovative ways to streamline processes and make business management more efficient. AI enables women entrepreneurs to overcome resource gaps through various apps and AI models such as:

- Tableau, PowerBI: Data visualization tools used for Business Analytics to interpret markets.

- SAS: Statistical software for analysis purpose

- Google Analytics: Used for Web data analysis

- JIRA: Project management tool

- Python: Programming language that has various modules that assist in data analysis.

Other tools available in the market are Qlik, IBM Cognos Analytics and Domo.

Apart from AI tools that assist in data analytics, AI-driven financial forecasting can be done via platforms like Kabbage. E-commerce websites such as Shopify, Amazon, Flipkart etc extensively use AI to level up the business needs.

India's **SheLeads** initiative demonstrates AI's role in empowering rural women entrepreneurs by providing digital literacy and access to markets. EmpowerHerAI is a program promotes the diversity of the various aspects of

AI. This includes the hiring process, mentoring sessions, and gaining the leadership edge, making it less challenging for women to be part of important industries.

7. AI in Education and Skill Development

AI democratizes education by tailoring learning experiences:

- Adaptive systems like **Khan Academy** adjust content to learners' pace.
- AI-powered language apps (Duolingo, Google Translate) help women in multilingual societies access global knowledge.
- AI chatbots provide continuous career mentoring.

Research shows that such platforms expand women's entry into STEM education, improving long-term empowerment (Holmes et al., 2019).

The All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) also promotes education for women empowerment. The table given below shows a few initiatives taken by AICTE for women and girl students to empower them through education.

Program Name	Beneficiaries
Pragati Scholarship	Meritorious girl students admitted to AICTE-approved technical degree or diploma courses
Saraswati Scholarship	Girls pursuing Bachelor's degrees in Management (BBA/BMS) and Computer Applications (BCA) in AICTE-approved institutions.
LILAVATI AWARD	AICTE-approved institutions that promote fairness and equality for women

8. AI in Healthcare for Women

A healthy woman leads to a healthy family that further builds a healthy society. Use of AI in women healthcare helps to diagnose disease at an early stage, assist in drug discovery, provide personalized treatment for women related diseases, analyze patient need and create customized treatment plans. AI analyzes large datasets that includes medical images, patient medical history and other medical records that help it to improve diagnostic accuracy, accelerate

research and create tailored treatments. This helps to streamline surgical operations, improve patient outcomes and efficiency of healthcare systems. Women have distinct health needs, from reproductive health to chronic health disease. They generally suffer from health issues such as

- Hormonal disorders (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS),
- Endometriosis,
- Menopause related issues,
- Thyroid Disorders and such others which are generally overlooked.

Certain diseases such as Osteoporosis, Lung Cancer, Autoimmune disease and other such disproportionately affect women. In this kind of situation, let us see how AI can come to our aid. Scientists are using machine learning algorithms and AI to study how men and women respond differently to drugs using pharmacogenomic data. Studies also reveal that using AI and machine learning algorithms, the risk of specific types of cancers can be detected at an early stage, and can be treated accordingly. To detect and classify PCOS from ultrasound images, an AI driven model, CystNet, has been designed. AI models also have contributed to in-vitro fertilization (IVF) where the model aids in selection of the most viable embryos for implantation. Although AI helps in women health-care, there are challenges faced by the model. Some of the challenges are data privacy and consent, gender biases in AI models and limited availability of gender specific health data. This article focuses on a very few health-care areas, but there are many other women related health-care areas where AI is contributing.

9. AI in Governance and Policy for Women

With the rapid urbanization and technological development, everyone is benefitted due to the technological benefits. However, unfortunately, women are less connected to the Internet, and technology access inequalities by gender are on the rise in Asia-Pacific (Sey & Hafkin, 2019). AI-enabled systems are likely to introduce new risks for women specifically in the area of security (Finlay, 2019). Designing, developing, managing and regulating AI-enabled systems that understands the women needs are the need of the hour.

AI supports gender-sensitive governance through:

- **Policy Analytics:** Governments use AI to evaluate progress toward gender equality.
- **Budgeting Tools:** AI assists in monitoring resource allocation for women-focused programs.
- **Civic Participation:** Chatbots and virtual platforms encourage women's engagement in policymaking.

For instance, UN Women's partnership with AI labs has developed tools for real-time monitoring of SDG-5 indicators.

10. Case Studies of Women-Led AI Innovations

Women leaders are shaping AI itself. Here a few case studies are discussed:

- **Joy Buolamwini** founded the Algorithmic Justice League (AJ) in 2016 to fight AI bias. She got the inspiration from her personal experience when the face detection software was not able to detect her face due to her gender. She found out that this was due to the racial and gender bias in AI system that she researched in the MIT Media lab.
- **Fei-Fei Li** is well known as non-profit worker and is a co-founder and chairperson of AI4All to increase diversity in AI education by educating the next generation of AI technologists, thinkers and human leaders.
- **Rana el Kaliouby** pioneered emotion AI through Affectiva, enabling empathetic AI applications. The digital universe is emotionally blind. This application allows the technology to understand humans the way we understand one another.

These innovators highlight how women are not only beneficiaries but also creators of transformative AI.

11. Ethical Challenges: Bias, Privacy, and Inclusivity

Gender inequality has been witnessed since ages. This effect is also visible in the way AI responds to certain situations. Although across the globe, women are accessing internet, statistics show that less than 20 per cent women are seen connected on the internet. The digital divide that is created due to gender inequality creates a data gap and contributes to the gender bias in AI. A study on equality, gender and leadership was carried out by the Berkeley Hass Center. It analysed one hundred and thirty three AI systems. The study revealed around 25 percent show both racial and gender bias and 44 percent show gender bias.

In an interesting research carried out by an artist from Turkey, regarding novel writing using Generative AI, the result show doctors were given male image whereas females were depicted as nurses. In the detailed study, it was revealed that due to the data that was biased towards male representing as doctors and females as nurses, this was the result generated. In still another interesting study carried out by an African student, the diagnosis given by AI powered system gave inaccurate answers to women related diseases. This happened due the biased data that was fed to the AI system, and the way AI processes the data does not reveal the symptoms present in women differently.

It is not able to comprehend that there can be difference in some symptoms for men and women.

Thus following challenges persist:

1. **Bias in Data:** Facial recognition misidentifies women of color at higher rates (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018).

2. **Privacy Risks:** Sensitive health and safety data may be misused.

3. **Digital Divide:** Rural and marginalized women face limited access to AI tools.

This gender bias that is visible in AI can be rectified by feeding proper data that is un-biased, but before that the hour has come where we first eliminate this gender divide from our societies.

Ethical frameworks emphasizing transparency, fairness, and inclusivity are vital.

12. Future Directions: AI for Inclusive Empowerment

A growing body of research advocates for participatory approaches in the design, deployment, and evaluation of AI and ICTs. Involving women, especially those from marginalized communities, in all stages of technology development ensures that systems are responsive to their lived realities and aspirations (Khorramrouz et al., 2023; Sheshadri et al., 2025). Participatory AI, as demonstrated in the Iranian Twitter study, enables culturally grounded annotation, richer datasets, and more meaningful outcomes (Khorramrouz et al., 2023).

AI's future role in empowerment may include:

- Predictive healthcare tailored to women's needs.
- AI-supported childcare platforms.
- Digital literacy campaigns powered by AI tutors.
- Women-centric innovation labs creating inclusive technologies.

By embedding inclusivity, AI can be a cornerstone of gender equity aligned with SDG-5 (World Economic Forum, 2023).

13. Conclusion

AI has the potential to be both a great equalizer and a reinforcer of inequities. For women, it offers practical benefits—reducing domestic burdens, improving safety, enabling entrepreneurship, and personalizing education and healthcare. But these opportunities must be balanced with ethical safeguards. The future of women's empowerment through AI depends on inclusive design, participatory governance, and women's leadership in shaping AI itself.

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Women as Change-Agents in India's Household Waste Practices: A Qualitative Exploration of Mindful Consumption, Product Lifecycles, and Sustainable Futures

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Abstract

This study explores how women in India act as pivotal agents in shaping household waste management practices across the product lifecycle — from acquisition to disposal. Anchored in mindful consumption, minimalism, and social practice theories, the research investigates how women's roles, decisions, and routines influence sustainable waste behaviors and contribute to the goals of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with women from diverse socio-economic, occupational, and religious backgrounds in Gujarat, including housewives, academics, and informal workers. Thematic analysis revealed five interlocking themes: (1) hygiene-driven "single-bin" disposal practices, (2) distrust in municipal segregation systems, (3) embedded reuse and exchange traditions, (4) economic and spatial constraints shaping consumption, and (5) emerging practices of mindfulness and aspirational minimalism among educated participants. These findings demonstrate that women's influence extends beyond the private household sphere into wider community and market systems, positioning them as critical actors in transitioning toward circular economies. The paper contributes by bridging global behavioral constructs with localized lived practices, offering grounded insights for policy interventions that leverage women's everyday agency in promoting sustainable consumption and waste management.

Keywords: women, mindful consumption, circular economy, household waste, SDG 12, SDG 5, qualitative research, India

1. Introduction

The management of household waste is both a private routine and a public challenge. In India, where rapid urbanization and rising consumption levels have strained municipal infrastructures, the role of households in waste generation and disposal is increasingly recognized as central to the sustainability agenda. Household decisions about what to buy, how long to use it, and how to dispose of it shape the quantity and quality of waste entering municipal systems and, ultimately, the success of circular economy initiatives. Among household actors, women are often the primary managers of food, consumer goods, and domestic waste, placing them in a uniquely influential position in determining whether materials are discarded, reused, or reintegrated into productive cycles.

The present study addresses this intersection by exploring women's everyday practices of acquisition, consumption, and disposal in the state of Gujarat, India. Using in-depth interviews with ten women representing a spectrum of socio-economic, educational, and occupational backgrounds, the research examines how women's decisions and routines intersect with broader structural factors such as infrastructure quality, institutional trust, and socio-cultural norms. By grounding the analysis in lived experience, the study seeks to reveal both the opportunities and constraints that shape sustainable household practices.

1.1. Women as agents of sustainable consumption

Research consistently highlights the disproportionate role women play in domestic consumption and environmental stewardship. Globally, women tend to assume responsibility for everyday household purchases, food preparation, and waste management, and their decisions therefore have outsized environmental impacts (Simon-Kumar, 2025). In the Indian context, women's roles are shaped not only by gendered divisions of labor but also by cultural expectations around cleanliness (*swachhata*) and household order (Janiso, Shukla, & Reddy, 2023). These responsibilities situate women as critical actors in achieving SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production, as well as SDG 5 on gender equality.

Yet women's contributions are often invisible in policy discourse, which tends to emphasize infrastructure development and technological solutions to waste management. A qualitative focus on women's perspectives allows us to center their agency and understand the micro-level routines that can enable or hinder sustainable transitions.

1.2. Mindful consumption, minimalism, and the circular economy

Concepts such as mindful consumption and minimalism offer useful lenses to analyze women's practices. Mindful consumption emphasizes conscious awareness of the environmental impacts of consumption and the intentional moderation of purchasing and disposal behaviors (*Sheth, Sethia, & Srinivas, 2011*). Minimalism, closely related, refers to restraint in acquisition and ownership, focusing on purposeful choices that avoid overconsumption (*Wilson & Bellezza, 2022*). Both frameworks align with circular economy principles, which seek to extend product lifecycles through repair, reuse, exchange, and recycling (*Kirchherr, Reike, & Hekkert, 2017*).

However, while global scholarship has largely developed these constructs in Western consumer contexts, there is limited qualitative evidence on how they manifest in Indian households — where cultural norms, resource constraints, and infrastructural realities differ substantially. For example, resale and trade-in practices have long been embedded in Indian markets, potentially representing indigenous pathways to circularity that do not fit neatly within Western minimalist discourses.

1.3. Structural constraints and enablers

Beyond individual orientation, sustainable household practices are mediated by structural conditions. The Theory of Planned Behavior (*Ajzen, 1991*) highlights perceived behavioral control and social norms as critical determinants of action. Social Practice Theory (*Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012*) further argues that practices emerge from the interplay of materials (infrastructure, bins), competences (know-how), and meanings (cultural understandings of cleanliness). For households in India, the availability of municipal collection services, the credibility of waste segregation systems, and the influence of neighborhood norms all play decisive roles in shaping behaviors.

Studies document that even when households attempt segregation, post-collection mixing often undermines trust and discourages continued efforts (*Joseph, Andrés, & Zabudovsky, 2024*). Similarly, evaluations of Swachh Bharat Mission interventions suggest that awareness campaigns alone are insufficient without reliable service provision and accountability (India Budget, 2019-20). These insights underscore the importance of analyzing how women navigate the tension between mindful intentions and infrastructural realities.

1.4. Research gap and contribution

While there is a growing body of literature on consumer behavior and waste management in India, most studies employ surveys and quantitative models (e.g., *Yadav & Pathak, 2017*). Far fewer have engaged deeply with women's lived experiences through qualitative inquiry. This paper contributes by:

1. Providing empirical evidence from semi-structured interviews with women across socio-economic and religious backgrounds in Gujarat.
2. Demonstrating how constructs like mindfulness, minimalism, and moral licensing manifest in everyday practices of product acquisition and disposal.
3. Identifying systemic barriers — such as infrastructural inadequacies and institutional mistrust — that constrain women's ability to enact sustainable behaviors.
4. Mapping women's practices to SDG 12 and SDG 5, highlighting their role as both household managers and potential community change agents.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framing

2.1. Women, sustainability, and household waste

The relationship between gender and sustainability has been well established in environmental behavior research. Women are often found to exhibit stronger pro-environmental orientations than men, especially in household and community contexts (*Hunter, Hatch, & Johnson, 2004*). In India, this trend intersects with entrenched gender roles that assign women the primary responsibility for managing household resources, cooking, cleaning, and waste disposal (*Simon-Kumar, 2025; Deshpande & Kabeer, 2024*). These daily responsibilities place women in direct contact with decisions about product acquisition, storage, and disposal, making them central to the “last mile” of circular economy transitions.

Several studies have highlighted how women's stewardship is critical to sustainable outcomes. Indian women demonstrate stronger green purchase intentions, driven by normative and ethical motivations. Similarly, *Sultana, Rokis, & Al-Attas (2024)* argued that household waste management in Bangladesh cannot be understood without considering women's agency and cultural perceptions of cleanliness (*swachhata*). However, much of this work remains quantitative and survey-based, limiting the depth of understanding of women's lived practices.

2.2. Mindful consumption and minimalism

Mindful consumption has been conceptualized as the intentional awareness of the impact of consumption decisions on the environment, society, and self, combined with restraint and reflection (*Sheth, Sethia, & Srinivas, 2011*). It emphasizes consciousness in daily choices — buying only what is necessary, avoiding waste, and reusing where possible. Minimalism, often associated with voluntary simplicity, is closely related. It involves limiting possessions and resisting consumerist impulses in pursuit of purposeful and sustainable living (*Wilson & Bellezza, 2022*).

In the Indian context, aspects of mindful consumption are embedded in cultural and religious traditions that value frugality and reuse. Practices such as reusing containers, repairing items, or passing on clothes and utensils within extended families reflect longstanding minimalist orientations. However, rising aspirations and exposure to global consumer culture have introduced tensions, where traditional reuse practices coexist with new patterns of overconsumption.

Empirical evidence also suggests that education and income level shape mindful and minimalist practices. Highly educated urban women may consciously embrace minimalist lifestyles inspired by sustainability discourses, while lower-income households may practice frugality out of necessity rather than environmental awareness. Exploring how these orientations manifest in daily routines provides a nuanced view of sustainability beyond Western-centric interpretations of minimalism.

2.3. Overconsumption and moral licensing

Overconsumption, defined as excessive or impulsive consumer behavior that exceeds actual need, undermines sustainable practices. Research shows that overconsumption, in the form of compulsive buying, can be linked to underlying psychological traits such as low self-esteem, high materialism, and a tendency toward obsessive-compulsive behaviors. (*Faber & O'Guinn, 1992*). In developing contexts like India, consumption is often linked with status and dignity, making restraint difficult despite environmental costs (*Kandpal & Maiti, 2022*).

An additional psychological mechanism complicating sustainable behavior is moral licensing. After engaging in one “good” behavior (e.g., recycling), individuals may feel licensed to engage in less sustainable actions later, believing their prior act has “earned” them moral credit (*Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010*). This dynamic may explain why households that occasionally segregate waste still continue unsustainable practices in other domains. While

moral licensing has been studied in Western consumer behavior, its operation in Indian household contexts remains underexplored.

2.4. Social norms and community influence

Social norms — both descriptive (what others do) and injunctive (what others think one should do) — play a critical role in shaping sustainable consumption and waste behavior. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (*Ajzen, 1991*), subjective norms significantly predict intention, alongside attitudes and perceived behavioral control. Empirical studies in India confirm that households are influenced by neighbors, peer networks, and community-level expectations regarding cleanliness and segregation (*Agrawal & Gupta, 2018*).

At the same time, normative influences may be uneven across social groups. For example, women living in university quarters or professional housing societies may experience stronger collective pressure to segregate waste than those in informal settlements, where infrastructural constraints dominate. Understanding how women perceive and navigate these social expectations provides insight into the community-level dynamics of household sustainability.

2.5. Construal level and psychological distance

Construal Level Theory argues that individuals interpret events differently depending on psychological distance — temporal, spatial, or social (*Trope & Liberman, 2010*). In the context of environmental behavior, distant outcomes (e.g., global warming, landfill overflows in the future) are often construed abstractly, reducing motivational salience. Conversely, immediate and tangible outcomes (e.g., foul smells, pests) tend to drive action.

For Indian women managing daily household chores, decisions may be guided less by abstract environmental concerns than by immediate issues of hygiene and household order. The transcript data, for instance, highlights references to cleanliness and convenience as key motivators. This suggests that interventions must bridge psychological distance by making environmental benefits tangible and immediate.

2.6. Brand trust, infrastructure, and marketing communication

Infrastructure quality is one of the strongest predictors of sustainable household waste practices. Studies show that even when households are motivated, the lack of reliable collection systems, separate bins, and trust in

municipal processing undermines sustained efforts. Perceptions of “segregation futility” — that waste is mixed post-collection — are particularly damaging (*Widyatmika & Bolia, 2023*).

Brand trust and marketing communication also shape consumer behavior. When brands credibly promote take-back schemes or sustainable packaging, households are more likely to engage in recycling and reuse (*Delgado-Ballester, 2004*). Conversely, skepticism about “greenwashing” can deter participation. Marketing campaigns that frame waste reduction in culturally resonant terms (e.g., cleanliness, community pride) have been shown to influence behavior in Indian urban contexts (*Agrawal & Gupta, 2018*).

2.7. Social Practice Theory and household routines

While individual-level constructs such as mindfulness and norms are useful, they cannot fully explain waste management practices, which are embedded in routines and material contexts. Social Practice Theory (SPT) shifts attention from individual attitudes to practices constituted by materials, competences, and meanings (*Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012*). For example, whether women segregate waste depends not only on attitudes but also on the availability of separate bins (materials), knowledge of segregation (competences), and cultural meanings of cleanliness (meanings).

SPT is especially relevant in India, where infrastructural deficits and space constraints shape what is possible in daily life. As interviews reveal, the practice of placing all waste in a single bin may reflect a rational adaptation to household constraints rather than ignorance or apathy. This underscores the need for interventions that realign materials and competences with sustainable meanings.

2.8. Linking to SDGs: Gender and sustainability synergies

The frameworks discussed above map directly onto the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) explicitly calls for halving global food waste and substantially reducing per capita waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse. Household practices, particularly those managed by women, are central to this target. SDG 5 (Gender Equality) emphasizes women’s empowerment in all spheres, including decision-making about resources and participation in sustainable livelihoods. Integrating women into formal recycling systems, as well as recognizing their household stewardship, directly contributes to these goals.

Finally, SDG 17 (Partnerships) is relevant, as achieving circular economy outcomes requires collaboration between households, municipalities, brands, and informal sector actors. Women, positioned at the interface of household and community, are vital connectors in this system.

2.9. Conceptual framing for the study

Drawing together these strands, this study adopts a multi-level theoretical framing:

- At the individual level, constructs such as mindfulness, minimalism, overconsumption, moral licensing, and construal level shape orientations toward sustainability.
- At the social level, norms, brand trust, and marketing communication influence household choices.
- At the structural level, infrastructure quality and stakeholder engagement determine whether intentions translate into durable practices.
- Across all levels, Social Practice Theory emphasizes how these factors come together in everyday routines of acquisition, consumption, and disposal.

By employing this framing, the study treats women not simply as individual consumers but as practitioners embedded in socio-material systems. The qualitative findings (Section 4) illustrate how these constructs manifest in lived practice, highlighting tensions, adaptations, and opportunities for sustainable transitions.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative design to understand women's roles as change-agents in household waste management. Qualitative approaches are particularly suited to exploring under-researched areas and capturing the lived experiences of participants in their socio-cultural and material contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary method, as they allow flexibility to probe participants' practices, beliefs, and constraints while ensuring comparability across interviews.

The research was grounded in sensitising constructs from mindful consumption, minimalism, social norms, and social practice theory but did not impose predefined categories. Instead, these constructs informed the coding framework while allowing emergent themes to surface from the data.

3.2. Participants

Ten women were interviewed between March and May 2025 across different cities in Gujarat (Vadodara, Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Bhavnagar, and Anand). Participants were purposively selected to reflect diverse socio-economic, educational, occupational, and religious backgrounds. This diversity allowed for contrasting perspectives on consumption and waste practices.

- **Age range:** 22–55 years
- **Occupations:** housewives, cleanliness worker, academic staff (professors, managers, researchers, secretary), students
- **Religious background:** Hindu and Muslim
- **Educational background:** ranging from not formally educated to PhD-level
- **Household contexts:** nuclear and joint families, rented PGs, tenements, flats, and university quarters

Examples:

- A mother–daughter pair (housewife and graduate) living in a middle-class tenement in Vadodara.
- A university dean (PhD) living in government quarters in Anand.
- A cleanliness worker in Ahmedabad with limited formal education.
- Urban professionals (MBA graduates, managers) living in flats in Ahmedabad.
- Housewives in Bhavnagar and Ahmedabad representing middle-income families.
- Muslim women (housewives and unmarried professionals) offering perspectives shaped by religious and social context.

Each participant was anonymised and assigned an interview ID (e.g., P1–P10). Demographic metadata was included in Appendix A to provide thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), enhancing transferability.

3.3. Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in participants' preferred language (Gujarati, Hindi, or English). Interview duration ranged from 30 to 50 minutes. Key areas of inquiry included:

1. Daily household consumption routines and decision-making around purchases.
2. Practices of waste disposal, segregation, and reuse.
3. Perceptions of municipal systems and infrastructure.
4. Influence of social norms, community expectations, and family roles.
5. Awareness of sustainability, cleanliness campaigns, and brand initiatives.

Interviews were recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and where necessary, translated into English. To ensure authenticity, the original-language excerpts are preserved in the results section, alongside translations.

3.4. Ethical considerations

Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, assured of anonymity, and informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. Consent was obtained verbally. Identifying details (names, addresses, workplaces) were masked during transcription.

Given the inclusion of women from lower socio-economic groups (e.g., a cleanliness worker), care was taken to ensure that participation was voluntary, non-exploitative, and respectful. Translation accuracy was verified by bilingual researchers.

3.5. Data analysis

Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process, was used to analyze the data:

1. **Familiarization:** reading transcripts multiple times.
2. **Generating initial codes:** deductive codes informed by sensitising constructs (mindfulness, minimalism, overconsumption, social norms, infrastructure, trust) and inductive codes emerging from data (e.g., “single-bin reality,” “segregation futility”).
3. **Searching for themes:** grouping codes into broader categories.
4. **Reviewing themes:** refining categories to ensure coherence.
5. **Defining and naming themes:** finalizing thematic map.
6. **Producing the report:** integrating quotes and analysis.

3.6. Trustworthiness and rigor

To enhance rigor, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four criteria were applied:

- **Credibility:** achieved through triangulation of multiple participants across socio-economic backgrounds, and inclusion of direct verbatim quotes to ground interpretations.
- **Transferability:** supported by thick description of participant contexts and detailed reporting of household settings.
- **Dependability:** ensured by maintaining an audit trail of coding decisions and analytic memos.
- **Confirmability:** enhanced through reflexive journaling and peer debriefing with co-researchers.

3.7. Limitations

The study is limited to ten participants in Gujarat and is not statistically generalizable. However, the depth of qualitative data provides insights into household-level dynamics and offers a foundation for future mixed-methods or comparative studies.

3.8. Thematic Map: Relationships among Themes

Thematic analysis yielded six interconnected themes, summarised in Table-1.

Table-1. Thematic Analysis Process and Results

Theme	Categories	Illustrative Codes	Representative Quotes (from transcript)	Link to sensitising constructs
1. Hygiene-driven “single-bin” reality	- Centrality of cleanliness - Space/time constraints	- “One dustbin for everything” - “Middle-class homes don’t keep multiple bins” - “All garbage goes together”	“हमारे घर पे तो एक ही होता है... मिडिल क्लास में तो एक ही dustbin होता है जिसमें सारा कचरा घर का उसमें ही जाता है।” (Interview 1, Vadodara) — “In our house there is only one bin... in middle-class homes there is just one where all garbage goes.”	Infrastructure; Social Practice Theory (materials/competences); Mindfulness constrained
2. Segregation on futility & trust deficit	- Mixing at collection - Perceived waste effort of	- “Trucks mixes it all” - “Even if we segregate, it goes together”	अभी Concept है कि अलग होना चाहिए Waste / पर At The End Of The Day Have You Seen THOSE Trucks जहां पे चीजें Carry करके ले जाते हैं। वहां पे सब	Infrastructure quality; Institutional trust; TPB perceived control

			एक साथ होता है। <i>(Interview-5, Manager, Ahmedabad)</i> Currently, the concept is that waste should be separate. But at the end of the day, have you seen those trucks where things are carried away? Everything is together there.	
3. Pragmatic circular practices (reuse, resale, trade-in)	- Old-for-new exchanges - Informal resale markets - Repair/reuse traditions	- “Sell old at shop, buy new” - “Exchange utensils” - “Reuse containers”	“उसका तो बेच देते हैं दुकान पे और वो सामान लेता है। जूना सामान लेके हम नया ले लेते हैं ऐसे। ” <i>(Interview 3, Professional, Ahmedabad)</i> — “We sell that at the shop, and they take the goods. They take the old item, and we	Minimalism; Circular economy; Brand trust (potential EPR link)

			<i>buy a new one like tha."</i>	
4. Economic and spatial constraints	- Price sensitivity - Expiry-date priority - Limited storage space	- "Cheaper options" - "Look at expiry first" - "Small flats, no place for separate bins"	“एक्चुअली में हमारा क्या था, हम वो एक्सपायरी देखते हैं। ओके। बाकी कुछ ऐसे कुछ तो देखते नहीं। फिर से उसे फेंकना ही, वही मीन्स वही चलता है ना, इसको वो फेंक देना ही बाद में तो। पर वो नहीं सोचते कि इसके, इसका रीयूज होगा या इसके कहां पे जाएगा, ये ऐसा सोचते नहीं हैं।” <i>Actually, what we look at is the expiry date. Okay. We don't look at anything else like that. Since we have to throw it away again, that is what happens,</i>	Overconsumption; Mindfulness; Social Practice Theory (materials)

			right, we have to throw it away later. But we don't think about its reuse or where it will go, we don't think like that. (Interview 9, Housewife, Bhavnagar) “The only thing is what what as I already mentioned that I tried to avoid throwing away things which I can store for a month and then sell it off and hopefully he is uh doing it properly right ...” (Interview-2, Professor, Anand)	

5. Emerging mindfulness & aspirational minimalism	- “Think before buying” - Deliberate restraint - Sustainability discourse among educated women	- “Buy less” - “Only if necessary” - “Minimal use”	<i>“I try to think: do I really need this, or can I avoid it?”</i> <i>“I’m washing and uh keeping it in a bag and I sell it off that also I’m not throwing those bags”</i> <i>(Interview 2, Professor, Anand)</i>	Mindfulness; Minimalism; Construal level
6. Communication, education & community influence	- Regular reminders - Influence of campaigns - Neighbourhood norms	- “Communication must be regular” - “Neighbors follow, so we do too”	<i>“... I think, I think that communication should also be regular then.</i> <i>बिकॉज़ ऐसा होता है ना कि हम खाना रोज खाते हैं तो हमको एनर्जी आती है बॉडी में, ऐसा नहीं है कि हम एक एक हफ्ता खा रहे हैं फिर हम पूरा महीना भूखे।”</i> <i>(Interview 8, Researcher, Ahmedbad)</i>	Social norms; Marketing communication; Stakeholder engagement

Narrative Thematic Map

The thematic analysis revealed six interconnected themes that can be organized into two overarching clusters: structural constraints and emergent enablers.

1. Structural constraints

- Theme 1: Hygiene-driven “single-bin” reality and Theme 2: Segregation futility & trust deficit highlight the material and institutional barriers that inhibit sustainable waste practices. The reliance on a single bin reflects space and time limitations, while the perception that segregated waste is ultimately mixed undermines motivation. These themes are anchored in *infrastructure quality* and *institutional trust*, consistent with Social Practice Theory’s emphasis on the interplay of materials and competences.
- Theme 4: Economic and spatial constraints intersects with these barriers by showing how price sensitivity, expiry-date priorities, and limited household space prevent households from adopting mindful or minimalist practices even when intentions are present.

2. Emergent enablers

- Theme 3: Pragmatic circular practices (reuse, resale, trade-in) reflects enduring traditions of exchange and repair that align with circular economy principles. These practices suggest that households already possess cultural templates for reuse, which can be scaled through formal take-back and producer responsibility programs.
- Theme 5: Emerging mindfulness & aspirational minimalism illustrates how some participants, particularly those with higher education and income, deliberately restrain purchases and reflect on necessity before buying. These practices represent a growing cultural shift toward mindful consumption, aligning with sustainability discourses.
- Theme 6: Communication, education & community influence cuts across all others, showing that regular campaigns, reminders, and neighborly influence can reinforce positive behaviors or counteract skepticism about system efficacy.

Interconnections:

- Themes 1, 2, and 4 (constraints) often suppress or override the effects of Themes 3 and 5 (enablers). For example, even when households engage in reuse (Theme 3) or aspire to minimalism (Theme 5), the perceived futility of segregation (Theme 2) or space limitations (Theme 4) may limit consistent adoption of sustainable practices.
- Theme 6 (communication and social influence) functions as a potential lever that can strengthen enablers while mitigating constraints. For instance, consistent communication could rebuild institutional trust (countering Theme 2) and encourage collective uptake of mindful practices (amplifying Theme 5).

Conceptual positioning:

- At the individual level, Themes 3 and 5 reflect personal orientations (mindfulness, minimalism), while Theme 4 shows household-level constraints.
- At the social level, Theme 6 demonstrates the influence of community norms and communication.
- At the structural level, Themes 1 and 2 highlight systemic and infrastructural barriers.

Together, these themes map a tension between aspiration and limitation: while women already practice forms of circularity and aspire toward mindful consumption, infrastructural inadequacies and trust deficits often prevent these orientations from translating into sustained sustainable waste behavior.

4. Results / Empirical Findings

The thematic analysis of ten semi-structured interviews with women across diverse socio-economic and religious backgrounds in Gujarat yielded six interrelated themes. These themes illuminate how women enact, negotiate, and at times resist sustainable waste practices in their everyday lives. Verbatim excerpts are anonymised (P1–P10), with translations provided where necessary.

4.1. Hygiene-driven “single-bin” reality

A recurring theme across participants was the centrality of hygiene, convenience, and time-efficiency in shaping waste routines. Most households described relying on a single dustbin into which all types of waste were deposited, particularly in middle-class contexts where space was limited.

“हमारे घर पे तो एक ही होता है... हां... मिडिल क्लास में तो एक ही dustbin होता है जिसमें सारा कचरा घर का उसमें ही जाता है।”

Translation: If I tell you that, in our house there is only one... yes... in the middle class, there is only one dustbin where all the household garbage goes.

This practice underscores the *materials* and *competences* dimensions of Social Practice Theory (Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012). Even when participants expressed awareness of the benefits of segregation, spatial constraints and routines embedded in daily hygiene made multiple-bin systems impractical. The “single-bin reality” demonstrates how infrastructural availability mediates the translation of mindful intentions into action.

4.2. Segregation futility and trust deficit

Several participants voiced skepticism that their segregation efforts would be respected once waste left the household. The perception that segregated waste was later mixed by municipal collectors created a sense of futility.

“अभी Concept है कि अलग होना चाहिए Waste / पर At The End Of The Day Have You Seen THOSE Trucks जहाँ पे चीज़ें Carry करके ले जाते हैं/ वहाँ पे सब एक साथ होता है।”

Translation: Currently, the concept is that waste should be separate. But at the end of the day, have you seen those trucks where things are carried away? Everything is together there.

This finding reflects the importance of **institutional trust** in sustaining household behaviors. Consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), participants’ perceived behavioral control was undermined when the system appeared unreliable.

4.3. Pragmatic circular practices: resale, reuse, and trade-in

Despite systemic barriers, participants described engaging in circular behaviors through resale, exchange, and reuse. These practices, while not always framed in sustainability terms, nonetheless extend product lifecycles.

“उसका तो बेच देते हैं दुकान पे और वो सामान लेता है। जूना सामान लेके हम नया ले लेते हैं ऐसे। Translation: We sell that at the shop, and they take the goods. They take the old item, and we buy a new one like that.”

These practices represent culturally embedded forms of minimalism and circularity. While not driven by global sustainability discourses, they illustrate indigenous logics of thrift and utility. Scholars argue that such practices offer scalable entry points for extended producer responsibility (EPR) and reverse logistics programs (Compagnoni, 2022).

4.4. Economic and spatial constraints

Economic considerations strongly shaped purchasing and disposal choices. Participants often prioritized price and expiry dates over environmental impact, reflecting both necessity and rational decision-making.

“अगर मिडिल क्लास फैमिली से देखा जाए तो वो ज्यादा मैटर करेगा कि किसका प्राइस ज्यादा है।”

Translation: If viewed from a middle-class family perspective, it will matter more whose price is higher”

This theme highlights the dual role of overconsumption and structural constraint. While wealthier households may consciously practice minimalism, lower- and middle-income participants often engaged in frugality out of necessity. Yet this frugality did not always translate into environmental mindfulness, as affordability was prioritized over sustainability.

4.5. Emerging mindfulness and aspirational minimalism

Among more educated and professionally employed participants, deliberate restraint and reflection in consumption choices were observed. These participants described thinking carefully before purchases and consciously reducing unnecessary acquisitions.

“...फूड मुझे लगता है वो करना आपके माइंड में वही होना चाहिए। फूड वेस्ट करना भाई अगर आपको लग रहा है कि ज्यादा है आप नहीं तो घर में जैसे हम फिर दे देते थे किसी को अगर कब्जा ज्यादा है वैसे भी तो ये चीज तुम्हें लगता है उतनी नहीं आपके थोड़ा माइंड में होना चाहिए बहुत ज्यादा नहीं भाई लिमिटेड पकाओ सब लोग वो है कि कम कम लो प्लेट वाला फिर वो झूठा जो हो जाता है वो बेसिकली फेंकता है ना तो यही होता है कि एक बार में आप कम खाओ If you need more या किसी फंक्शन में भी जाओ तो Then you can take again मतलब प्लेट में वेस्ट मत करो.”

Translation: ...I think when it comes to food, that (goal) should just be in your mind. If you feel there is too much food that you can't eat, then at home, we used to give it to someone else if there was excess. Anyway, I don't think this is that difficult; it should be somewhat in your mind. Not too much. Cook limited amounts. Everyone should take small portions. The half-eaten food that gets left on the plate is basically thrown away, right? So, the point is to eat less at once. If you need more, or even if you go to a function, then you can take again. Meaning, don't waste food on your plate.

These reflections resonate with the concept of mindful consumption (Sheth, Sethia, & Srinivas, 2011) and aspirational minimalism (Wilson & Bellezza, 2022). They suggest that exposure to sustainability discourses in academic or professional settings may foster intentional practices that align with global sustainability narratives, albeit unevenly across social groups.

4.6. Communication, education, and community influence

Finally, participants emphasized the role of repeated communication, campaigns, and peer influence in shaping behaviors. Many argued that messages about waste management must be delivered consistently to remain salient.

“I think if we start giving communication regularly, then 10 or 20% of people, you know, will start following it.”

“...अभी तक तो ऐसा कुछ मिला नहीं है। ओके। जैसे ऐड में वो सब देखते हैं कि मैसेज मिलता है कि भाई ड्राई कचरा है, उसे ऐसे उड़ाओ मत, उसको डस्टबिन में डालो, वो नॉर्मली। बाकी कोई मैसेज अभी तक नहीं मिला है।”

Translation: ...nothing like that has been received yet. Okay. Like we see everything in ads, we get the message that dry garbage, don't just throw it around, put it in the dustbin, that is normal. But no other message has been received yet.

“हां, वो तो ज्यादातर जब इलेक्शन आता है तब देखते हैं।”

Translation: Yes, that is mostly seen when the election comes.

Several participants also mentioned that neighbors' practices influenced their own, highlighting the role of social norms and community expectations.

4.7. Synthesis

Taken together, these six themes reveal a complex interplay between constraints (single-bin reality, segregation futility, economic/space limitations) and enablers (pragmatic circular practices, emerging mindfulness, social influence). Women in Gujarat demonstrate both agency and adaptation: while they actively reuse and reflect on consumption, their efforts are often constrained by structural inadequacies and institutional mistrust. This tension suggests that interventions must go beyond awareness campaigns, addressing infrastructural deficits and leveraging women's culturally embedded practices to achieve SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

5. Discussion and Contributions

5.1. Revisiting the research aims

This study set out to explore how women in Gujarat, India, shape household waste practices across the product lifecycle — from acquisition to disposal — and how these practices intersect with constructs of mindful consumption, minimalism, overconsumption, moral licensing, social norms, and infrastructural factors. By analyzing ten semi-structured interviews, the research sought to capture the lived realities of women's daily routines and to contextualize them within broader sustainability discourses and policy frameworks.

The thematic analysis revealed a dual reality: women actively practice embedded forms of circularity (resale, reuse, trade-in) and show emerging orientations toward mindful consumption, but these efforts are often constrained by infrastructural deficits, institutional mistrust, and economic limitations. This discussion interprets these findings through the theoretical lenses reviewed in Section 2 and identifies the study's contributions to scholarship and practice.

5.2. Constraints on sustainable behavior: infrastructure, trust, and economic realities

Three of the themes — hygiene-driven “single-bin” reality, segregation futility, and economic/spatial constraints — highlight the structural barriers that inhibit sustainable household practices.

- The “single-bin” practice underscores the Social Practice Theory perspective (*Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012*), where routines are sustained not by attitudes alone but by the availability of materials and competences. Without separate bins or adequate space, even motivated

households cannot consistently segregate waste.

- Perceptions of segregation futility resonate with findings that post-collection mixing undermines household motivation. Trust deficits weaken the link between intentions and behaviors, aligning with the Theory of Planned Behavior's emphasis on perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991).

- Economic constraints reflect the complexity of overconsumption and minimalism in the Indian context. While frugality among lower-income households may reduce waste, it is driven by necessity rather than environmental mindfulness. Wealthier participants, conversely, described aspirational minimalism — choosing restraint not out of necessity but as a deliberate sustainability practice.

Together, these findings emphasize that structural interventions (infrastructure provision, service reliability, institutional credibility) are prerequisites for enabling household-level sustainability.

5.3. Embedded circular practices: indigenous pathways to sustainability

A notable contribution of this study is the documentation of pragmatic circular practices that predate contemporary sustainability discourses. Participants described selling old items in exchange for new, reusing containers, and participating in local resale markets. These practices illustrate how cultural traditions of thrift and reuse align with circular economy principles (Kirchherr, Reike, & Hekkert, 2017).

While these practices may not always be framed in environmental terms, they nonetheless extend product lifecycles and reduce waste. Importantly, they represent culturally embedded entry points for interventions such as extended producer responsibility (EPR) and retail-based take-back schemes (Compagnoni, 2022). This insight challenges the view that circularity must always be introduced through new policies or technologies; instead, it can build upon existing everyday practices.

5.4. Mindfulness, minimalism, and aspirational change

Educated participants, particularly those in professional or academic roles, articulated elements of **mindful consumption** and **minimalism**. They described pausing to consider necessity before purchases, reducing unnecessary

acquisitions, and adopting a more deliberate orientation toward consumption. These findings echo the notion of **mindful consumption** as a customer-centric approach to sustainability (Sheth, Sethia, & Srinivas, 2011) and reflect a growing trend toward aspirational minimalism among urban middle-class Indians (Wilson & Bellezza, 2022).

However, the coexistence of mindful practices among some and structural constraints among others suggests that sustainability discourses remain unevenly distributed. For many women, economic pressures and infrastructural limitations overshadow mindful intentions. This aligns with the observation that sustainable behaviors must be understood within their socio-economic contexts, not simply as matters of individual choice.

5.5. Social norms, communication, and collective action

The influence of neighbors, communities, and campaigns underscores the importance of social norms and communication in sustaining waste practices. Participants noted that repeated messaging and visible peer compliance encouraged their own engagement, consistent with evidence that descriptive and injunctive norms significantly predict pro-environmental behaviors.

This suggests that interventions must go beyond one-time awareness campaigns and instead employ ongoing, community-level communication strategies. Embedding messages in daily routines — much like the analogy drawn by one participant to eating food every day — can reinforce sustainable practices and counteract perceptions of futility.

5.6. Contributions to theory

This study makes three key theoretical contributions:

1. **Contextualizing global constructs in Indian practices.** While mindfulness, minimalism, and moral licensing are global constructs, this study shows how they manifest in localized forms — such as thrift-driven reuse or skepticism-driven noncompliance. This contextualization enriches the literature by extending theory to non-Western, resource-constrained settings.
2. **Bridging individual and practice-based perspectives.** By integrating the Theory of Planned Behavior with Social Practice Theory, the study demonstrates that individual intentions (mindfulness, minimalism) must be understood alongside infrastructural and cultural arrangements (single-bin reality, resale traditions). This synthesis highlights the limits

of purely individual-level explanations of waste behavior.

3. **Highlighting women's agency as systemic.** Women are not merely household managers but also connectors between households, communities, and markets. Their embedded circular practices demonstrate agency that transcends domestic boundaries, underscoring their centrality in transitions toward circular economies.

5.7. Contributions to practice and policy

The findings also carry practical implications:

- **Municipal policy:** To reduce perceptions of segregation futility, municipalities must ensure visible integrity in waste processing (e.g., transparent reporting on segregation rates, audits of collection systems). Without this, household efforts risk being undermined.

- **Corporate practice:** Brands can leverage existing resale and trade-in practices by formalizing take-back schemes and building trust in sustainable claims. This aligns with SDG 12 targets on recycling and reuse.

- **Community interventions:** Communication strategies should be regular, participatory, and embedded in local cultural frames (e.g., linking cleanliness to dignity, health, and community pride). Self-help groups and resident welfare associations can act as multipliers.

- **Gender empowerment:** Recognizing and formalizing women's roles in both household and informal recycling economies aligns with SDG 5. Policies that provide training, remuneration, and institutional support for women in waste management can deliver both gender equity and sustainability benefits.

5.8. Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals

The findings contribute directly to three SDGs:

- **SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production):** By documenting household-level pathways to waste reduction, reuse, and recycling.

● **SDG 5 (Gender Equality):** By centering women's agency and highlighting the need for institutional recognition of their roles in sustainability transitions.

● **SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals):** By demonstrating that sustainable waste management requires cooperation among households, municipalities, brands, and community actors, with women as key intermediaries.

5.9. Summary

In sum, this study reveals that women in Gujarat engage in both traditional and emerging practices that support circularity, but their efforts are often undermined by infrastructural and institutional shortcomings. By situating women's lived experiences within global sustainability frameworks, the research contributes to both theory and practice, offering grounded insights into how SDG targets might be achieved in everyday life.

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of women's roles in sustainable household waste practices in Gujarat, India. By employing a qualitative design grounded in thematic analysis, it has highlighted both the constraints and enablers that shape everyday consumption and disposal routines.

On the one hand, structural barriers such as limited space, single-bin reliance, perceptions of segregation futility, and economic pressures constrain women's ability to act sustainably. On the other hand, culturally embedded practices of reuse, resale, and trade-in, alongside emergent orientations toward mindful consumption and minimalism, demonstrate women's agency and potential as change-agents.

Importantly, women's roles extend beyond the household. They act as connectors between family, community, and market systems, influencing both household routines and broader cultural shifts. Their practices align directly with Sustainable Development Goals — particularly SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). However, realizing this potential requires supportive infrastructure, trustworthy municipal systems, sustained communication, and recognition of women's agency in policy and corporate strategies.

Theoretically, the study demonstrates the value of integrating individual-level constructs (mindfulness, minimalism, social norms) with Social Practice

Theory, which emphasizes material and cultural arrangements. Methodologically, it illustrates how in-depth qualitative inquiry can capture the complexity of sustainability transitions in non-Western, resource-constrained contexts.

Future research could build on these findings through mixed-methods studies, cross-regional comparisons, or longitudinal analyses of household practices. For policymakers and practitioners, the message is clear: supporting women as sustainability leaders is not merely about awareness campaigns but requires systemic change in infrastructure, trust, and institutional recognition.

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Milk, Sweat, and Equality: Women in Dairy as Agents of Change for Bharat 2047

Asmita Hemantkumar Vyas, Kamini Shah, Nishit Vyas, Dharti Rami

Abstract

This study explores how women in Gujarat's dairy sector significantly enhance rural livelihoods and catalyze economic and social growth, directly aligning with India's vision for Viksit Bharat 2047. Placing women at the center of dairy cooperatives—spanning milk production, livestock care, and management—this research draws on the Amul movement's legacy and the wider White Revolution. Despite facing persistent challenges, women-led dairy activities have raised incomes, improved gender equality, and reduced poverty in rural communities. The paper advocates for targeted interventions: increased access to credit, digital training, essential equipment, and gender-focused policies to further empower women. Sharper subheadings and improved transitions have been introduced to bolster coherence. Addressing previous redundancy, the draft avoids repetition and delves more deeply into thematic analyses, referencing both primary observations and recent data where available. A critical assessment of proposed policy options now accompanies the discussion, with an emphasis on timelines and practical feasibility. The study ultimately argues that with adequate support, women in Gujarat's dairy sector can lead a globally relevant model of inclusive, sustainable rural development for 2047.

Keywords: Women in dairy, Rural growth, Dairy cooperatives, Women empowerment, Inclusive development

1. Introduction

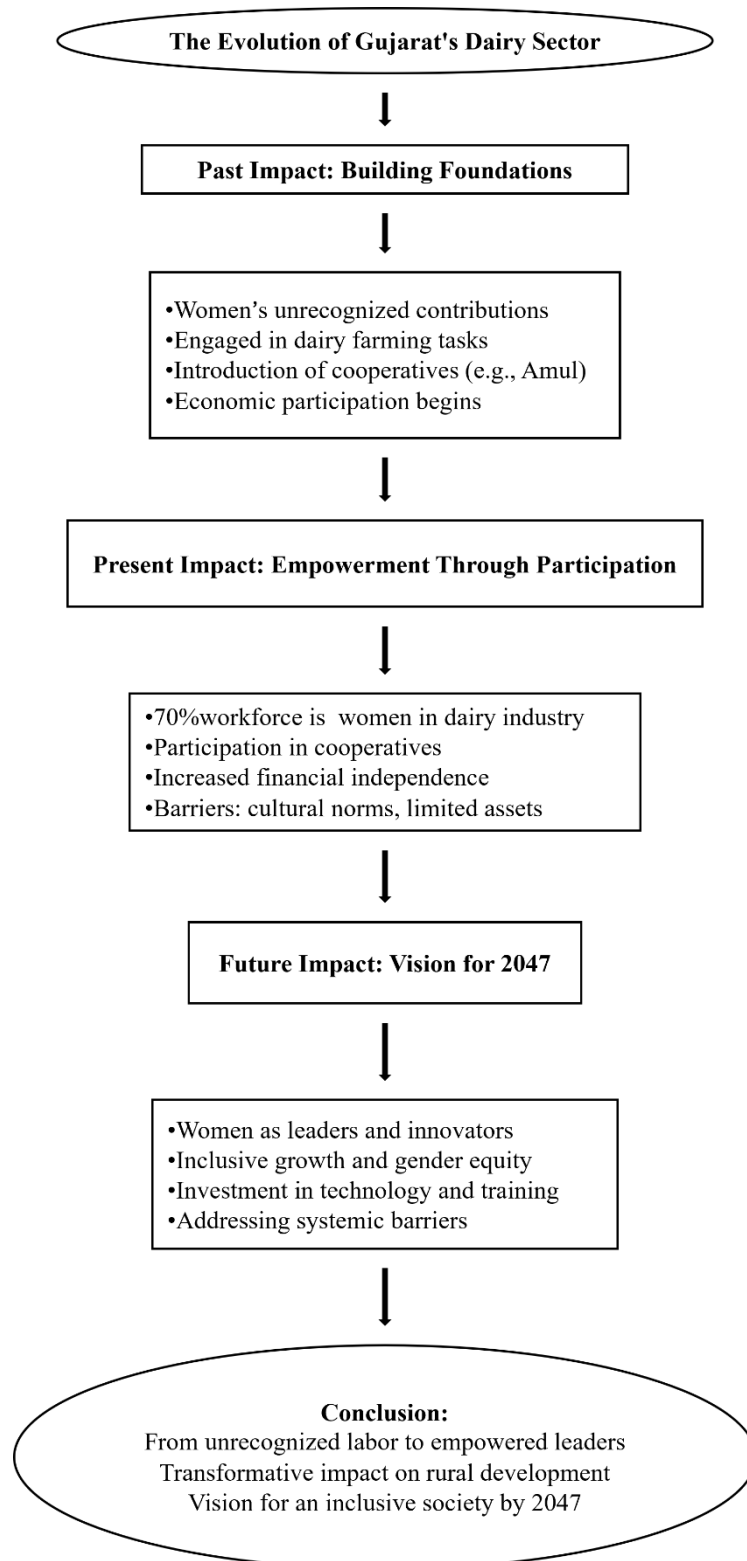
In an arena long defined by resilience and challenge, the women of Gujarat's dairy sector rise as steadfast architects of progress, weaving economic growth and social transformation into the fabric of rural life.

The landscape of Gujarat's dairy sector showcases women as fundamental architects of rural transformation, blending economic resilience with social progression. Women are central to this industry globally, contributing immensely to milk production, animal care, and cooperative management.

Looking ahead to Viksit Bharat 2047, the vision for a developed and self-reliant India aligns seamlessly with the transformative role of the dairy sector. By 2047, India's dairy ecosystem, particularly in Gujarat, can serve as a global benchmark for sustainable agricultural practices, rural empowerment, and gender equity. Women, who already form a significant portion of the labor force in this sector, will be at the forefront of this transformation. By amplifying their roles in cooperatives and entrepreneurial ventures, India can ensure greater rural prosperity and improved household incomes, leading to stronger communities.

In rural Gujarat, dairy farming is not merely an economic pursuit; it constitutes a vital pillar of community life, strengthened by the cooperative model exemplified by Amul. As India leads the world in milk production, Gujarat's approach, centered on collaboration and community-driven development, serves as a testament to the transformative power of cooperatives. The Amul brand not only supports milk producers but also fosters entrepreneurship, self-reliance, and rural prosperity, providing a blueprint for other regions to emulate (Gajjar, 2023). Notably, the Anand model of dairy cooperatives sparked the White Revolution, propelling India's rise as a global milk producer and benefitting millions. However, the sector continues to face significant challenges, including increased privatisation, mounting market competition, and infrastructural gaps, all of which threaten long-term rural prosperity. Recent empirical fieldwork, including interviews with cooperative leaders and analysis of government data, underscores the urgency of implementing agile, community-driven solutions to sustain and enhance these gains.

Beyond Gujarat, the transformative power of women in dairy is evident across rural landscapes worldwide. In countries such as Kenya and Bangladesh, women's substantial participation in dairy cooperatives has led to financial independence, improved household nutrition, enhanced decision-making power, and strengthened rural livelihoods. (Basu & Galiè, 2021; Islam et al., 2019) These global examples demonstrate that when women are empowered through access to technology, financial resources, and capacity-building programs, the benefits ripple outward to uplift entire communities. In the context of Viksit Bharat 2047, India must prioritize investments in women-led dairy initiatives, recognizing the sector's potential to address the dual challenges of rural development and gender equity. As rural women continue to navigate structural barriers both within India and internationally, their participation in the dairy sector stands as a catalyst for economic productivity, social equity, and sustainable agricultural practices. Targeted interventions, such as, expanding access to credit, digital tools, and market linkages; can unlock the full potential of women in dairy, fostering community development and well-being. By equipping women with education, training, and leadership opportunities in dairy.



India can transform its rural communities into hubs of innovation, inclusivity, and self-reliance, moving decisively toward the vision of a resilient and prosperous Viksit Bharat. This study, while focusing on Gujarat, draws important parallels with global experiences to underscore the universal role that women in dairy can play in driving meaningful and sustainable change.

This study aims to explore the contributions of women within Gujarat's dairy sector, situating their efforts in the broader global context. By examining the challenges they face, the opportunities available, and successful models of women-led initiatives, this study seeks to highlight strategies for enhancing economic participation and fostering gender-inclusive practices.

The evolution of Gujarat's dairy sector has significantly impacted the status of women, shaping their socio-economic roles and influence across past, present, and future timelines.

2. Growth of Dairy Cooperatives in Gujarat

Dairy cooperatives have played a transformative role in enhancing rural development and milk production, particularly in Gujarat. The "Anand model" pioneered in Gujarat inspired the nationwide "White Revolution," which, under Operation Flood, shifted India from milk scarcity to becoming one of the largest global milk producers. This revolution significantly uplifted rural families by providing better marketing opportunities for milk. However, challenges like informal sector competition, insufficient infrastructure, and quality concerns persist. Privatization trends pose additional risks to the cooperative framework. (Rajendran & Mohanty, 2004) Despite these obstacles, cooperatives remain central to rural livelihoods, fostering job creation and economic growth. To sustain progress, they must address these issues and adapt to evolving market dynamics.

The Transformation of India's Dairy Sector: The legacy of the "White Revolution," led by the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) since 1965, continues to define India's dairy success. This movement empowered rural communities, especially women, by involving them in economic activities. This initiative empowered small farmers by forming cooperatives that bypassed intermediaries, boosting their incomes and ensuring food security (Kurien, 2004). Although privatization pressures and the absence of leaders like Verghese Kurien have tested these models, dairy remains an essential income source for rural families.

The Role and Challenges of Cooperatives: Cooperatives, particularly Gujarat's Amul, have been a powerful force for rural progress and economic development. What began as a small local effort expanded into a model that collects millions of liters of milk daily, driving social change and economic

growth. By connecting producers directly with consumers, cooperatives paved the way for the White Revolution.(Chawla, 2011) Yet, the journey hasn't been without difficulties. For example, while sugar cooperatives in Gujarat improved the financial conditions for members, they sometimes exploited landless workers and migrant labor.(Ebrahim, 2000) The shift towards more market-driven approaches has also pressured cooperatives to adapt. Despite these challenges, Amul's story provides lessons for other businesses: focus on building supply chains, strive for operational efficiency, and think long-term.(Chawla, 2011)

3. Important Role of Women in Dairy Cooperatives

3.1. Active Participation: Women are critical to India's dairy sector, contributing nearly 70% of the workforce. Dairy cooperatives in Gujarat, such as those within the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), have empowered women economically and socially, improving their standing within communities. Initiatives like Dairy Vigyan Kendra (DVK) have provided training to enhance milk productivity, showcasing the potential of women in the sector (Misra et al., 2023).

3.2. Economic Impact: Women's involvement in dairy has significantly supported household income and community well-being. Women cooperatives backed by institutions like the National Dairy Research Institute have enhanced women's entrepreneurial skills, driving rural development. However, advancing women's contributions requires further support, such as education, credit access, and skill-building programs.(Pandey, Mishra, Kumar Jha, et al., 2024)

4. Economic and Social Impact

4.1. Income Generation and Financial Independence: Dairy farming has become a crucial source of income for women in rural Gujarat, offering financial stability and a path toward autonomy. Women's contributions, although substantial, often go unrecognized in household and cooperative decision-making. Factors such as education, farm size, and herd ownership directly impact women's earnings and economic security, highlighting the importance of expanding training opportunities, broadening access to credit, and providing targeted subsidies (Kaur & Astha, 2021).

4.2. Access to Credit and Asset Ownership : Limited access to credit remains a significant hurdle for women dairy farmers. Collateral requirements and financial literacy gaps frequently restrict women's ability to secure loans for self-employment and business growth. Moreover, disparities in asset ownership particularly of land and livestock, further constrain women's economic prospects

and autonomy.(Jagadeesha, 2024) Policy interventions promoting joint land titles and the development of savings products tailored to women's needs are vital steps toward bridging these gaps, fostering gender equity, and improving economic outcomes.(O'sullivan, 2017)

4.3. Community Development and Rural Transformation: The active involvement of women in dairy cooperatives has had a profound effect on rural development by boosting household incomes, reducing poverty, and strengthening families and communities. Cooperatives not only provide financial security but also instill confidence and leadership abilities in women.(Dohmwirth & Hanisch, 2018) Organizations such as SEWA have played a pivotal role in empowering women through entrepreneurship training and skill development. Despite these successes, challenges such as insufficient policy support and limited recognition for women's contributions still persist, underscoring the need for continued advocacy and institutional intervention.(Vijayakumar & Jayachitra, 2013)

4.4. Gender Dynamics and Social Empowerment: Participation in dairy cooperatives has provided women with greater decision-making authority and enhanced social mobility. Tools like the Women's Empowerment in Livestock Index (WELI) are instrumental in measuring women's control over resources and participation in key decisions. However, persistent caste- and gender-based norms continue to pose barriers to full inclusion. Addressing these local social contexts and implementing inclusive, community-oriented strategies are essential for creating truly equitable opportunities for women in the dairy sector.(Farnworth et al., 2023)

5. Supporting Women in Dairy: Government and Institutional Efforts

5.1. Policy and Institutional Support: The Indian Government has introduced numerous policies and initiatives to enhance women's involvement in agriculture and dairy farming, aiming to promote their financial independence and social standing. Women in Gujarat significantly contribute to rural economies through tasks like animal care, fodder collection, and milking, though their contributions are often underappreciated (Pandey et al., 2024). Despite obstacles such as limited policy backing and market challenges, programs like self-help groups and training initiatives have bolstered women's livelihoods. Recognizing their efforts and providing tailored support are crucial for advancing rural development and gender equality.(Gangwar et al., 2004)

5.2. Women's Role in Agriculture: Women's contributions to farming and rural livelihoods are indispensable, but a gender gap persists. In Malaysia, the growing demand for dairy has prompted government measures to promote

domestic production.(Sim & Suntharalingam, 2015) Empowering women in agriculture supports economic growth while improving access to education, healthcare, and jobs. Women's traditional knowledge and management skills are valuable for developing small enterprises. Networking among rural women entrepreneurs has proven effective in strengthening their roles. In India, government programs are fostering self-reliance and economic upliftment among women through agricultural involvement.(Dohmworth & Hanisch, 2018)

5.3. Training and Skill Development: Organizations like NGOs, cooperatives, and the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) play an instrumental role in equipping women with farming and business management skills. Training programs in areas such as food processing, sewing, and forest management have enabled women, particularly tribal groups, to establish micro-enterprises. Though immediate financial gains may be modest, sustained investment in infrastructure and access to financial resources, like bank-financed self-help groups, can lead to long-term economic growth. (Sindhi, 2012).

5.4. Real-World Insights and Case Studies: Studies on women's participation in dairy farming highlight both progress and obstacles. Initiatives like Sumul Dairy's inclusion of marginalized groups demonstrate growth (Somjee, 1989), while poorly designed programs, as seen in Rajasthan, have inadvertently increased workloads for women. In Bangladesh, small-scale dairy projects have enhanced women's confidence and decision-making abilities, emphasizing the importance of addressing societal and environmental challenges to achieve sustainable outcomes.(KMS et al., 2024)

6. Challenges Women Face in Gujarat's Dairy Industry

6.1. Financial and Technical Difficulties: Women in Gujarat's dairy sector face challenges such as high feed costs, expensive veterinary care, and low milk prices, all of which reduce profitability. Limited availability of green fodder, climate-specific breed issues, and inadequate marketing support exacerbate these difficulties. Women, who comprise 70% of the workforce, often lack proper recognition and policy support, hindering their empowerment and the overall growth of rural economies.(Pandey, Mishra, Jha, et al., 2024)

6.2. Cultural and Gender Barriers: Cultural norms in rural Gujarat restrict women's opportunities, with preferences for sons reflecting deep-seated societal biases. Education has proven instrumental in challenging these norms, but persistent barriers hinder women's advancement in education, politics, and decision-making. Effective community engagement and targeted policies are essential for fostering genuine gender equity.(Singh et al., 2025)

6.3. Limited Access to Resources: Women in agriculture often struggle with accessing credit, training, technology, and veterinary services. Structural challenges include poor access to land, market information, and decision-making platforms. Addressing these gaps through social connections, financial support, and improved infrastructure can significantly enhance productivity and livelihoods.

6.4. Operational Challenges: Small-scale and tribal dairy farmers often encounter problems like low productivity in native breeds, high feed costs, and livestock health issues (Kyotos et al., 2022). Women's significant role in daily farm operations frequently goes unrecognized. Market trends favoring large-scale producers further disadvantage small-scale farmers, calling for customized strategies to ensure inclusive growth.

Against this backdrop, the women of Gujarat's dairy sector emerge as powerful agents of change. Their significant contributions to dairy cooperatives not only challenge traditional gender roles but also illustrate how women, despite systemic barriers, can drive economic growth and social transformation in their communities.

7. Innovations and Technology in Dairy Farming

7.1. Advancements in Technology: Modern technologies, including Automated milking systems (AMS) and health-monitoring tools, are revolutionizing dairy farming, increasing efficiency and sustainability.(Sangode, 2025) Mobile applications and data-driven tools support real-time management, enhancing productivity. Gujarat's adoption of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has streamlined operations and ensured timely payments for farmers.(Desai & Desai, 2021)

7.2. Training and Productivity Enhancement: Programs like Dairy Vigyan Kendra (DVK) and the Women Dairy Development Project (WDDP) provide targeted training in animal care and scientific practices, empowering women to increase earnings and efficiency. Education and experience play crucial roles in the successful adoption of such innovations.(Jadav et al., 2014)

7.3. Women's Cooperatives and Case Studies: Women's dairy cooperatives, supported by technology, have bolstered rural development. The GCMMF's ICT integration has improved operational efficiency and ensured timely farmer payments. Projects like the WDDP have equipped women with knowledge of modern dairy practices, fostering economic and personal empowerment.(Bowonder et al., 2005)

8. Women in Dairy: Sustainability, Innovation, and Future Potential

8.1. Women-Led Environmental and Sustainable Practices : Women in Gujarat are pioneering environmental sustainability through resource management and community-driven initiatives. Projects such as those led by SARTHI in Panchmahal District have empowered women to rehabilitate degraded common land, addressing biomass shortages while simultaneously boosting self-confidence and social status. SEWA's Women, Water and Work Campaign in semi-arid regions of Gujarat has further enabled women to take ownership of local water management—constructing and maintaining water harvesting structures, undertaking watershed restoration, and reviving traditional reservoirs. These efforts have transformed women into community "barefoot geologists," effectively resolving chronic water scarcity and improving collective livelihoods (Chakraborty, 2018). Beyond water initiatives, women-led organic vegetable farming in dryland areas has contributed to greater income, reduced out-migration, and fostered environmental sustainability. Collectively, these achievements highlight the capacity of women-led practices to drive both environmental stewardship and gender-equitable community development.

8.2. Women as Drivers of Innovation in Dairy : Women form the backbone of Gujarat's dairy industry, performing essential tasks in livestock care, feeding, and fodder collection—yet often without adequate recognition. Dairy farming is vital for income generation, especially among small-scale and marginal women farmers. (Jadav et al., 2014) By participating in and leading dairy cooperatives, women gain access to training in advanced animal management and farming practices, thus strengthening productivity and sustainability. Education, age, and experience are key factors that enable women to embrace technological solutions and innovative farming approaches. (Desai & Desai, 2021) Such innovation promotes efficient management and growth even in contexts constrained by limited financial resources, indicating significant economic empowerment potential.

8.3. Trends, Challenges, and Growth Potential : Recent trends show an upward trajectory in women's participation in agricultural cooperatives and the adoption of technology-driven practices. Women are becoming indispensable contributors to rural economies, promoting sustainable growth and improved agricultural outputs across Gujarat. Nevertheless, persistent challenges remain—such as limited access to education and training opportunities, heavy domestic responsibilities, and prevailing gender biases within families and communities, all of which restrict women's full integration and decision-making authority (Pandey et al., 2024). As cooperatives increasingly turn to digital tools for improved efficiency, enhancing women's digital literacy and access becomes essential. Targeted support from cooperatives—such as tailored training,

financial services, and efforts to address systemic biases—will be critical to maximizing women's contributions and realizing the full potential of sustainable and inclusive dairy sector growth.(Farnworth et al., 2023; Pandey, Mishra, Jha, et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2025)

9. Robust Policy Suggestions for Viksit Bharat 2047: Growth of Dairy Cooperatives in Gujarat

Robust, Time-Bound Policy Suggestions for Viksit Bharat 2047: Growth of Dairy Cooperatives in Gujarat

9.1. Infrastructure Enhancement (2025-2030): In upcoming years, the focus should be on building the backbone of Gujarat's dairy sector through better infrastructure including cold storage units to keep milk fresh, modern testing labs to ensure quality, and rural collection centers to bring services closer to farmers. Funding from the National Programme for Dairy Development and the Infrastructure Development Fund can make this possible, starting with underserved districts in the first five years. These improvements won't just cut down on wastage and guarantee higher-quality products but they will also open up new job opportunities, helping rural communities thrive.(Centre for Advanced Trade Research Trade Promotion Council of India, 2024; Gandhi & Jain, 2011)

9.2. Women's Empowerment and Leadership (2025-2035): Empowering women to take active roles in shaping the dairy sector is essential for its growth and sustainability. This includes reserving seats for women in cooperative leadership, offering tailored training in leadership, digital skills, and advanced dairy techniques, and making it easier for them to access credit through collateral-free loans and joint asset ownership programs. (Pandey, Mishra, Kumar Jha, et al., 2024)These efforts can be woven into existing state-level women's development missions and supported by new cooperative digitization schemes. Progress will be tracked with clear targets such as achieving 30% representation of women in cooperative executive roles etc. The result will be stronger decision-making, greater economic independence for women, and leadership models that can be scaled across the country.

9.3. Targeted Inclusion of Marginalized Communities (2025-2032): Expanding dairy cooperative membership to include more landless, tribal, and marginalized women is key to building a truly inclusive sector. Pilot programs in high-need districts can help achieve this by offering family-based participation incentives and running social sensitization workshops to address cultural barriers.(Gaillard & Dervillé, 2022) Using participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools and linking efforts with government programs for aspirational

districts will make these initiatives more effective. Success will be reflected in stronger participation from underserved groups, evident through rising membership numbers and improved household incomes.

9.4. Technology Upgrade and Sustainability (2025-2035): Upgrading technology in the dairy sector can unlock higher productivity, better quality, and a lighter environmental footprint. Annual digital literacy drives and wider access to farm management and e-marketing platforms will ensure that even small-scale women dairy farmers can benefit from modern tools. Scaling up affordable, sustainable technologies such as solar-powered chillers, automated milking systems, and rainwater harvesting etc., will further strengthen the sector. (Centre for Advanced Trade Research Trade Promotion Council of India, 2024) These initiatives can be delivered through partnerships with Central and State Dairy Boards, with training embedded into all new cooperative expansion plans and clear adoption targets set for every phase. The result will be greater use of technology by women, improved productivity, and a measurable positive impact on the environment. (Gandhi & Jain, 2011)

9.5. Market Access and Branding (2025-2030): Ensuring fair prices and stronger market visibility is vital for sustaining women's participation in the dairy sector. Guaranteed minimum support prices for milk can provide stability, while direct-to-consumer e-commerce platforms will connect cooperatives to buyers without middlemen. Branding initiatives for "women-produced" dairy products can add both recognition and market value. (Jadav et al., 2014; Pandey, Mishra, Jha, et al., 2024) These actions can align with national cooperative export and branding programmes led by the Ministry of Cooperation, starting with pilot e-market platforms in select districts and expanding based on results. The expected outcomes include price stability, higher cooperative revenues, and a stronger identity for women-led dairy products.

9.6. Institutional and Policy Support (2025-2040): Strong institutions and clear policies are essential for long-term change. Making annual measurement of women's empowerment through tools like the Women's Empowerment in Livestock Index (WELI) etc., will ensure that progress is tracked and gaps are addressed. Integrating dairy development with rural education, health, and nutrition schemes will multiply the benefits for communities. (Farnworth et al., 2023) This approach can be built into all new cooperative registrations and review processes, with findings reported annually to guide future policy. Over time, this will lead to continuous policy improvement, measurable impact tracking, and closer integration of dairy initiatives with wider rural development goals.

9.7. Implementation Approach and Monitoring (2025-2047): Each recommendation is tied to a specific **implementation timeframe** and designed

for integration with existing schemes such as NPDD, DIDF, SDCFPO, state rural development programs. Progress should be monitored against defined KPIs; such as women's representation in leadership, cooperative membership rates, adoption rates of new technology, and average income levels, with annual progress reviews by the State Dairy Board and Ministry of Cooperation. (Pandey, Mishra, Kumar Jha, et al., 2024)

10. Conclusion

By highlighting the transformative contributions of women in Gujarat's dairy sector, this study reinforces their significance as a cornerstone in advancing inclusive economic development and realizing the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. It highlights how women, who form the backbone of dairy cooperatives, contribute significantly to milk production, livestock care, and cooperative management. The study explores the historical growth of Gujarat's dairy sector, tracing its roots to the White Revolution and the cooperative movement led by Amul, showcasing the transformative power of collaboration, providing a blueprint for rural development and empowering women economically and socially. The study emphasizes the need for sustained efforts to enhance women's roles in cooperatives and entrepreneurship to drive rural prosperity and community development.

Drawing parallels with global examples, the study underscores the potential of women-led dairy initiatives to foster financial independence, improve household nutrition, and uplift rural livelihoods. It identifies challenges faced by women, such as limited access to credit, technology, and decision-making platforms, alongside cultural and gender barriers. Despite these obstacles, women's active participation in dairy has significantly impacted rural economies, reducing poverty, enhancing incomes, and improving social equity. While these initiatives have uplifted rural families, challenges like informal market competition and privatization trends persist. The study calls for the modernization of infrastructure, digital literacy for women, and sustainable practices to address these issues. Special emphasis is placed on integrating marginalized communities into cooperatives and promoting inclusive policies to bridge gender and economic disparities. Technological advancements are identified as game-changers, enabling women to improve productivity through innovations like automated milking systems and ICT tools. Training programs, leadership opportunities, and access to resources are crucial for empowering women to adopt these technologies and lead sustainable practices in dairy farming. Furthermore, the study stresses the importance of policy support, such as gender-focused subsidies, market linkages, and community-driven initiatives, to ensure that women's contributions are recognized and rewarded.

In conclusion, the study envisions Gujarat's dairy sector as a global benchmark for inclusive growth by 2047. As Gujarat strides toward the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, the empowerment of women in the dairy sector symbolizes a transformative journey from silent contributors to dynamic leaders. The untapped potential of women, when fully realized through equitable policies, access to resources, and cultural shifts, has the power to redefine rural economies and inspire nationwide progress. By placing women at the helm of innovation and sustainability, the dairy industry can lead a broader movement for gender justice and social upliftment. This evolution is not just about economic growth; it is about rewriting the narrative of rural India. In a future where women are architects of change, Gujarat's dairy sector will stand as a beacon of inclusivity, proving that true development is measured not by profits alone but by the empowerment of those who were once on the margins. This is the essence of Viksit Bharat: a nation built on equality, resilience, and shared prosperity.

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Global Gender Perceptions Towards Oil and Gas Sector's Environmental Practices

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Abstract

The oil and gas sector has vastly impacted the global supply chain for generations. With this sector's contributions, there has also been an increase in the level of awareness of stakeholders globally concerning multinational's corporate social responsibility practices. In the wake of recent times, there is even more so a great deal of attention being placed on the environmental implications of the multinational corporations operating in the oil and gas sector. The perceptions of CSR to these MNCs are impactful, as the public at large can act to legitimize an entity's operations. These perceptions can influence the level of support, and financial returns of these entities. This comes at a time when the United Nation's 2030 Sustainability goals are closely approaching. Thus, this paper uniquely endeavors to explore not just the public at large's perspective, but it takes into consideration the different genders' perceptions. It enables those in the O&G field to implement policies more conducive to their diverse and often underrepresented stakeholders: women. It utilizes the Jamovi software to analyze O&G MNCs' environmental practices' perceptions globally. Data has been gathered from selected continents and regions using the non probability purposive quota sampling method. Through the Kruskal Wallis' method of analysis, findings reveal that female respondents were less satisfied with the CSR practices when compared to the male participants. This could be attributable to the fact that women tend to have higher expectations of CSR practices in addition to MNCs often carrying out performative ineffective forms of CSR such as greenwashing. This study allows its readers to have a more in depth understanding of how gender affects perception globally, allowing them to expand on the body of knowledge and also taking appropriate action to start addressing the lower levels of perceptions.

Keywords: Perception, Gender, Environmental Practices, Oil and Gas, Multinational Corporations, CSR

1. Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has yet to have an agreed-upon definition in academia, which has led to there being uncertainty in the field (Dahlsrud, 2008). Abbott & Monsen (1979) presented social issues that could guide CSR measurement, emphasizing the need for continuous development. Further to which, Mohabir et al., (2023) identified social issues as being a trending term for research in the CSR field. Authors such as Kapelko et al., (2021) defined the term through the lens of it being agenda entities incorporate into their practices to mitigate the public's poor perception of their activities.

Focus has been placed heavily on the CSR of multinational corporations (MNCs) due to their expanded influence and reach brought about by globalization (Jamali, 2010). MNCs that operate in the oil and gas (O&G) sector have even more received a great deal of criticism regarding their impact on climate change and resource depletion (Kelman et al., 2016). The public's perception is critical to these entities since their legitimacy is based heavily on the approval of the stakeholders domicile to the nations in which they operate, including developing nations (Jamali, 2010; Mohabir & Joshi, 2024) which are very often left out due to the monopoly of CSR by developed nations (Nyabakora & Mohabir, 2024).

Furthermore, attention has been placed on O&G MNCs as the United Nations' Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) for 2030 endeavoring to lower emissions (SDG 7, 11 & 12), are closely approaching. The supranational has also implemented SDG which focuses on promoting female equality and empowerment (SDG 5). In line with this goal, this study will thus endeavor to identify the perceptions women have of the O&G MNCs' environmental practices. This will be done by examining their perception of the O&G MNCs' environmental practices.

In their study, Alonso-almeida et al., (2015) mentioned that there are many studies regarding male and female CSR perceptions. There are, however, not many that take into account the perception of the public at large. Hur et al., (2015) examined the perception of customers in South Korea. Their findings reveal that female customers have lower perceptions of the CSR being executed, than that of males. This may have been the case since females tend to have higher expectations of CSR than males leading to them having better perceptions of CSR (Alonso-almeida et al., 2015) with more considerations being shown towards the environment and the community. To supplement this, Crona et al., (2013) also mentioned that due to the females' exposure and experiences with climate change and providing for their family, their perceptions would as a result, be different from a males'. Thus, this research will investigate the public perception of the genders; however, it will do so on a global scale. As such, it

will endeavor to identify whether the female perception will be more negatively skewed than males, as was found by Hur et al., (2015).

Through these findings, those in the O&G field should better comprehend where they stand globally concerning their environmental perceptions. It should allow for managers to design CSR that does not use the 'one shoe fits all approach' (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001) which adapts the CSR executed in developed nations to emerging and developing nations. Through its findings, managers should be able to incorporate marketing strategies with consideration of the additional factor: gender. Thus, this study's objective and hypotheses are outlined below.

Study Objective:

To identify the global gender perceptions of Environmental Practices.

Hypothesis Statements:

H₀: There is no significant difference in the perceptions of environmental-related CSR between males and females.

H_A: There is a significant difference in the perceptions of environmental-related CSR between males and females.

H₁: Females tend to have a lower perception of environmental-related CSR executed than their male counterparts.

Research includes four sections as can be seen below. The methodology section will be used to provide a breakdown of how data collection was carried out, in addition to the forms of analyses that will be executed, and the instrument that has been used to do so. This will be followed by the results and discussion section, which will reveal the findings from this study. Furthermore, it will expound on the results of this study, and how they are tied to the existing literature. Finally, the conclusion will delve into whether this study's hypotheses were met, and if the objectives of this study were achieved.

2. Methodology

Due to the nature of this study, primary data was collected using the cross-sectional survey designed to examine the gender differences between perceptions of O&G environmental CSR practices. It incorporated the quantitative approach since it facilitated the statistical evaluation of the variance of perception between the genders. Furthermore, the quantitative approach is preferred in the CSR field, as it aids with measurement and developing processes in management (Frynas, 2009).

To obtain the global public perception, the targeted sample set was derived using the stratified convenience sampling method of selected continents and the Caribbean. The Caribbean was included due to its fragile nature (Joshi & Mohabir, 2021; Mohabir & Joshi, 2022) with there being a need for more focus in this region offset by changes brought about by climate change and the effects thereof (Mohabir & Joshi C, 2022). The internet-based survey was designed with five statements regarding the perception of O&G EI CSR. The EI themes were adapted from Abbott & Monsen, (1979), Beresford (1973, 1975, 1976). Themes included perceptions regarding ‘pollution control’, ‘product improvement’, ‘environmental repair’, ‘recycling’, and ‘environmental disclosure’.

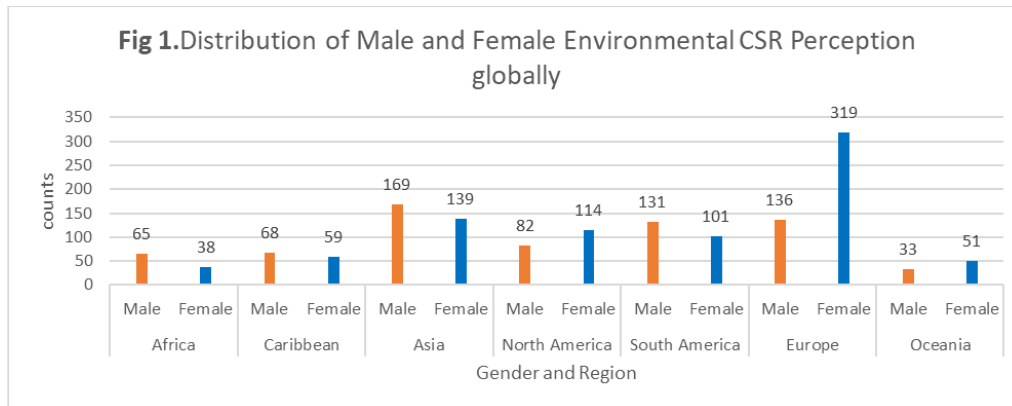
Each question was posited to the participants using the five-point Likert scale to procure the level of agreement regarding CSR geared towards environmental practices. They were then shared with four experts in fields such as CSR and academia, with appropriate input being incorporated to ensure the instruments’ reliability. The instrument was then pilot tested on 200 respondents. The instrument was then tested to ensure validity using exploratory and confirmatory analyses indicating that all the statements in the questionnaire were viable and thus retained.

The minimum sample size from each region was set at thirty respondents following the central limit theorem to ensure the validity of inferences made for the large global samples (Kothari, 2004). Each recipient was then requested to snowball the survey to someone within their region to optimize the number of responses as was done by Chaudhary (2017). The total number of responses obtained was 1505, with there being 684 males and 821 females. This sample was drawn from over 118 countries dispersed across North America, South America, Central America, Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and Oceania with the central measure per region being met. The sample was obtained from a variety of employees, community members, industry professionals and the like.

The data was coded and visually represented using Excel and analyzed using Jamovi (“The Jamovi Project,” 2022) to test the hypothesis. The dependent variables were then coded from 1 through five (Strongly agree =1, agree=2, neutral=3, disagree=4, strongly disagree=5) and the independent variable gender was coded from one to two (male=1, female=2). Normality checks were then executed, and the Kruskal-Wallis test was utilized since the data was nonparametric. In the section below, the study’s findings, including a Dwass-Steel-Critchow-Fligner (DSCF) pairwise comparison will be used to identify the veracity of perceived differences between the genders.

3. Results and Discussion

This section will include the findings obtained from this study such as the descriptive data of the sample set. In addition, normality and assumption tests will be displayed and discussed followed by the Kruskal Wallis and DFCS test results to depict the global gender perceptions.



Based on Figure one, each region and its accompanying gender were above thirty responses, thereby facilitating the execution of the analyses granted the appropriate number of representations from the sample set. The highest reported male feedback emanated from the Asian continent with 169 responses, while the highest number of female feedback emanated from Europe (319). The lowest number of male responses emanated from Oceania (33), while the lowest number of female responses was from Africa (38).

Table 1: Global Gender Perceptions: Descriptive data

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	SE
Perception of Env Practices	Male	684	3.06	0.972	0.0372
	Female	821	3.24	0.938	0.0327

As can be seen in Table 1, the study had 684 male participants and 821 female participants. The mean reveals that the male participants had a relatively average level of perception of environmental issues and CSR practices, with an average of 3.06, while the female participants had a slightly lower level of perception, with the mean being 3.24. This indicates that the female participants

less favorably perceived the environmental practices executed by the O&G MNCs than the males.

Table 2: Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)

	W	P
Environmental Perceptions	0.978	< .001

Table 3: Homogeneity of Variances Test (Levene's)

	F	df1	df2	P
Environmental Perceptions	1.17	1	1503	0.279

The normality test (Shapiro-Wilk) revealed that the result $P < .001$ violates the standard p-value of .05, thus indicating that the data set is not normally distributed. The Homogeneity test P value of .279 suggests that the variables genders are comparable, and thus their differences should not affect the results of this study's findings.

Table 4: Kruskal-Wallis One-Way ANOVA (Non-parametric)

	χ^2	df	P	ϵ^2
Env Perceptions	14.9	1	< .001	0.00992

Based on the fact that the data was non-normal, the Kruskal-Wallis test has been executed. The findings suggest that gender may play a significant role in impacting the perception of O&G MNC's Environmental CSR practices as there was statistical significance between the two variables ($\chi^2 = 14.9$, $p < .001$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.00992$). Thus, the null hypothesis has been rejected in favor of the alternate hypothesis. It can then be said that there is a significant difference between the perceptions of the genders. Notably, the effect size demonstrates that though gender is statistically significant, it is not necessarily a major factor in determining Environmental CSR. This demonstrates that there are other factors to be considered when studying the topic.

Table 5: Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner pairwise comparisons of Global Gender Perception

		W	P
Male	Female	5.46	< .001

The Pairwise test compares both genders: male and female. It confirms the findings from the previously displayed means (3.06, 3.24), that the female perception is lower of the CSR environmental practices than that of the males'. The P value further indicates that there is a meaningful difference between the two genders' perceptions as this finding was statistically significant (W=5.46, $p < .001$).

It can be seen from the findings above that gender plays a significant role in the perception of O&G MNCs' EI practices. Specifically, findings demonstrate that the female participants exhibited less favorable perceptions of the O&G Environmental CSR practices than males. These findings align with the literature which states that factors such as gender do affect CSR perception (Wang, 2011) granted that females tend to have higher and more stable expectations of CSR (Hur et al., 2015). Additionally, gender is a critical factor to be considered when executing CSR, as it influences a person's beliefs and values (Greening & Turban, 2000).

These findings are contrary to what Chaudhary (2017) found when they tested gender as a moderating value for CSR which was not significant in all CSR dimensions. These results could have been offset by homogeneity from the sample set such as the inclusion of one country, and employees with higher levels of education as the dominating number of stakeholders emanating from the private sector which could lead to similar levels of perceptions. It is thus imperative to consider that factors such as the nation or society and culture, can also play an important role in defining the type of CSR that should be executed.

The slightly more negatively skewed perceptions of the female sample may be attributable to climate change and the depletion of resources (Frynas, 2009) offset by the O&G MNCs. Furthermore, though O&G MNCs do contribute a great deal to CRS (Frynas, 2009), there may be a deficiency in the type of CSR that is being executed, as it is purported that these entities tend to engage in superficial CSR (Raghubir et al., 2010) such as greenwashing (Kelman et al., 2016) or sports without actual substantial contributions to society. Since women tend to have higher expectations of CSR, their perceptions in this study align with the literature as women would indeed be more critical of ineffective forms of being executed by the O&G MNCs. Thus, gender should be considered

as an influential factor by the O&G MNCs in relation to their global environmental CSR perception.

4. Conclusion

This study's primary objective to identify the global gender perception of CSR environmental practices of O&G sector has been achieved through the execution of the Kruskal-Wallis test which revealed that the alternate hypothesis of gender perception of O&G MNC Environmental CSR was significantly different. Based on the DFCS test and the mean presented, it could also be seen that females had lower levels of perception of the Environmental CSR executed. This may have been the case since one's gender affects culture and values, even more so, because women exhibited more likelihood to have higher expectations of CSR from MNCs leading to them being more critical of the type of CSR executed.

This study is not the end of research in this field, but rather it serves as a mere contribution to a much larger body of knowledge. Its findings are limited to this sample's set, thus future studies can be executed using qualitative or mixed types of data. Random sampling methods could be executed for replicability and generalizability by those in the academic field since this study's findings are limited to its sample set. Managers could utilize the findings from this study to build upon their CSR practices, with a specific focus on the female perspective of CSR to enhance perceptions through meaningful environmental practices. Findings indicated that though gender does have an impact on the perception, its effect is limited and thus other may have stronger effects. More studies can endeavor upon researching such factors. Similar approaches can also be done for men, as they exhibited average levels of perceptions, indicating that their perception could also be improved. In addition, stakeholders such as the government can also implement policies which would hold the MNCs accountable to less artificial forms of EI CSR, as this act will not only hold the MNCs accountable, but it will also represent improvement upon the environment, and the male and female perception.

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Mothers for Mother Earth: Women as the Harbingers of Sustainable Consumption

Sonal Bhatt

Abstract

Unregulated consumption is the fountainhead that generates wastage, damage or loss in the quality of productive natural resources and results in pollution. A sustainable lifestyle minimizes ecological impacts of human consumption while enabling a flourishing life for individuals, households, communities as well as the entire bio-diversity. It could be prompted through propagating individual and collective choices for adopting products, services and practices that are environment-friendly. In our modern lifestyles, consumption of goods and services, our way of working and our celebrations damage the environment inadvertently. Women could be the harbingers of change that is essential for us to go back to our traditional way of life and re-discover our environment-friendly customs, traditions and celebrations in harmony with nature. Women, mindful of their environmental footprint, could take conscious measures to make their lifestyle and that of their family environment-friendly and contribute towards environmental conservation.

1. Introduction

Imprudent and unregulated consumption is the fountainhead that generates wastage, damage or loss in the quality of productive natural resources and results in pollution. Sustainable consumption is said to occur when the consumption needs of the present generation are met without reducing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In other words, it discourages ‘over-consumption’. It is rightly said that, “*ati sarvatra varjayet*” meaning, ‘excess of anything is bad’. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) underlined that ‘sustainable consumption’ ought to be the focus of policy measures rather than ‘sustainable development’ in order to regulate environmental pollution.

Sustainable consumption includes not only to the mindful use of various goods and services, but also to their re-use and re-purposing to the extent possible; and ultimately recycling and disposal of the same in a manner that minimizes the generation of harmful waste. In other words, this indicates a circular flow of resources where the waste from one sector becomes an input for another sector.

A sustainable lifestyle minimizes ecological impacts of human consumption while enabling a flourishing life for individuals, households, communities as well as the entire bio-diversity. It could be prompted through propagating individual and collective choices for adopting products, services and practices that are environment-friendly. However, these are often conditioned, facilitated or constrained by societal norms, political institutions, public policies, infrastructures, markets, and cultural practices (Vergragt, 2016). However, social and economic dimensions such as of consumer welfare, societal and personal risk-mitigation, availability and price of alternative and supplementary public services that could support the changes in personal choices and lifestyle of consumers are also equally important in making consumption choices sustainable.

Sustainable consumption could be achieved by increasing efficiency of consumption as well as a change in consumption patterns to such that ecological footprints are environment-friendly. Many consumers are well-aware of the importance of their consumption choices and care about environmental issues, however most do not translate their concerns into their consumption patterns. This is because the purchase decision process is complicated and relies on e.g. social, political, and psychological factors. Young et al. identified a lack of time for research, high prices, a lack of information, and the cognitive effort needed as the main barriers when it comes to green consumption choices (Young, et.al., 2009) This gap could be filled by way of engaging women in the cause of environmental conservation through the lifestyle choices made by their families.

Traditional Indian lifestyle and value systems could reduce the wastage of resources and prevent environmental pollution. An environmentally conscious consumer is the need of the day. Women have a major role to play in determining the same, at the very grassroots level, i.e. our homes and our daily life. Modern home-makers not only maintain warm, beautiful and functional homes but also act as powerful ‘influencers’ and ‘opinion leaders’ who have a big say in their families’ lifestyle choices. Women therefore, can become the harbingers of mindful, sustainable, and environment-friendly consumption.

2. Efficiency in Consumption of Water:

Women could avoid the overuse, wastage of water in their homes by using water mindfully. Recycled household water from the bathrooms, toilets, kitchen etc. and using them in the kitchen gardens for growing vegetables etc. or beautifying barren spaces.

3. Prevention of Air Pollution

Women could limit the usage of aerosols, household pesticides and perfumes deprives small insects in and around the surroundings from their food and endangers the existence of common household species such as sparrows, frogs, lizards etc. This in turn interferes with the food chain. and inferior fuels for cooking creates indoor pollution, that has a detrimental effect on health. Instead of resorting to harmful chemical products as insect repellents, women should try to keep their surroundings clean and wherever needed, use natural pesticides such as neem leaves, camphor, salt, cloves etc. and mosquito nets on windows and beds.

4. Efficiency in Energy Consumption

Women should choose energy-efficient household appliances or those power by renewable energy sources such as solar power. Energy efficient devices such as LED lights, compact florescent lights (CFL), solar heaters, cookers, coolers, lights and fans also turn out to be cheaper to operate and hence benefit the household budget. Rural housewives could insist upon the purchase of energy efficient and less smoke-emanating gas stoves for their kitchens, gobar-gas plants using methane for cooking purposes, wherever feasible. Women should orient their children and family members towards saving electricity as much as possible. Simple habits instilled in children like switching off the lights, fans and ACs when one leaves a room, could become a lifelong good practice and go a long way in energy conservation by the children even during their adult lives. Encouraging children to practising cycling, walking or using public transport at least for their non-priority commutes would be very good idea, which also could inculcate discipline and benefit the health of children. For travelling to longer distances or for family trips women could encourage the use of public transport. Indeed, the slow train journeys of yore to far-off places to spend memorable school holidays are a thing of the past for many in these times of fast-paced travel. However, these slow journeys would give children to see and appreciate the natural scenery, learn and engage with different geographical terrains and come closer to nature. Train journeys have an added attraction of getting to enjoy a home-cooked train tiffin lovingly

prepared by mothers for their families, instead of processed food creating tons of plastic waste. During school-days, mothers could practice car-pooling or sharing taxi rides to pick up and drop their kids. Older children could be encouraged to use bicycles. Mothers could also teach their teenagers the importance of planning to club more than one activity in a single trip and thus save both time and fuel. A pledge of ‘no vehicle use once a week’ could be taken by the family members. Similarly, using a hand pump to draw water could be a good form of exercise for the old and a form of recreation for the youngsters of the family. Besides it could save on the household electricity bill.

5. Prevention of Wastage of Food

A third of the food intended for human consumption – around 1.3 billion tons – is wasted or lost, that could have fed 3 billion people. While in developing countries, 40% of food waste occurs at the post-harvest and processing levels; in developed countries, 40% of food waste occurs at the retail and consumer levels. For instance, in the US, more than 50% of all produce thrown away because it is deemed to be “too ugly” to be sold to consumers. This amounts to about 60 million tons of fruits and vegetables per year.

In Indian culture, women are given the status of ‘Annapurna’; the Goddess who nourishes us with food. With a little forward planning, women could cook only as per requirement, so that food is not wasted. Similarly, they could encourage a culture at home where anyone who serves their plates, is mindful so as to not take more than what they could finish. Excess food should be promptly given to those in need. As far as possible, food should be prepared using only local and seasonal produce. Aerated drinks could be replaced with natural drinks, packaged snacks with homemade snacks and non-vegetarian food with vegetarian or vegan items. Kitchen waste could be dealt with in an efficient and clean manner if compost pits are created in every kitchen garden to tackle solid organic waste from the kitchen. It could have an added advantage of providing fresh ingredients for the kitchen too. A simple practice of separating organic and inorganic waste by way of separate dustbins used in the house could go a long way in streamlining solid waste collection and management by the civic authorities.

In public functions such as weddings, parties etc. food and drinks can be served in mud utensils (kulhads), grass or leaves that are cheaper, biodegradable, do not require water to be cleaned; and at the same time generate employment for labour engaged in producing bio-degradable items.

6. Prevention of Wastage of Consumer Durables

Women are responsible for shopping and storage of groceries. Plastic shopping bags and packing material are non-biodegradable, but popularity due to being lightweight and cheap. Hence, plastic items for packaging, household articles such as artefacts made of ivory, stuffed animals used as show-pieces, caged birds etc. could be replaced with jute, paper and cloth items that are attractive, durable and cheap. Similarly, wooden furniture is costlier due to dwindling forests. In comparison furniture made of plastic is found to be cheaper and light-weight and easier to move and handle. However, if the plastic is of inferior quality, the furniture breaks very soon and adds to plastic waste. Instead, a better option would be to use furniture and household articles made of PVC, cane, jute or rubber.

Women have been fascinated with fashionable products since time immemorial. However, many fashion choices that were tolerable in the past, have become unsustainable and damaging to the environment in the present. For instance, clothes and accessories made of silk, tiger skin, crocodile leather, synthetic dyes etc. are no longer to be seen as a sign of a classy lifestyle but as one's insensitivity towards the environment and lack of compassion for other living beings.

With an overall rise in prosperity all over the world, particularly in the developed countries, the global demand for fashion and clothing has risen at an unprecedented rate and the fashion industry accounts for 10% of global carbon emissions which is more than that in both the aviation and shipping sectors combined (United Nations, 2018). Besides, nearly 20% of global wastewater (around 93 BCM) is produced from textile dyeing according to the UNEP, which estimates the worldwide generation of 92 million tonnes of textiles waste every year; which is expected to soar up to 134 million tonnes a year by 2030 (Global Fashion Agenda and The Boston Consulting Group, Inc., 2017). Discarded clothing and textile waste ends up in landfills, while microplastics from clothing materials such as polyester, nylon, polyamide, acrylic and other synthetic materials is leached into soil and nearby water sources. UN Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action (United Nations, 2018a) was directed at the 'fast fashion' business model which relies on cheap and speedy production of low-quality clothing to meet the latest and newest trends. Women could combat this trend by resisting the over-marketing efforts by the 'fast-fashion' companies. Indian women should go back to traditional lifestyle and ethos, that stressed upon 'simple living and high-thinking'. As Swami Vivekananda famously told a foreign lady, "In your culture, a tailor makes a gentleman; but, in our culture, the character of a person makes him a gentleman". Women should choose weather-friendly cotton clothes fabrics using natural dyes for colour for themselves and their family members. Similarly, office and formal dressing also

need not be western wear that is unsuitable for Indian weather. Instead, formal Indian wear such as sarees and kurta-pyjama should be the accepted office-wear. India has a rich variety of textiles, embroidery, dyeing techniques, patterns and designs that are unique to each region of the country. By using these, women could not only patronize local artisans but also reduce the cost of transportation of goods.

Indian consumers have traditionally been price-sensitive and given to thrift. Recycling, reuse or upcycling clothes and household articles has always been an accepted social practice. When a garment or cloth outlived its function, the lady of the house skilfully converted it into a new product with an artistic twist; for instance, turning sarees into blankets or torn garments into cloth bags! However, as income levels rose, traditional social structures broke down and the number of nuclear families increased; the need to recycle, upcycle or re-use old goods reduced. Hence, consumers, especially the new generation think it below their dignity to use such goods. However, as home-managers, women need to stop looking down upon re-use, up-cycling and recycling. These practices make our lifestyles more sustainable.

Donating things that we do not need is a good way to de-clutter one's home and at the same time, free up resources for others who need it. As Marie Kondo, the renowned home-organising expert says, "Hold each item in your hands. If it "sparks joy," keep it. If not, get rid of it" (Lowe, Lindsey, 2019). Women should donate unused, out-grown or out-lived items from their homes during their house-cleaning and sprees. Mothers should involve their children in this activity so that they learn the importance of minimalistic living from a young age and carry it into their adulthood.

7. Use of Eco-friendly household products

Women could make it a point to purchase environment-friendly products such as doormats, brushes, mattress, pot holders etc. made of coconut fibre, also known as coir. Coir is a strong, water resistant and long-lasting material. Similarly, household products made of clay, wood or iron are also strong and long-lasting; and even easy to recycle after their lifespan is over. Hence, even as they are costlier to purchase initially, in the long run they turn out to be cheap and hassle-free.

8. Prevention of congestion and pollution in residential localities

To the extent possible, women in hot and dry regions should select dark curtains that regulate sunlight and heat coming into the house. Moreover, they

could plant shady trees around their house that could regulate indoor temperature and cut out noise and air pollution from outside and reduce the need for air conditioning. Household roof-top solar electricity plants could be used for household electricity needs including for powering water heaters and kitchen appliances.

In the colder and wetter areas, women could choose lighter coloured curtains to allow ample sunlight and warmth within the house. Women's groups could assume the ownership of the parking, public and green spaces including water fountains and water bodies within their residential localities. These could be enlivened with activities for such as socializing, sports, gardening, jogging, yoga and exercising, creative workshops etc. This way, they could not only make a fruitful use of their own time, but also help in protecting those spaces from pollution and degradation.

Women's fetish for cleaning their surroundings often results in lining compounds and parking spaces with floors made of cement concrete. These floors prevent rainwater to seep into the ground. This reducing the replenishment of groundwater through rainfall and at the same time, creates water-logging on the surface. Blocks made of cement concrete that are laid on the ground such that gaps remain within any two blocks; are an answer to this problem. Such blocks would allow the seepage of rainwater into the ground and at the same time maintain cleanliness on the surface.

9. Resource use efficiency in the work-place

Our workspaces are energy-guzzlers, but not always equally productive and often, needlessly wasteful. Women Self Help Groups, NGOs and Women's Cooperatives could take the lead in creating paper-less offices, adopting digital record-keeping, making creative use of digital means of communication and conferencing, printing on both sides of the paper, not using the printer unless absolutely essential etc. Practices such as on-line meetings, working-from-home, flexible working hours, shared transport for employees and adjusting the office timings according to changing natural daylight hours with every changing season etc.; are not merely environment-friendly but could also go a long way in ensuring women's efficiency and safety in their work-places (<https://ecobnb.com/blog/2023/08/green-office-ideas-sustainable/>). Office going ladies could also chose to commute by cycling, walking or using public transport for work as much as possible.

10. Eco-friendly tourism

With the growing number of nuclear or ‘double-income, no kids’ families, more and more consumers are engaging in luxury tourism. The value of the luxury hospitality market worldwide was 213 billion USD in 2023 (<https://www.statista.com/topics/11552/luxury-travel-and-tourism-worldwide/#topicOverview>). Women should influence their family decisions into choosing eco-friendly hotels that have installed facilities for rain-water harvesting, solar geysers, heaters and cookers etc. Hotels that have an environment-friendly architecture and design that reduces the need for air conditioning by simple measures such as adjusting the height of the ceiling and build proper ventilation allowing for natural light, heating or cooling the indoors need to be patronized. Homestays that specialize in serving local dishes, cooking from home grown vegetables, using home-grown flowers for decoration, reducing food wastage and donating unused food to the needy should be encouraged.

Forests could be best explored by participating in nature camps, forest camps, ayurvedic or yoga retreats, bird-watching, nature photography, river rafting, trekking, bicycle trips, mountaineering, forest walks etc. Tent accommodations with eco-friendly sanitation facilities eliminates the need for constructing permanent structures for hotels in environmentally sensitive areas. Mother should teach their children to be sensitive and compassionate towards nature and not indulge in damaging flora and fauna during their expeditions.

Historical places and even big cities could be best explored through walking tours, heritage walks, travelling in local public transport or visiting local markets and public parks. Mothers could bond with their kids during these walks and together they could create lasting memories for the whole family. Mothers should teach their children not to litter or damage historical or heritage structures, holy rivers or other water bodies or over-draw from scarce local resources like water or electricity. These habits inculcated by mothers, last a lifetime for the children who grow up as ‘tourists with a conscience’. This could be the answer to the growing problem of ‘over-tourism’ (Taiminen, 2018) in many popular tourist destinations.

11. Eco-friendly celebrations

As per capita incomes rise, there is an urgent need to revisit how we spend our incomes, especially in celebrations of various occasions, events, festivals and public gatherings.

Tree plantation is the best way to commemorate any special events such as birth, inauguration, marriage, housewarming etc. Women must also take the

lead in observing religious practices by observing self-discipline, abstinence and fasting, feeding to the needy, abstaining from consuming addictive goods, showing compassion towards all living beings etc. and 'giving' to needy. Tree-worship has always been prescribed for Indian women in the form of watering and nurturing trees and medicinal plants such as peepul, tulsi, mango, Ashoka (*polyalthia longifolia*, also known as the Indian Mast Tree etc.

India is a land of festivals with myriad festive celebrations in some or the other part of the country, going on all the year round. However, in recent years, our festival celebrations are endangering the environment (IGCC, 2022).

Ganesh Chaturthi is typically celebrated with a giant idol made of POP paint and plastic material, noise from blaring music systems and hours of traffic congestion followed by pollution of local water bodies by immersing the idols in them. Similar practices are followed during Durga Puja in Bengal. It does not necessarily add to our virtues. On the contrary, it displeases the Supreme being by damaging nature in its diverse forms. POP idols could take several months to years to fully dissolve. It also reduces the oxygen levels in the water. Besides, paints containing heavy metals such as mercury and lead which dissolve in water along with the idol, result in increasing the acid content of the water; killing fish and other aquatic organisms. Several accessories used during the puja such as plastic flowers, cloth, incense, camphor etc. add more stain to the already polluted rivers and lakes (India Today, 2016). Ganesh Chaturthi and Durga Puja could be better celebrated by women by creating small, purely mud idols at home and engaging in group chants, bhajans and arti (without the loud speakers) in peaceful, joyous congregations.

Similarly, Deepawali, the festival of lights, is also a time when air pollution levels rise to record levels. Chanchpara et.al. (2023) studied the pre-Diwali and post-Diwali air pollution levels in Bhavnagar city of western coastal India and reported maximum pollution on the day of Diwali with significantly higher average 24-h concentration of PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}, and SPM. The concentrations of SO₂ and NO₂ were also high and so was the noise level on Diwali night. Metals like Zn, Al, Pb, and Mn were observed from PM₁₀ in higher concentrations during the study. The AQI value observed to be 348, was the maximum on Diwali, indicating air quality to be of "very poor" category. They recommended that it was time to implement regulations on burning firecrackers for pollution reduction, aiming to achieve a sustainable atmosphere. Women could spearhead Deepawali celebration in their homes by lighting up the surroundings by electric lights, cleaning and decorating the surroundings inside and outside the house, encourage their family members to share whatever they have with those who have little; and to open their hearts and minds to new experiences, re-kindling their relationships and spreading joy all around.

Holi, the Indian festival of spring colours, is preceded by Holika Dahan (lighting a fire to mark the victory of good over evil) by burning firewood resulting in smoke and air pollution. Women should take the lead in the efforts to limit the number of 'holika-dahan' ceremonies and organizing a single holi bonfire per village, town, or city. The next day of Holi is marked with a lot of fun and frolic as people spray each other with colours. In the past, these used to be natural colours made of 'palash' flower (*butea monosperma*, also known as the Flame of the Forest due to its bright red colour) that emanates colour when soaked in water. In recent times, people use artificial powdered colours and chemical-based sprays to play Holi. These colours are highly structured polymers and are very difficult to decompose biologically (Garner and Lal, 2023) and therefore impose grave ecological damage in the form of land and water pollution. Mothers should teach their kids to use natural colours, water-sprays and flower petals on each other during Holi.

Uttarayan is a very popular festival among youngsters who enjoy the impending spring season by flying kites. Kite flying competitions are a healthy replacement for aggressive arguments or fights among children. However, enjoyment for one, spells death for the other, when glass-infused kite-strings which do not break easily are used to fly kites. These strings injure birds flying in the sky as birds may not see the strings soaring in the air along with the kites. Every year, scores of birds are injured due to kite strings and fall on the ground to die or fall prey to animals like cats and dogs. During Uttarayan in January 2024, in Surat city alone a total of 1,121 birds were found injured. 75 of the injured birds died while 1,046 were under treatment (ToI, January 16, 2024). If only we would stop using glass-infused kite strings and suspend our kite-flying in the early mornings and around sunset in the evenings, we could prevent these life-threatening injuries to birds.

Bakri Eid is a Muslim festival marked by a religious slaughter (*kurbaani*) of animals as an offering in the name of God. This practice could be made environment-friendly by allowing the slaughter only at the community level and not at the household level and by arranging for proper disposal of the unused remains of the slaughtered animals. This way, the number of animals slaughtered could be minimized. Muslim women could surely take a lead on this.

Navratri is celebrated with much gaiety, song, dance and fanfare all over India, particularly in the state of Gujarat. However, of late, its impact in terms of noise pollution in the night hours and air pollution and congestion due to movement of traffic have come under scrutiny. Sharma et.al. (2018) monitored noise pollution at various locations of Jabalpur city during Naratri festival and found that the noise levels of all the testing locations were higher than the prescribed limits. Women take the lead in the dancing and revelry during Navratri. However, they could also represent to the garba-organizers to start the

programme by evening and end it before it is too late in the night. This way, women could not only relieve the inconvenience of the senior citizens who get disturbed due the cacophony of garba functions but also but also be a blessing to the birds, animals and other nocturnal beings for whom, a noisy and glaring night is nothing but a torture.

12. Conclusion

In essence, our modern lifestyle, consumption of goods and services, our working and celebrations damage the environment inadvertently. Women could be the harbingers of change that is essential for us to go back to our traditional way of life and re-discover our environment-friendly customs, traditions and celebrations in harmony with nature. Women, mindful of their environmental footprint, could take conscious measures to make their lifestyle and that of their family, environment-friendly and contribute towards environmental conservation.

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6

Women as Architects of Change: Social-Emotional Learning for Community Development Sub-theme - Role of women in Societal Change

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Abstract

Women have historically been at the forefront of community development, serving as agents of social change, economic progress, and cultural transformation. Their active participation in education, healthcare, and governance has significantly contributed to sustainable societal development. This chapter explores the role of **Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)** in strengthening **women's leadership** and fostering **inclusive community development**. SEL equips individuals with essential competencies such as emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills, which are critical for resilience, decision-making, and conflict resolution. By integrating SEL into education, workforce development, and policymaking, women can be empowered to navigate structural barriers and actively engage in leadership roles. The study highlights the challenges that hinder women's leadership, including cultural biases, gender norms, and institutional limitations. The chapter underscores the **policy implications of SEL**, emphasizing the need for **gender-responsive education reforms, leadership programs, and community-based SEL initiatives**. Through a **theoretical and empirical analysis**, this chapter provides insights into the transformative impact of SEL on women's empowerment and its potential to drive sustainable social change. The study concludes with recommendations for policymakers, educators, and community organizations to scale SEL-based programs, ensuring greater inclusivity and long-term societal benefits.

Keywords: Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Women's Leadership, Community Development, Emotional Intelligence, Gender Empowerment, Workforce Development, Social Inclusion, Education Reforms, Economic Empowerment.

1. Introduction

Women have historically played a crucial role in community development, acting as key agents of social change, economic progress, and cultural transformation. Their involvement in education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and social justice initiatives has significantly contributed to sustainable community development (United Nations, 2023). The empowerment of women is not merely an issue of gender equity but a fundamental driver of economic and social progress. Studies indicate that when women are actively engaged in decision-making processes, communities experience improved health outcomes, enhanced educational access, and greater economic stability (World Bank, 2022).

One critical framework that strengthens women's leadership and participation in community development is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). SEL encompasses a range of skills, attitudes, and competencies that enable individuals to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, develop empathy, establish healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2020). Research suggests that SEL fosters resilience, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence—key attributes that enhance women's ability to navigate societal challenges and drive meaningful change (Brackett et al., 2019).

The role of women in community development extends beyond traditional caregiving responsibilities to leadership in economic, political, and social spheres. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), empowering women through education and leadership initiatives leads to long-term improvements in societal well-being, including poverty reduction, economic growth, and enhanced democratic governance (UNDP, 2021). Studies indicate that when women are given opportunities to participate in economic activities and social governance, entire communities experience substantial progress in healthcare access, child development, and social welfare (Duflo, 2012).

Furthermore, women's leadership in community-driven organizations has been shown to enhance social cohesion and collective well-being. For instance, in India's Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), women-led cooperatives have successfully empowered marginalized women by providing financial independence, skill development, and community support (Chen, 2020).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) plays a transformative role in equipping women with the psychological and interpersonal skills needed to become effective change agents. SEL fosters emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and interpersonal competencies, which are crucial for leadership, conflict resolution,

and resilience (Goleman, 1995). Studies highlight that SEL enhances women's confidence, assertiveness, and ability to navigate patriarchal structures, thus fostering greater participation in leadership roles (OECD, 2018).

SEL is linked to improved mental health and well-being, particularly for women in underserved communities who often face higher levels of stress, gender-based violence, and economic instability. Research indicates that SEL-based interventions help women develop coping strategies, enhance emotional regulation, and build social support networks, thereby reducing vulnerability to psychological distress (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Programs such as Girl Rising and Room to Read have successfully integrated SEL into educational initiatives, resulting in increased school retention, leadership skills, and community engagement among young girls (Jukes et al., 2018).

Integrating SEL into community development efforts fosters sustainable social and economic progress. Women equipped with SEL competencies are better able to advocate for social justice, drive community engagement, and participate in governance structures. SEL promotes collaborative problem-solving and ethical decision-making, which are crucial for sustainable policies and grassroots movements (Elias et al., 2021).

SEL enhances women's ability to mentor and support others within their communities, creating a multiplier effect that extends across generations. Studies have shown that when women leaders incorporate SEL practices into community development, there is a positive impact on children's education, youth empowerment, and social cohesion (Weissberg et al., 2015). For example, the BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) Women's Empowerment Program has successfully utilized SEL principles to foster women's entrepreneurship and leadership, leading to long-term economic and social benefits for entire communities (Kabeer, 2018).

In summary, women serve as architects of change in community development, and the integration of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) enhances their ability to lead, inspire, and sustain progress. As global efforts continue to advance gender equality and sustainable development, it is essential to recognize and invest in SEL-based frameworks that empower women as key agents of transformation. The following sections will further explore how SEL strengthens women's leadership, the challenges they face, and the broader implications for policy and community development.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has gained widespread attention as a crucial framework for fostering emotional intelligence, resilience, and

leadership skills in both educational and professional settings. CASEL (2020) defines SEL as the process of acquiring and applying knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and establish positive relationships. This discussion explores the theoretical foundations of SEL, its impact on leadership and resilience, and gender perspectives in SEL and emotional intelligence.

3. Definition and Core Competencies of SEL

SEL is rooted in psychological and educational theories emphasizing emotional regulation, interpersonal skills, and cognitive development. CASEL outlines five core SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. A systematic review by Lozano-Peña et al. (2021) highlights how these competencies have evolved through structured models, including emotional regulation and the prosocial classroom framework (Lozano-Peña et al., 2021).

4. The Impact of SEL on Leadership, Resilience, and Social Change

Research indicates that SEL significantly contributes to leadership development, resilience, and social transformation. A study on resilience-building in early childhood education demonstrated that explicit SEL instruction helps children develop coping mechanisms for future challenges (Wu, Frydenberg, & McKenzie, 2022). Similarly, teachers' social-emotional skills, such as mindfulness and empathy, were found to positively influence students' SEL development, reinforcing the role of educators as SEL leaders (Orr & Lavy, 2024). Furthermore, research on post-COVID-19 recovery found that social-emotional competence mediates the relationship between group identity and post-traumatic growth, underscoring SEL's role in social resilience (Zhou et al., 2023).

5. Gender Perspectives in SEL and Emotional Intelligence

Gender differences in SEL and emotional intelligence have been explored since Goleman's (1995) seminal work. Recent research indicates that gender influences SEL implementation and perception. A study on SEL in Poland and Ukraine found that younger teachers, particularly women, were more likely to embrace innovative SEL strategies (Pentón Herrera & Chugai, 2024). Additionally, research on adult social-emotional competence assessment revealed that women scored higher on measures of emotional regulation and interpersonal skills (Oliveira et al., 2022).

6. Women as Catalysts for Social Change

Women have played a transformative role in driving social change, both historically and in contemporary settings. Their leadership in community transformation has been evident in grassroots movements, policy reforms, and advocacy efforts. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a key tool in fostering women's leadership and empowerment by equipping them with essential skills for resilience, emotional intelligence, and social awareness.

7. Historical and Contemporary Examples of Women Leading Community Transformation

Women have historically led transformative social movements, from suffrage campaigns to modern-day advocacy for gender equality and human rights. Research highlights that women in leadership roles often prioritize relationship-building and sustainability in their approach to social change. A study by Gordon (2020) examined the leadership of women in the grassroots microfinance organization Rojiroti, finding that their leadership style fostered collective empowerment, knowledge-sharing, and the challenging of power structures (Gordon, 2020). Similarly, Dushkova and Ivlieva (2024) analyzed global community empowerment programs and found that female-led initiatives were more likely to address sustainability and resilience challenges effectively (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024).

8. SEL as a Tool for Women's Leadership and Empowerment

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) fosters key leadership competencies, including self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills, which are crucial for women's empowerment. Research on transformative leadership suggests that SEL-based programs can help women navigate structural barriers, such as gender bias and workplace discrimination. A competency framework developed for women in South Africa's local government sector found that SEL principles—such as emotional intelligence and conflict resolution—were essential for effective leadership (van der Waldt et al., 2019). Additionally, Zulu (2022) explored how Black women professors in South Africa leveraged SEL-based strategies to navigate academia and influence institutional change (Zulu, 2022).

9. Grassroots Leadership and Sustainable Community Transformation

Grassroots leadership is often an entry point for women into broader political and social influence. Many women become leaders out of necessity,

seeking better opportunities for their families and communities. Research by Bukusi (2020) found that transformative leaders engage in active relationship-building, knowledge-sharing, and empowerment at the local level, fostering long-term systemic change (Bukusi, 2020). Additionally, research on women's participation in microfinance and local governance underscores that grassroots leadership fosters economic and social resilience (Gordon, 2020).

10. Social-Emotional Learning and Community Development

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a crucial framework for fostering problem-solving, conflict resolution, and collaboration in community development. By enhancing emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills, SEL contributes to addressing gender disparities, improving mental health, and promoting economic empowerment. Furthermore, SEL plays a vital role in shaping education, employment, and policy-making to create more inclusive and equitable societies.

11. How SEL Enhances Problem-Solving, Conflict Resolution, and Collaboration

SEL fosters critical thinking, emotional regulation, and communication skills, all of which are essential for conflict resolution and collaboration. Research has shown that SEL-based programs help individuals develop empathy and negotiation skills, reducing community tensions and fostering cooperation (Catalano et al., 2019). A systematic review of Positive Youth Development (PYD) programs in low- and middle-income countries found that SEL interventions significantly improved youth decision-making, reduced aggression, and promoted social cohesion (Catalano et al., 2019). Similarly, integrating SEL into community education programs has been effective in promoting mindfulness and emotional intelligence, which are crucial for collective problem-solving and resilience (Singha & Kanna, 2024).

12. Role of SEL in Addressing Gender Disparities, Mental Health, and Economic Empowerment

1. Gender Disparities

SEL can be a powerful tool in addressing gender disparities by empowering women and marginalized groups with confidence, leadership skills, and emotional resilience. Research by Dhiman (2023) highlights the role of education, including SEL principles, in reducing gender inequality and promoting women's empowerment. In rural India, social education programs

based on SEL principles have been instrumental in empowering marginalized women by fostering self-efficacy and collective action (Saikia et al., 2024).

2. Mental Health

Mental well-being is a key aspect of SEL, as it equips individuals with strategies to cope with stress, anxiety, and trauma. Research in India suggests that incorporating mindfulness practices and SEL-based mental health interventions in educational and community settings can significantly enhance emotional resilience and reduce stigma around mental health issues (Singha & Kanna, 2024). These programs not only support individual well-being but also contribute to healthier, more supportive communities.

3. Economic Empowerment

SEL has also been linked to economic empowerment by fostering skills necessary for workforce readiness and entrepreneurship. A study on B40 women (low-income households) in Malaysia found that emotional management skills, a core component of SEL, played a crucial role in improving financial decision-making and professional growth (Maideen et al., 2024). Moreover, public policy recommendations emphasize SEL as a means of supporting women's economic independence and leadership in the workforce (Aref & Fallentine, 2023).

13. Intersection of SEL with Education, Employment, and Policy-Making

1. Education

SEL is increasingly recognized as a fundamental part of educational curricula worldwide. A review of gender-focused education programs found that integrating SEL into schools can reduce dropout rates, enhance academic performance, and improve student well-being (Dhiman, 2023). Programs that combine SEL with skill-building in leadership and communication are particularly effective in promoting social mobility and reducing inequality.

2. Employment

Employers are increasingly valuing SEL competencies such as teamwork, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. Research suggests that SEL-based job training programs help individuals develop resilience and leadership skills, leading to greater job retention and workplace satisfaction (Maideen et al., 2024). These findings highlight the growing need for SEL integration in workforce development initiatives.

3. Policy-Making

Policy-makers are recognizing the benefits of SEL in community development and public policy. Research on women's empowerment in the Gulf

region highlights the need for SEL-based policies that promote gender inclusion, social cohesion, and economic resilience (Aref & Fallentine, 2023). Similarly, government strategies aimed at reducing domestic violence emphasize the role of SEL in fostering nonviolent communication and emotional regulation (Aziz, 2025).

14. Challenges and Barriers to Women's Leadership and SEL Integration

Despite the growing recognition of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) as a transformative tool in leadership, education, and governance, several challenges hinder its full integration. Women, in particular, face significant social, cultural, and structural barriers to leadership and participation in SEL-based programs. This discussion explores (1) social and cultural barriers to women's leadership and SEL integration, (2) structural limitations in education and governance, and (3) strategies to overcome these barriers through policy and practice.

15. Social and Cultural Barriers to Women's Leadership and SEL Integration

1. Gender Norms and Cultural Expectations

Social and cultural biases often limit women's access to leadership roles, particularly in male-dominated sectors. Research on board diversity in Lebanese banks highlights the impact of patriarchal norms and succession planning biases in restricting women's rise to leadership positions (El Hajj et al., 2017). Similar trends are evident in Moroccan sports federations, where women's professional advancement is hindered by deep-rooted gender biases and a lack of institutional support (Lotfy et al., 2025).

2. Religious and Minority Rights Barriers

In many societies, religious and traditional beliefs further reinforce gender roles, limiting women's participation in leadership and SEL initiatives. A study on Islamic education and gender equality found that women often struggle to gain decision-making power in educational institutions due to cultural constraints and societal expectations (Januar & Rahmi, 2024). Addressing these barriers requires a shift toward inclusive educational frameworks that incorporate SEL principles to promote empathy, tolerance, and justice.

16. Structural Limitations in Education and Governance

1. Barriers in Education

Education systems often lack the infrastructure to integrate SEL effectively, particularly in regions with limited resources. Research on Aboriginal-led education in Australia found that governance structures often fail to recognize culturally relevant leadership models, creating barriers for Indigenous women in education and leadership (Stanley, 2024). Similarly, studies on child and adolescent mental health in Ethiopia highlight the lack of institutional support for SEL-based interventions, limiting their effectiveness in addressing social and psychological challenges (Engdawork et al., 2025).

2. Governance and Policy Challenges

Governance structures frequently exclude women from decision-making processes, further limiting the implementation of SEL policies. A study on migrant integration in Peru found that governance models often fail to include SEL frameworks, leading to gaps in social inclusion and workforce development for marginalized populations (Schmitt et al., 2023). The same issue arises in Pacific Island maternal health policies, where a lack of SEL-informed approaches has resulted in disparities in care quality (Wilson et al., 2020).

17. Strategies to Overcome These Barriers Through Policy and Practice

1. Gender-Inclusive Leadership Programs

Developing targeted leadership programs that incorporate SEL principles can help break gender barriers. Initiatives that focus on mentorship, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution have been successful in improving women's representation in leadership (Lotfy et al., 2025).

2. SEL Integration in Education Policy

Governments and policymakers need to incorporate SEL into national education policies. Research on child mental health in Ethiopia suggests that policy changes must address both institutional and societal barriers to effectively implement SEL (Engdawork et al., 2025).

3. Community-Led Governance Models

Empowering communities to take ownership of SEL initiatives has been a successful strategy in some regions. The Warlpiri Education and Training Trust in Australia provides an example of a culturally adaptive governance model that prioritizes Indigenous leadership and community engagement (Stanley, 2024).

18. Policy Implications and Future Directions in Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has emerged as a transformative framework with significant implications for education, workforce development, and social inclusion. Governments and organizations play a crucial role in promoting SEL initiatives, particularly for women and girls, to foster leadership, resilience, and equity. This discussion explores (1) the role of governments and organizations in promoting SEL-based initiatives, (2) integrating SEL in formal and informal education for women and girls, and (3) future research and policy recommendations.

19. Role of Governments and Organizations in Promoting SEL-Based Initiatives

1. Government Policies and National SEL Frameworks

Governments worldwide are increasingly recognizing SEL as a fundamental component of education and workforce development. Research on SEL in Japan highlights how cultural and policy barriers impact the adoption of SEL in formal education, demonstrating the need for tailored implementation strategies that consider societal values and institutional structures (Mori, 2022). Similarly, Panama's national SEL initiative, *Me and My New World*, was developed to enhance personal competencies and promote gender equality through school-based programs (Araúz-Ledezma et al., 2020).

2. Role of International Organizations and NGOs

Global organizations such as the United Nations and UNICEF advocate for SEL as a tool for addressing systemic inequalities in education and employment. A study on high-risk youth emphasized the role of SEL in career development, workforce readiness, and poverty reduction, highlighting how policy interventions aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals can improve educational and economic outcomes (Solberg et al., 2020).

3. SEL for Social Inclusion and Mental Health

SEL programs also play a vital role in supporting marginalized communities. Research on refugee inclusion in the U.S. found that culturally responsive SEL programs enhance belonging, reduce acculturative stress, and promote well-being among displaced populations (Bennouna et al., 2021). These findings reinforce the need for SEL policies that address mental health and social integration.

20. Integrating SEL in Formal and Informal Education for Women and Girls

1. Formal Education and SEL Curriculum Design

Integrating SEL into formal education is essential for promoting gender equity and leadership development. Research on SEL in early childhood education in Canada demonstrated that socio-emotional competencies positively influence academic performance and peer interactions, supporting the need for SEL integration from a young age (Zhang et al., 2024).

2. Informal Education and Community-Based SEL Programs

Beyond formal schooling, community-led SEL programs are crucial for women's empowerment. A study on gender and social-emotional learning in Panama revealed that SEL interventions can challenge traditional gender roles and promote equal relationships among adolescents (Araúz-Ledezma et al., 2022). Similarly, workforce training programs incorporating SEL principles have been shown to improve leadership skills and economic opportunities for women in underserved communities (Solberg et al., 2020).

21. Future Research and Policy Recommendations

1. Expanding SEL Research and Implementation Strategies

Future research should focus on scaling SEL programs while considering cultural, economic, and institutional contexts. Studies emphasize the need for localized SEL frameworks that align with national education policies and labor market demands (Mori, 2022).

2. Policy Recommendations

National SEL Standards – Governments should establish national SEL guidelines to ensure uniformity in implementation across schools and community programs.

Gender-Responsive SEL Initiatives – Policymakers should integrate SEL into gender empowerment policies to enhance leadership, conflict resolution, and financial literacy for women.

SEL in Workforce Development – Expanding SEL-based job training and entrepreneurship programs can promote career advancement, particularly for women in marginalized communities.

SEL for Social Inclusion – Governments should fund SEL programs targeting refugees, migrants, and vulnerable populations to promote social integration and well-being.

22. Conclusion

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) is a powerful catalyst for leadership, resilience, and social transformation, particularly for women and marginalized groups. By equipping women with emotional intelligence, conflict resolution skills, and economic empowerment opportunities, SEL fosters leadership development and community engagement (Dhiman, 2023; Gordon, 2020). It also plays a crucial role in building inclusive communities by addressing gender disparities, promoting mental well-being, and improving workplace diversity (Bennouna et al., 2021; Solberg et al., 2020). However, cultural, structural, and policy barriers continue to hinder its full integration, especially in regions where entrenched gender norms persist (Mori, 2022). To fully realize SEL's potential, governments must embed it in national education policies, ensuring that curricula include gender-responsive SEL training from an early age (Zhang et al., 2024). Policymakers should establish SEL-based workforce programs to promote women's leadership and economic mobility (Aref & Fallentine, 2023; Maideen et al., 2024), while nonprofits and grassroots organizations must scale SEL-driven initiatives to support community resilience and gender equity (Araúz-Ledezma et al., 2020). Ultimately, investing in SEL-based policies, education reforms, and leadership training will create more inclusive and sustainable societies. Future research should focus on global expansion, cultural adaptability, and institutional support to maximize SEL's impact on women's leadership and community development.

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AI-Powered Strategies to Reduce Cybercrimes Against Women: Issues, Root Causes, and Remedies

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Abstract

Women now have additional opportunities for activism, entrepreneurship, education, and communication thanks to the internet's and social media's explosive growth. However, this digital transformation has also presented new difficulties. Women are more at danger in this modern age from things like identity theft, trolling, doxing, cyberstalking, online harassment, and even the improper use of personal photos. This chapter examines these concerns in detail, including the primary categories of cybercrimes that target women as well as their consequences. The main Indian regulations that safeguard women online are also reviewed. Another area of interest is the growing contribution of artificial intelligence (AI) to the battle against cybercrime, from identifying suspicious activity to screening harmful content to assisting law enforcement with prediction tools. Popular smartphone applications and AI-powered safety tools that women may utilize to be safe online are among the practical options that are covered. The chapter also looks at the causes of these crimes, including technological flaws, cultural prejudices, and societal attitudes. Stronger legislation, more digital literacy, more intelligent AI-based moderation, mental health assistance, and international collaboration are all suggested as ways to tackle the issue. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the need for collaboration in order to create a safer online environment for women. Building a safe, inclusive, and reliable digital environment is a task for educators, legislators, technologists, and civil society.

Keywords: Cybercrime, Identity Theft, Doxing, Cyberstalking, Artificial Intelligence, Natural language processing

1. Introduction

The rapid development of social media and the internet has improved how individuals engage, communicate, and express themselves. Women have benefited greatly from digital spaces, which enable them to network, study,

launch enterprises, and support causes throughout the world. However, women are now more susceptible to specific security risks including identity theft, doxing, online harassment, cyberstalking, and revenge porn as a result of their greater online presence. [1] In addition to the psychological and emotional suffering they cause to their victims, these threats can have major physical, social, and economic repercussions. Despite being essential, traditional cybersecurity techniques are usually reactive and have limited capacity to manage the speed, and complexity of gender-targeted online harassment. This is where artificial intelligence's (AI) revolutionary potential lies. AI-powered solutions can proactively detect risky behavior, eliminate offensive content, examine possible patterns of activity, and notify users and authorities in real time. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the creation and use of AI-based tools aimed at reducing the risks women face on the internet. It examines these systems' workings, the underlying technologies that enable them, ethical challenges they present, and their role in encouraging a safer and inclusive digital. This highlights the need of collaboration among technologists, lawmakers, educators, and civil society to make cyberspace a place where women can interact with confidence, ease, and safety[1], [3], and [4].

2. What is cyber crime?

Cybercrime incorporates any illegal activity involving computers, networks, or electronic devices. "The unlawful use of any communication device to perpetrate or assist in committing any illegal act " is called cybercrime[1]. These crimes can be committed against individuals, organizations, or governments with the goal of obtaining private information, extorting money, or interfering with corporate activities [5].

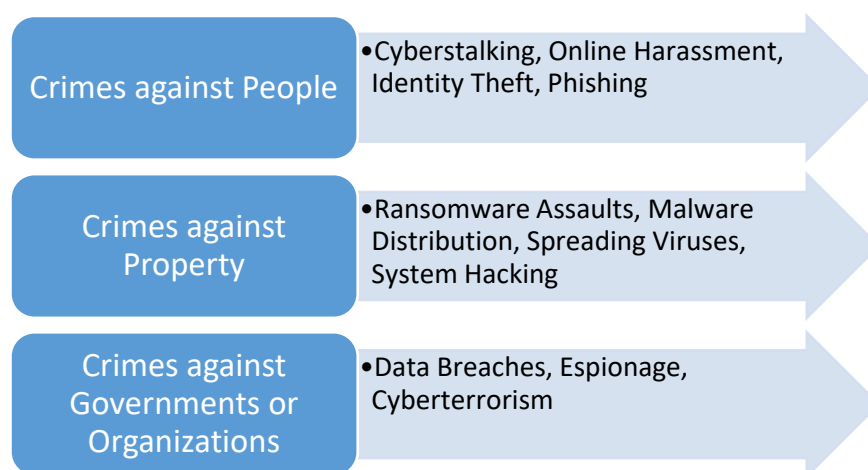


Fig 1: Categories of Cybercrime

3. Types of cybercrimes against women in India

Information technology now underlies modern technical and worldwide development in our internet-savvy society. Internet users are becoming increasingly powerful and witnessing changes in their lives as a result of the internet's progression and the apps, goods, and services it offers. Internet-related crime has increased in leaps and bounds due to the numerous advancements made to the internet. Cybercrime makes people very vulnerable. This new type of crime is committed worldwide, and its soft targets are women. The various forms of cybercrime against women are then covered: [3]–[9].

Cyber Stalking: Stalking means following someone to harass or victimise them. Cyber stalking is the practice of following someone using the internet, e-mail, or chat rooms [3]–[5], and [9].

Cyber Defamation: When someone uses a computer or the internet to publicly broadcast defamatory information about another person, or sends defamatory texts or emails about that person, this is known as cyber defamation [3]–[5], and [9].

Cyber Bullying: When a woman is humiliated, harassed, embarrassed, threatened, or otherwise targeted by another individual using interactive digital technologies, the internet, or mobile phones, it is considered to be cyberbullying. Cyberbullies harass women by posting any kind of humiliating content, sending or posting vulgar messages online, hacking the account, threatening to commit acts of violence, sending pornography threats, and stalking through calls or messages [3]–[5], and [9].

Voyeurism: The cybercrime voyeurism is committed when anybody watches or captures the image of a woman engaged in a private act in circumstances where she has the belief of not being observed either by the perpetrator or any other person, but those images are used to be disseminated [3] and [9].

Revenge Porn / Non-Consensual Image Sharing: Sharing a woman's private photos or films without her permission, usually in an effort to embarrass or extort her. These behaviours include seeking amusement, peer approval for profit-driven endeavours, humiliating cyberbullying methods, and retaliation from an ex-partner [7] and [9].

Identify Theft and Phishing: The act of stealing someone else's identity in order to commit fraud is known as identity theft. Pretending to be someone

you trust is a technique called phishing that is used to get private information. Women are disproportionately at risk of identity theft and phishing scams, frequently targeted with romance scams, bogus giveaways, or requests for personal information under false pretenses. This type of cybercrime involves obtaining private data, such as bank account information or passwords, frequently via phishing emails or social media catfishing in an effort to establish trust before taking advantage of it [4], [5], and [7].

Cyber Pornography: Cyber pornography poses a threat to female internet users as well. This includes the spreading of pornographic websites with sexual images and videos. Pornographic websites are threatening women in society in an attempt to get sexual favours or take revenge [3], [5], and [9].

Online Grooming & Trafficking: When an adult utilizes the internet to establish emotional ties and trust with a girl or young woman with the goal of sexually abusing, controlling, or trafficking her, this is known as "online grooming." The activities like recruiting, abusing, or selling women and girls for forced labour, sexual exploitation, or other illicit purposes are done through the use of internet networks. Traffickers entice victims with false promises (jobs, modelling, marriage) via social media, dating apps, or employment portals. On the dark web, victims' images and personal information are occasionally sold [3], [5], [9], and [10].

Cyber Extortion / Sextortion: The criminals used manipulated or intimate images to blackmail women, then demanded cash or sexual favours in return [5] and [7].

Cyber Morphing: Morphing is changing an original image of any woman by an unpermitted user. Dishonest individuals frequently adopt a woman's image, edit that image, and then distribute it illicitly. This crime aims at online extortion of women or humiliation [3] and [9].

Doxing: Doxing is a type of cyberbullying in which targeted women are harassed, exposed, monetarily harmed, or exploited using private or sensitive information, remarks, or documents. Accessing particular information about women, like their home location, phone number, and place of employment, and then posting it online for public viewing is against the law [9].

4. The legal provisions for cybercrimes against women in India

Women are particularly susceptible to particular types of online crimes that target their safety, privacy, and dignity as a result of the growing usage of

social media and the internet. These cybercrimes have major societal and financial repercussions in addition to psychological and emotional suffering. Awareness, prevention, and prompt reporting all depend on knowing the different kinds of cybercrimes and the appropriate legal remedies. A thorough taxonomy of the most common cybercrimes that Indian women encounter is given in the following table, along with the pertinent legal provisions found in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Information Technology Act of 2000.[3], [11]–[13].

Table 1: List of cybercrimes against women with legal protection

Sr. No	Type of Cybercrime	Description / Example	Relevant Legal Protection in India
1	Cyberstalking	Repeatedly sending threats, tracking online activity, following on social media.	IPC Sec. 354D – Online Stalking [3][14] IPC Sec. 78 - Monitors the use by a woman of the internet, email, or any other form of electronic communication [9]
2	Online Harassment & Cyberbullying	Abusive posts, trolling, targeted hate campaigns, threats.	IPC Sec. 509 – Insulting modesty of woman IPC Sec. 354A – Sexual harassment [3] [14] IT Act Sec. 66E – Violation of privacy [3][9]
3	Revenge Porn / Non-Consensual Intimate Image Sharing	Posting private photos/videos without consent, often by ex-partners.	IPC Sec. 354C – Voyeurism [14] IPC Sec. 292 & 293 – Obscene material circulation IT Act Sec. 67 & 67A – Publishing/transmitting obscene or sexually explicit material [9]

4	Cyber Morphing	Editing images/videos to make them obscene or defamatory.	IPC Sec. 469 – Forgery to harm reputation [15] IPC Sec. 500 – Criminal defamation IT Act Sec. 66D – Cheating by personation [3]
5	Doxing	Publishing private details (address, phone no.) online without consent.	IT Act Sec. 66E – Violation of privacy[3][14] IPC Sec. 503 – Criminal intimidation[15]
6	Identity Theft	Stealing Aadhaar, PAN, bank, or login details for misuse.	IT Act Sec. 66C – Identity theft (3 years jail + fine) [3]
7	Phishing & Financial Fraud	Fake messages/emails tricking victims into sharing OTPs, passwords, banking details.	IT Act Sec. 66D – Cheating by personation [3] RBI Cyber Fraud Guidelines – Victim reimbursement rights
8	Cyber Blackmail & Sextortion	Threatening to leak private content unless money/favors are given.	IPC Sec. 384 – Extortion [15] IPC Sec. 503 & 506 – Criminal intimidation [15]
9	Cyber Defamation	Posting false/defamatory statements about a woman online.	IPC Sec. 499 & 500 – Defamation (up to 2 years imprisonment)[14]
10	Online Grooming	Adults luring girls online for sexual exploitation/meeting.	POCSO Act Sec. 11 & 12 – Sexual harassment of minors IT Act Sec. 67B – Child pornography / exploitation [14]
11	Online Human Trafficking	Recruiting, selling, or exploiting women using online platforms.	IPC Sec. 370 & 370A – Human trafficking [15] Immoral Traffic

			(Prevention) Act, 1956 – Prohibits trafficking for prostitution [10]

5. Role of AI in combating cybercrimes against women

The number of cyber offenses against women, including revenge porn, doxing, identity theft, online harassment, and cyberstalking, is increasing worldwide. These offenses not only infringe on privacy, but also silence women's opinions, limit digital engagement, and have an impact on mental well-being. Compared to conventional manual methods, artificial intelligence (AI) has become a potent tool for detecting, preventing, and responding to these crimes more effectively. [4] and [5].

1) AI for Early Warning and Detection:

AI techniques are used to monitor online content like social media posts, websites, and forums, to detect and report threats, hate speech, manipulated photos or movies and abusive language. It allows women to receive early warnings when stalkers attempt to access their personal information [16] and [17].

2) AI for Safety and Prevention:

AI tools may find periods and locations by examining cybercrime trends with a high risk. Live tracking and automated evidence recording during emergencies can be done using AI. AI-powered chatbots or virtual assistants. Women may activate assistance and share their location in real time even though they don't speak. Some AI tools can identify questionable financial activities and stop account takeovers which may reduce the risk of identity theft aimed at female business owners or influencers [18].

3) AI for Support & Reaction:

AI chatbots alleviate victims' fear and doubt by helping them with the reporting process. AI programs automatically prepare and preserve digital evidence for judicial admissibility. Victims of online harassment may find initial psychological assistance via AI-powered mental health chatbots [16] and [18].

4) AI for Education and Awareness:

Women may learn about phishing awareness, password security, and cyber hygiene from personalized AI-driven learning platforms. With the help of Natural Language Processing (NLP), AI chatbots now provide safety advice and education in one's own native language [18] and [19].

6. List different tools for protecting women against cybercrime

A range of AI-powered solutions designed especially for identifying and stopping cybercrimes against women are highlighted in this area. These resources are made to effectively and efficiently handle a range of cybersecurity issues:[5] and [18]

Table 2: Tools for Women's Safety against Cybercrime

Sr. No	Tool / App	AI Features	Use Case for Women's Safety
1	Aura	Dark web monitoring, predictive fraud alerts, ID theft protection	Protects against identity theft, financial scams, fake profiles
2	IBM Trusteer	Behavioral biometrics, phishing detection, adaptive authentication	Prevents bank fraud, phishing, unauthorized online transactions
3	Darktrace	Self-learning AI, anomaly detection, autonomous response	Stops hacking attempts, phishing campaigns, ransomware
4	Harassment Manager (by Jigsaw + Twitter)	Bulk reporting automation, content filtering	Helps women under mass harassment report and block abusers efficiently
5	Perspective API (Google Jigsaw)	NLP-based toxicity scoring for online text	Detects hate speech, misogynistic or threatening language in forums, chats
6	Bot Sentinel	AI detection of bots and trolls on Twitter/X	Helps women identify coordinated harassment campaigns
7	StopNCII.org	Hash-matching AI technology	Prevents non-consensual intimate images from being re-uploaded online
8	bSafe	AI-powered SOS alerts, voice activation, automatic recording	Real-time location tracking and alert for emergencies or stalking
9	Norton Genie / McAfee Scam Protection	AI scam detection for links & messages	Protects women from phishing links sent via SMS, email, or social media

10	FaceCheck.ID	Reverse image search to identify impersonators	Helps women find fake profiles or catfish accounts using their photos
11	Bodyguard AI	AI-based social media content moderation	Removes abusive, racist, or sexist messages from women's feeds automatically.
12	Sensity AI / Deepware Scanner	Deepfake detection	Protects women from fake videos or manipulated intimate content.
13	Safetipin	AI analyzes images of streets to rate them on lighting, crowd, visibility, and presence of security	Helps women choose safest routes and report unsafe areas
14	Noonlight	AI interprets panic signals, verifies emergencies, and contacts police dispatch automatically	Reduces response time and ensures help arrives even if user can't talk
15	Life360	AI-based driving and location insights, predictive alerts for accidents or unusual activity	Keeps family informed of user's movements, alerts if something abnormal occurs
16	Watch Over Me	AI analyzes user's location history and time patterns to detect potential risk zones	Notifies contacts if user is delayed in reaching destination
17	Guardian by Truecaller	AI-based verification of contacts and real-time location sharing optimization	Ensures alerts go to real, verified contacts and updates them continuously
18	Circle of 6	AI prioritizes contacts based on proximity and availability for faster help	Sends alerts to best-placed responders in user's network
19	Microsoft Seeing AI (Special Use)	AI narrates surroundings using	Empowers visually impaired women to be

		object and text recognition	more aware of surroundings and stay safe

7. Causes of cyber-crimes against women

The multifaceted nature of cybercrimes against women stems from a combination of psychological factors, technical abuse, legal loopholes, social standards, and a lack of digital competence. In order to address these issues, comprehensive solutions are needed, including proactive reporting systems, robust legislation, awareness campaigns, and AI-powered security technologies. The next section describes the various causes of cyber-crimes against women [19].

1. Social & Cultural Factors

For many years, the women of the family have carried family honour and dignity. The majority of countries have patriarchal societies. The patriarchal character of society is among the most important elements leading to women's exploitation through internet crime. Gender inequalities significantly affect nurturing habits in India. Women are taught at all costs to remain mute and try to hide cybercrime from their families [4], [20], [21].

2. Psychological and Emotional Factors

Everyone is using the Internet these days. However, should we consider the women of the time, many of them are homemakers and occasionally they feel isolated. Women's loneliness has prompted them to visit dating sites, interact with others on various social networking sites, and divulge personal information to complete strangers. Women in such an emotional condition frequently become victims and reveal their secrets and sensitive personal information about their home, family, possessions, and banking information to an unknown individual. Some cyber stalkers and harassers aim for vengeance or dominance; others engage in cybercrimes for enjoyment, looking for excitement or retribution following female rejection [20].

3. Technological Factors

Every woman in this modern era is using phones, social media, and messaging applications for their pleasure or some times to cure their loneliness. But Women become viral by sharing their personal photographs or videos; they are unaware of two-factor authentication or a robust password mechanism, hence rendering them vulnerable. Because of this, women occasionally fall prey to harassment, defamation, or vengeful pornography [20], [22].

4. Legal & Institutional Factors

The primary cause of the rise in cyber-crimes against women in India is lack of legal security. Often anonymous, the crimes need a cyber-expert to decode the actual identification of the perpetrator. Laws may need to be strengthened and the appropriate execution of such legislation should also be guaranteed. To safeguard women from cyber-crimes, the government and the legislature should take strong action [14].

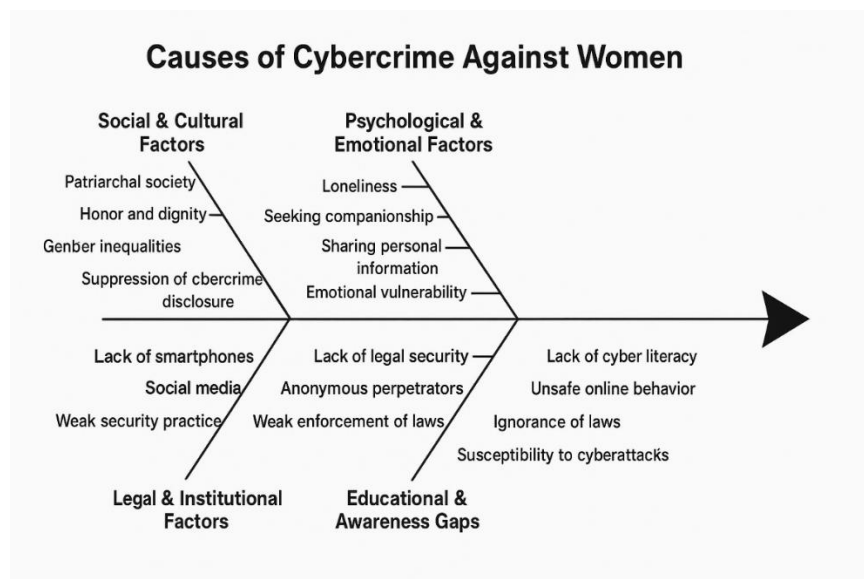


Figure 2: Causes of cybercrime against women

5. Educational & Awareness Gaps

Another element contributing to the widespread cyberattacks against women in India is a lack of knowledge of computers and cybersecurity. Many Women in India lack a fundamental understanding of safe online behavior, including setting privacy settings, avoiding phishing scams, and establishing robust passwords. They frequently don't know about the laws that prohibit cybercrime. They are susceptible to cyberattacks because of their ignorance [14], [21].

8. Strategies to mitigate cybercrimes against women

Cybercrimes aimed at women—including identity theft, doxing, cyberstalking, trolling, and online harassment greatly compromise their general safety, mental health, and privacy. Combating these offenses calls for a

multifaceted approach, including legal, technical, pedagogical, and social steps. Key tactics are listed below:[19]

1) Legislative and Regulatory Action [4], [5]

- The government needs to update and enact strong cybercrime laws that specifically target cybercrime against women.
- Create NGOs, cybercrime units, or cyber forensic labs dedicated just to women.
- Professionals with expertise in cyber forensics are needed to expedite the reaction and investigation of the offender.
- To speed up the administration of justice, cases involving cybercrime against women are given priority in fast-track tribunals.
- Create international collaborations to keep an eye on offenders from other countries who are committing crimes.

2) AI-Based and Technological Solutions [21]

- Artificial intelligence might completely change how we approach cyber offenses. Real-time detection and prevention of cyber offenses is made possible by artificial intelligence.
- Large volumes of data can be examined by artificial intelligence algorithms to spot suspicious behavior and notify law enforcement authorities for action.
- Additionally, AI can also be used to detect trends in cybercrimes, which can aid in anticipating and stopping similar incidents in the future.
- Encourage the use of AI-powered women's safety apps that combine GPS tracking, AI alerts, and emergency contact features to guarantee women's safety.

3) Digital Literacy and Awareness [3], [5], [21]

- Give women correct instruction on how to generate strong passwords, recognize phishing scams, and utilize social media safely.
- Encourage responsible internet usage by arranging awareness campaigns in schools, universities, and workplaces.
- Promote women's immediate help by sharing national cybercrime websites (such Cybercrime.gov.in in India) and helplines.
- Incorporating cyber security courses into college or high school courses.

4) Psychological and Social Assistance [3], [5], [21]

- Provide women who are abused online with free helplines and counseling for psychological health care.
- Women's rights groups and non-governmental organizations can help victims file complaints against the cybercriminals and seek justice.

- Establish safe online discussion boards where women may share their experiences and seek guidance.

5) Development of Policy, Innovation, and Research [3]

- For the reporting and examination of cybercrime cases, Cyber Police Stations and Cyber Crime Cells should be established.
- Encourage police and judicial training programs for dealing with cybercrime situations.
- Watch out for emerging dangers including female-targeting malware, deepfakes, and AI frauds.
- Motivate female entrepreneurs to develop technology with a safety focus.
- As technology advances, laws must be revised often to handle new issues.

9. Conclusion

A crucial issue in the digital era is making sure that online continues to be a place of empowerment rather than victimization, which is highlighted by the high frequency of cybercrimes against women. Technology has made online abuse more sophisticated and widespread, but it has also brought about effective remedies. Artificial intelligence has the potential to change how society react to gender-based cybercrimes because of its capacity to analyze large datasets, identify dangers in real time, and issue early warnings. But technology alone cannot fix the issue. A comprehensive strategy is necessary for effective mitigation, including strong and constantly updated cyber legislation, quick law enforcement tools, privacy-first digital platforms, community-level digital literacy, and psychological support programs for victims. The collective duty of society to eradicate victim-blaming cultures and normalize reporting is equally important as holding social media platforms accountable. It is feasible to create a safer online space where women may engage, express, and prosper fearlessly by combining legal, technological, educational, and social tactics. In order to guarantee that the internet becomes a place of safety, equality, and empowerment for everyone, the chapter ends with a plea for further innovation, policy improvement, and cooperative action. To combat deepfake usage, future solutions should concentrate on blockchain-based authentication, multilingual abuse monitoring, and AI-powered early danger identification. AI integration with police reporting systems helps expedite investigations while safeguarding the privacy of victims. Global data-sharing networks and digital literacy initiatives will bolster response and preventative initiatives. It is important to support women-led cybersecurity innovation in order to build more secure and welcoming online environments.

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Women’s Scientific Legacy in Higher Education- Reintegrating the 64 Kalās under NEP 2020

Vibha S. Vaishnav

Abstract

Ancient Indian education was founded on a holistic vision that emphasized the integrated development of individuals, encompassing not only vocational training but also intellectual, artistic, moral growth and spiritual development. Central to this framework were the 64 Kalās—comprehensive arts and sciences designed to cultivate a well-rounded and capable human being. This inclusive educational paradigm presents valuable insights for contemporary educational reforms.

This article revisits the 64 Kalās from a scientific and gender-inclusive perspective, highlighting the significant yet underrecognized contributions of women such as Rishikas like Gargi, Maitreyi, Lopamudra. In the context of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, it advocates for the incorporation of these traditional knowledge systems into modern higher education to foster innovation, inclusivity, and intellectual equity.

Keywords: 64 Kalās, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), NEP 2020, Women in Science, Vedic Education, Multidisciplinary Learning

1. Introduction

The Chatushashti Kalās, or 64 arts/skills, represent a profound civilizational vision of integrated knowledge in ancient India, seamlessly blending aesthetics with applied sciences and technologies. These Kalās were systematically practiced in Vedic gurukulas and later universities like Takshashila and Nalanda. [1,2] While often perceived as purely artistic or leisurely pursuits within the humanities, many Kalās are deeply scientific, mathematical, and technological in nature, embodying a sophisticated knowledge system. [1, 2]

Crucially, women in ancient India were not only active practitioners but also significant innovators in these diverse Kalās, contributing to fields such as mathematics, metallurgy, astronomy, architecture, and medicine. This work aims to uncover these often-underrepresented contributions, demonstrating their scientific rigor and presenting a compelling case for their integration into higher education programs aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The NEP 2020 vision actively promotes multidisciplinary education and the inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), encouraging skill-based learning integrated with culture and technology. [3,4] Reviving the Kalās is not merely a cultural endeavor; it is a strategic imperative for fostering innovation and a holistic understanding of knowledge, ensuring intellectual equity in the 21st century. [3, 4]

2. The 64 Kalās: An Integrated Knowledge Framework

The 64 Kalās encompassed a holistic knowledge framework that transcended rigid disciplinary boundaries, integrating sciences, arts, mathematics, music, craftsmanship, and metaphysics. This integrated approach emphasized both theoretical understanding and practical application for individual and collective well-being, aiming to foster a "complete person" who integrated physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of human life. They included diverse fields: [2]

Performing and Fine Arts: Singing, playing musical instruments, dancing, painting, composing poems, understanding dramas, and scenic representations.

Practical and Domestic Skills: Culinary art, making artificial flowers, garland-making, floor decoration, preparing beds, proper use and care of dress and ornaments, sewing, elementary carpentry, repairing household tools, and preparing toys for children.

Intellectual and Linguistic Pursuits: Reading, writing, understanding different languages, knowledge of dictionaries and vocabularies, solution of riddles and enigmas, mental exercises (like completing stanzas), drawing inferences, and knowledge of various dialects. Grammatical sense, literary, and syntactical faculties were also developed informally.

Sciences and Technology: Mathematics, accounting, engineering, sculpture, agriculture, cattle-breeding, commerce, medicine (Ayurveda), chemistry, mineralogy, metallurgy, and the art of building (architecture). Specific arts related to gold, silver, jewels, and gems were also included, as well as knowledge of mines and quarries.

Physical and Martial Arts: Physical exercises, practice with sword, single stick, quarter staff, and bow and arrow. Gymnastics was also part of this training.

Social and Personal Refinement: Skill in the use of body ointments and paints for teeth, applying perfumed ointments, dressing hair with unguents, knowledge of social rules, and how to pay respect and compliments. The art of knowing a person's character from features was also noted.

Specialized and Esoteric Knowledge: Art of understanding writing in cipher, changing and disguising appearances, framing mystical diagrams, and even using mantras for obtaining property.[5,6]

3. Women's Central Role in Ancient Indian Education and Knowledge Systems

Ancient Indian society, particularly during the Vedic and Upanishadic periods (circa 1500–500 BCE – according to available sources), allowed for significant intellectual participation by women, a feature remarkable compared to many other contemporary civilizations. The gurukula system, though largely dominated by male students, was not entirely closed to women; girls from scholarly, Brahmin, and royal families often received education either formally or through private instruction. Women were encouraged to undergo the Upanayana (initiation ritual for education) and pursue Brahmacharya (celibate student life), granting them the right to study the Vedas and engage in intellectual dialogues, suggesting that intellectual capability was not gender-exclusive. [1,3,6,7]

Several socio-cultural conditions during the Vedic period supported this engagement: the absence of rigid child marriage allowed women time for study the notion of Atman being beyond gender, granted spiritual and intellectual equality, and intellectual family lineages encouraged daughters alongside sons. Proficiency in Sanskrit was not gender-limited among the upper classes. This created a cultural climate where women's participation in knowledge systems was natural and respected. While this egalitarian space regrettably diminished in later periods due to social rigidification, the legacy of women thinkers persisted through oral traditions and spiritual lineages.

4. Rishikās: Pioneers of Scientific and Philosophical Inquiry

The Rig Veda and other Vedic scriptures highlight the presence of Rishikās—female seers—who composed hymns and offered profound philosophical and scientific insights. Women such as Gargi, Maitreyi, and Lopamudra were pivotal in shaping discourses on metaphysics, cosmology, and

human consciousness. Their contributions, embedded in sacred texts, demonstrate a deep understanding of natural and metaphysical laws. [7,8,9]

4.1. Mathematics and Astronomy

Ganita (Mathematics) and Jyotisha (Astronomy) were foundational sciences in ancient India. Gargi Vachaknavi challenged sage Yajnavalkya on the nature of Akshara, raising questions about the universe's support structure—ideas parallel to modern cosmology. Her dialectical engagement reflected comprehension of infinity, abstraction, and recursion. Maitreyi, a scholar and spiritual partner of Yajnavalkya, explored the unity of Atman and Brahman—philosophical precursors to calculus and zero theory. Lilavati, featured in Bhaskaracharya's treatise, symbolizes the enduring role of women in mathematical tradition. The Sulba Sutras, often orally transmitted through families, contain early geometric methods, including the Pythagorean triple, essential in altar design and astronomy—areas where women likely participated actively. [10-14]

4.2. Architecture and Yajña Design

Yajña-kundas (ritual altars) were constructed with precise mathematical and astronomical principles. Lopamudra, consort of Rishi Agastya, is credited with hymn composition and altar knowledge. Women trained in Kalās such as Vastu-Vidya (architecture), Rekha-Chitra-Karma (geometry), and Takshana (carpentry) contributed to yajña preparations and spatial alignment. They engaged in Soma-yajnas, calculated muhurta (auspicious time), and aligned sacrificial grounds using ritual geometry—an early form of applied architectural science. [15,16]

4.3. Ayurveda and Botany

Women historically served as herbalists, midwives, and Ayurvedic healers. The Sushruta Samhita documents female contributions to medicine. Katyayani was noted for her work in botanical healing. Apala composed hymns invoking herbal remedies, and Ghosha, who suffered from disease, composed healing verses to the Ashwini Kumaras. Kalās such as Vrikshayurveda-Yoga (plant science) and Sugandha-Yukti (aromatic science) involved extraction, formulation, and therapeutic application—processes with empirical and patent-worthy value. [2,17]

4.4. Music, Acoustics, and Sound Science

Gita-Vidya (music), Vadya-Vidya (instrumentation), and Udaka-Vadyam (water music) were deeply scientific arts exploring sound, resonance, and frequency. Figures such as Anasuya, Shakuntala, and Romasha exemplified women's mastery in acoustic theory, musical notation, and rhythmic precision. Their contributions relate directly to pattern recognition and auditory science—areas now explored in acoustic research and sound therapy. [18-20] Recent neuroscientific research on mantra-induced brainwave states using EEG and fNIRS validates the ancient acoustic framework through the lens of modern brain studies [21].

4.5. Intellectual Games and Proto-AI

Several Kalās point to foundational knowledge in logic, decision-making, and symbolic communication—precursors to AI and computational linguistics. Prahelika (riddles), Durvacaka-Yoga (cryptic speech), and Akshara-Mushtika-Kathanam (hand-coded language) demonstrate advanced abstraction and encoding skills, reflected today in natural language processing and semiotics. [21] Large language models such as retrieval-augmented LLMs are now being trained on curated Vedantic datasets to preserve and digitally annotate these ancient knowledge texts, ensuring accuracy and minimizing hallucination in automated reasoning [23,24].

4.6. Applied Arts and Technology

Women were integral to technological Kalās that combined aesthetic and functional expertise.

- **Textile Technology:** Vastra-Grahana (clothing), Sūcī-Vāpa (needlework) involved plant-based dye chemistry, weaving patterns, and fabric mechanics.
- **Culinary Science:** Pāka-Vidya (cooking), Bhakta-Yukti (texture management) used fermentation, heat control, and preservation—methods paralleling food chemistry and nutrition science.
- **Metallurgy and Jewelry:** Kalās like Bhūṣaṇa-Yoga and Mani-Bhūmikā-Karma involved working with alloys, gemstones, and toolcraft.
- **Painting and Sculpture:** Ālekhyam (painting) and Śilpa (sculpture) reveal technical mastery in proportions, color chemistry, and material sciences.

- **Martial Science:** Dhanurveda was taught to women of Kshatriya lineage. Figures like Vishpala (Rig Veda) and later Rani Laxmibai reflected a continuation of martial training rooted in early education.

Women characters such as Kadambari and Mahashweta in classical literature are depicted as having mastered the 64 Kalās, highlighting the ideal of holistic education. This tradition persisted into later eras, demonstrating that ancient Indian education emphasized scientific, artistic, and spiritual training for women—an ethos resonant with NEP 2020’s vision of inclusive and integrative learning.

5. Relevance to Modern Higher Education under NEP 2020 and IKS

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions multidisciplinary education and the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). The 64 Kalās serve as powerful blueprints for achieving these goals, exemplifying skill-based learning integrated with culture and technology, and promoting a holistic approach to education. The current education system, largely inherited from the "Macaulayan model," is criticized for limiting education and producing individuals for specific professions rather than fostering holistic human development, which the Kalās can address. [3, 4]

Reintegrating the spirit of the 64 Kalās into modern education is crucial for integral personality development and for preparing individuals to face contemporary challenges. This involves:

Holistic Development: Moving beyond a narrow, subject-focused approach to emphasize the development of faculties such as understanding, analysis, synthesis, intuition, revelation, inspiration, and discrimination.

Value-Oriented Education: Ensuring that education inherently promotes values of truth, beauty, goodness, and spiritual well-being, instead of being treated as an incidental "extra-curricular" activity.

Cultural Immersion: Reconnecting students with India's rich heritage, including its spiritual knowledge, robust intellectuality, and inexhaustible creativity, by studying its history, philosophies, arts, and sciences.

Flexibility and Customization: Offering a wide range of subjects as options, with different levels of study (ordinary, advanced, special), allowing students to pursue areas where they have natural talent and genius. This moves away from the "stuffing of the human mind with snippets of information" towards cultivating knowledge and wisdom.

Physical and Aesthetic Education: Giving due importance to physical culture for health, strength, agility, and grace, and recognizing art, music, and poetry as essential for the "perfect education of the human soul".

Re-evaluating and re-integrating these forgotten dimensions into modern educational thought and practice is critical for India to recover its true genius and contribute as a leader in global civilization, promoting a universal culture of peace, harmony, and unity.

A few suggestions for Integration into Contemporary Higher Education:

1. IKS-based Modules within STEM Degrees: Incorporating modules on Vastu -Vidya in Architecture, Acoustics in Musicology, Ethnobotany in Pharmacy, and Cognitive Science in Creative Writing can enrich modern curricula.

2. Establish Departments of ‘Science of Kalās’: Creating interdisciplinary departments that blend traditional knowledge with modern science (e.g., Natyashastra with Physics for sound/movement studies) can provide innovative learning pathways.

3. Partnerships with IP Experts: Mining traditional knowledge for modern patents through collaborations with IP experts and utilizing the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) can bridge ancient wisdom with contemporary innovation and commercialization, directly connecting to the IP potential inherent in many Kalās.[25]

The NEP encourages research in traditional sciences and embeds Kalās into multidisciplinary programs, allowing students to develop holistic skills. The focus on multidisciplinary education in NEP provides an ideal framework to revisit and integrate these ancient wisdoms, ensuring that higher education is not only academically rigorous but also culturally rooted and globally competitive.

6. Conclusion

The 64 Kalās are not merely relics of aesthetic indulgence but robust blueprints of integrated science, engineering, and creative intelligence. Women across Indian antiquity demonstrated exceptional excellence in these Kalās, paving the way for their significant revival in the 21st century. From the profound cosmological inquiries of Gargi and Maitreyi to Lopamudra’s contributions to sacred geometry and the practical applications of Ayurveda by female healers, ancient Indian women were central to the development and transmission of a sophisticated knowledge system.

Reclaiming this heritage through NEP-aligned interdisciplinary education, robust IP research, and technological exploration is not merely a cultural endeavor—it is a strategic necessity. By integrating the Kalās into modern higher education, we can foster innovation, promote intellectual equity, and reshape education into a space where science and art, logic and intuition, technology and tradition coalesce. The enduring value of the Indian Knowledge System, enriched by the contributions of Rishi scientists and Rishikas, remains a guiding light for future generations, blending science, spirituality, and social harmony to address contemporary global challenges.

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Beyond Marketing: Advertising's Role in Women Empowerment and Social Change

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1. Introduction

In the digital age, advertising has evolved beyond its conventional function of product promotion to become a dynamic cultural agent capable of shaping public discourse, influencing social behavior, and redefining collective identities. Particularly in contexts marked by socio-political complexities such as India, advertising occupies a unique and powerful position at the intersection of commerce, culture, and communication. It not only reflects dominant societal narratives but also actively constructs new ones—particularly around gender roles and women's empowerment (Jhally, 1987; Gill, 2007).

Historically, Indian advertisements have perpetuated narrow gender binaries by portraying women in stereotypical roles—primarily as domestic caretakers, passive dependents, or aspirational beauty ideals (Goffman, 1979; Das & Sharma, 2019). Such portrayals have long been critiqued in feminist media discourse for reinforcing patriarchal ideologies and inhibiting the representation of women's agency (Mulvey, 1975). However, the emergence of more progressive brand narratives in recent years—spurred by shifts in consumer awareness, feminist activism, and digital democratization—has given rise to a countercurrent within advertising practice. One prominent example is the jewellery brand Tanishq, which has garnered both acclaim and critique for its socially conscious advertising campaigns that engage with complex themes such as remarriage, interfaith harmony, professional independence, and redefined familial roles. Tanishq's campaigns such as *Wedding Remarriage* (2013), *Mia by Tanishq* (2016), *Pehla Heera* (2014), and *The Interview* (2021) stand out for their nuanced storytelling, emotionally resonant visuals, and departure from reductive femininity. These campaigns symbolize a growing trend of "femvertising," where gender-sensitive narratives are woven into commercial storytelling to build emotional brand equity (Repisky, 2018). Yet, questions of authenticity, impact, and audience perception remain pertinent. Do these advertisements merely commodify empowerment, or do they catalyze measurable shifts in societal attitudes and behaviors? How are such narratives

interpreted across India's diverse sociocultural contexts—particularly between urban and rural audiences, or among different age, class, and religious groups? To what extent does media placement strategy, digital amplification, and timing influence the campaign's reach, backlash, or cultural acceptance?

This paper addresses these questions by critically analyzing Tanishq's empowerment-themed advertisements through a multidimensional framework. While qualitative thematic analysis remains the core methodological approach, the study also emphasizes the need for empirical tools such as audience surveys, focus groups, and sentiment analysis to capture real-world reception and long-term behavioral influence (Middleton & Turnbull, 2021; Mukherjee et al., 2022). Furthermore, the paper proposes a comparative lens by referencing advertising strategies from brands that maintain conventional or stereotypical gender portrayals—thereby illuminating Tanishq's distinctiveness and situating it within broader industry trends. The theoretical grounding for this inquiry draws upon feminist media theory (Gill, 2007; Mulvey, 1975), cultural semiotics (Barthes, 1972), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), and reception theory (Hall, 1980). These frameworks facilitate a deeper understanding of how advertising functions as a site of cultural negotiation and symbolic power, particularly in navigating the tension between representation and reality, ideology and market logic, and social responsibility and brand loyalty.

By unpacking the multilayered narratives embedded in Tanishq's campaigns, this study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that examines advertising not merely as a business strategy but as a participatory discourse shaping the contours of gender justice and social transformation. In doing so, it advocates for a shift toward longitudinal, culturally embedded, and audience-centric advertising research that goes beyond surface-level interpretations and engages with the lived experiences and responses of diverse publics.

2. Theoretical Foundation

This study draws upon an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates concepts from advertising theory, feminist media studies, cultural studies, and audience reception analysis to critically examine the potential of advertising to serve as a vehicle for women's empowerment and social change. Specifically, it explores how Tanishq's campaigns function as multimodal cultural texts that not only reflect but also reshape prevailing gender narratives in India's media ecosystem. This framework enables a nuanced exploration of how empowerment messages are constructed, disseminated, and interpreted—highlighting both their transformative potential and their commercial constraints.

3. Advertising as a Catalyst for Social Transformation

Advertising in the modern era transcends its commercial origins to act as a medium of cultural communication. As Jhally (1987) posits, advertisements constitute “the most pervasive form of cultural communication in modern society,” shaping public consciousness, influencing value systems, and mediating social meanings. In this sense, advertisements are not passive reflections of society but active participants in the construction of social realities, particularly in relation to gender roles.

Within this discourse, cause-related marketing has gained traction as brands increasingly align with social causes to build emotional resonance and differentiate themselves in saturated markets. Kotler and Lee (2005) argue that integrating corporate social responsibility into branding strategies enhances consumer trust and drives loyalty. Tanishq’s campaigns exemplify this paradigm, as they simultaneously serve brand objectives and articulate narratives of social relevance, including remarriage, interfaith harmony, and professional identity.

4. Representation of Women in Media: Norms and Intersections

Feminist media theory has long critiqued the representation of women in advertising for perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing patriarchal norms. Goffman’s (1979) foundational work exposed how advertisements present women as submissive, ornamental, and dependent. Although recent years have seen a shift toward more empowering portrayals, such narratives remain entangled with deeper ideological structures.

This paper also adopts an intersectional lens, informed by Crenshaw’s (1989) theory of intersectionality, which underscores the importance of analyzing how multiple identities—gender, caste, religion, class, and region—interact in the portrayal and reception of empowerment narratives. Tanishq’s *Ekatvam* campaign, for example, not only addresses gender but also celebrates interfaith unity, thereby contributing to a broader discourse on inclusivity and social cohesion.

Importantly, this study recognizes the need for **comparative analysis** to contextualize Tanishq’s progressive stance. While Tanishq challenges prevailing norms, other brands continue to perpetuate conservative or stereotypical images of women, offering a valuable contrast to assess the uniqueness and potential influence of Tanishq’s approach.

5. Feminist Critiques: Authentic Empowerment or Commodification?

A critical debate within feminist advertising scholarship concerns the authenticity of empowerment narratives. Gill (2007) introduced the concept of *commodity feminism*, where the language of empowerment is appropriated as a branding tool, often lacking depth or structural commitment to social change. This critique raises vital questions: Are brands like Tanishq engaging in genuine advocacy, or are they deploying feminist aesthetics to enhance market value?

Analyzing corporate authenticity requires extending the lens beyond the advertisement itself. Scholars such as Banet-Weiser (2018) argue that feminist branding must be examined in relation to corporate culture, employment practices, and stakeholder engagement. A critical interrogation of Tanishq's organizational ethos—its workplace gender policies, public responses to backlash, and collaboration with advocacy groups—can help differentiate performative branding from meaningful change.

6. Agency and Representation in Visual Narratives

Drawing upon Laura Mulvey's (1975) theory of the *male gaze*, this study emphasizes the role of visual storytelling in enabling or obstructing female agency. Traditional advertisements often objectify women, but campaigns like *The Interview* reconfigure this gaze by placing women in positions of voice, decision-making, and professional recognition.

In these narratives, women are no longer merely the "looked-at" object but become active subjects shaping their destinies. Such depictions align with the goals of feminist media production, which seeks to replace passive representations with stories that center autonomy, resilience, and self-worth.

7. Thematic Analysis and Audience Reception: Understanding Real-World Impact

To unpack the latent and manifest content of these advertisements, the study employs thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is well-suited to examining advertisements as layered texts—both verbal and visual—enabling researchers to identify recurrent motifs such as empowerment, resistance, familial redefinition, and cultural pluralism.

However, to transcend textual interpretation, it is essential to integrate insights from audience reception theory, particularly Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model. While advertisers may intend to convey progressive

messages, audiences decode them through personal, cultural, and political lenses. Therefore, this study also considers public sentiment and social media responses as indicators of how different demographic segments—rural vs. urban, older vs. younger, conservative vs. liberal—respond to these narratives.

For instance, the *Ekatvam* ad received both praise and backlash, highlighting the contested terrain in which progressive advertising operates. Such dynamics necessitate an analysis not only of the message but also of its media strategy—timing, platform selection, and promotional tactics—that influence both reach and controversy.

In sum, this theoretical foundation frames advertising as a discursive site where cultural values are contested, negotiated, and sometimes transformed. Through the lenses of feminist critique, cultural semiotics, and reception theory, this study investigates how Tanishq's advertising campaigns operate at the confluence of ideology and industry. By considering both intent and impact, representation and reception, and narrative and authenticity, the framework provides a robust basis for analyzing the socio-cultural significance of women-centric advertising in India.

8. Literature Review

In order to situate the present study within the broader academic discourse, this literature review critically examines existing scholarship on gender representation in advertising, the rise of femvertising, digital media's impact on empowerment, and the complexities of audience reception. The review integrates both global and India-specific perspectives to underscore existing patterns, innovations, and research gaps. Special attention is paid to how empowerment is framed—whether as authentic advocacy or commodified branding—and to what extent such narratives translate into sustained social impact. The following thematic clusters provide an analytical overview of key findings from prior studies, highlighting their relevance and limitations.

8.1. Advertising as a Vehicle for Social Change

Das and Sharma (2019), in their qualitative analysis of contemporary Indian advertisements, underscore how campaigns such as Ariel's *Share the Load* challenge entrenched patriarchal norms by encouraging equitable household responsibilities. Their findings affirm the role of advertising as a potential catalyst for gender equality. However, their study is limited to a few select campaigns and lacks a cross-platform comparative perspective,

highlighting the need for broader and more systematic evaluations across varied media formats.

Repisky (2018) explores the concept of femvertising, where brands adopt the language of empowerment to resonate with female audiences. While recognizing the positive visibility such campaigns afford, Repisky critically highlights the risk of tokenism—where empowerment becomes a superficial branding tool rather than a reflection of institutional or structural change. Notably, the study identifies a major gap in longitudinal assessment of cultural impact, pointing to the need for research that captures audience perceptions over time.

8.2. Media and Technological Mediation of Empowerment

Porter et al. (2019), in a study of Sub-Saharan Africa, examine how digital platforms amplify women's voices in processes of social change. Though regionally focused, the study offers transferable insights into the global dynamics of access inequality and the dual role of digital media in both advancing empowerment and reinforcing stereotypes. Their findings emphasize the importance of designing inclusive media strategies that reach underrepresented and digitally marginalized populations.

Similarly, Kausar et al. (2024) investigate digital journalism's role in shaping gender awareness. They recognize the progressive potential of digital storytelling but caution against the proliferation of misinformation and performative narratives, which can dilute the effectiveness of genuine empowerment messaging. These findings reinforce the importance of media literacy and credibility when analyzing audience reception in the digital age.

8.3. Critical Perspectives on Beauty, Representation, and Context

Middleton and Turnbull (2021) interrogate the paradoxes within empowerment advertising by examining how beauty-centric campaigns often camouflage latent gender biases. While these advertisements project female strength, they may simultaneously reinforce narrow aesthetic standards. Their research advocates for more radical departures from normative beauty portrayals, particularly in campaigns aimed at structural gender reform.

Santonniccolo et al. (2023) expand this critique by examining gender stereotyping in global media. Their findings suggest that while narrative frameworks are evolving, traditional norms often persist, especially in emerging markets. The authors argue for the integration of localized cultural perspectives to enhance the efficacy and relevance of progressive advertising.

8.4. India-Specific Insights and Gaps

Moorthi, Roy, and Pansari (2018) trace the evolution of gender roles in Indian advertising, acknowledging positive shifts in urban campaigns but emphasizing that rural-targeted ads often remain trapped in conservative tropes. Their work highlights the need for comparative studies that explore disparities in geographic and cultural reception of empowerment messages.

Kumari (2024) examines media advocacy for women's leadership, arguing for a grassroots media approach to increase visibility for underrepresented voices. Her study stresses the role of regional campaigns in bridging the digital divide and making leadership narratives more inclusive.

The *Webology* Editorial (2022) explores gender representation in print media, identifying both enduring stereotypes and progressive shifts. It calls for a more integrated analysis that accounts for both legacy and digital media ecosystems, an area relatively underexplored in current research.

Akhter and Naheed (2023) document the global landscape of campaigns for women's rights, drawing on cases from both developed and developing nations. They critique the lack of coordinated global frameworks for measuring the success of regional initiatives, thereby underscoring the need for more comparative and empirical analyses.

8.5. Research Gaps

Despite the growing body of literature examining gender representation and empowerment in advertising, several critical gaps persist that limit the broader applicability and depth of current findings. This study identifies and seeks to address the following key research lacunae:

8.6. Cultural Context and Regional Nuance

A significant proportion of existing scholarship on empowerment advertising is situated in Western contexts, often failing to account for the cultural specificity and regional diversity of countries like India. While brands like Tanishq operate within a pan-Indian framework, the reception of empowerment narratives varies sharply across geographies, socio-economic strata, and linguistic communities. Moorthi, Roy, and Pansari (2018) observe that rural-focused advertisements in India continue to reinforce regressive gender stereotypes. There is a dearth of comparative research that explores how

such messages are decoded in rural versus urban, traditional versus progressive settings. This study aims to fill that void by analyzing culturally embedded campaigns and their differential impact across regional audiences.

8.7. Empirical Measurement of Impact

Much of the current research relies heavily on qualitative content analysis without corresponding efforts to assess real-world behavioral influence. Studies such as Das and Sharma (2019) and Middleton and Turnbull (2021) offer insightful critiques of representation but fall short of evaluating how these advertisements affect audience attitudes, belief systems, or actions over time. There remains a pressing need for mixed-method and longitudinal approaches that integrate qualitative insights with empirical data—including audience surveys, sentiment analysis, and focus groups—to assess the sustained social impact of empowerment-themed campaigns.

8.8. Digital Divide and Platform-Specific Accessibility

While digital platforms have broadened the scope of participatory media, they have simultaneously intensified inequalities in content access and representation. Porter et al. (2019) and Kausar et al. (2024) highlight how the digital divide—rooted in gender, geography, and economic status—can limit the reach and inclusivity of progressive narratives. The current literature inadequately addresses how digital empowerment messages are consumed (or missed) by marginalized audiences who lack reliable internet access or media literacy. This study intends to explore the extent to which platform strategy, media targeting, and accessibility influence the inclusivity and equity of advertising reception in India.

8.9. Authenticity, Tokenism, and Consumer Perception

The rise of femvertising has sparked debates around the authenticity of empowerment narratives. Scholars such as Gill (2007) and Repisky (2018) caution that many brands adopt feminist aesthetics for commercial appeal without embedding these values in their internal practices. Yet, few studies have critically examined how audiences themselves perceive this authenticity. Are such campaigns viewed as genuine efforts toward gender equality, or are they dismissed as superficial brand posturing? This study seeks to incorporate audience reception data to explore how consumers evaluate the alignment (or dissonance) between brand messaging and institutional credibility.

9. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a multi-layered qualitative research methodology aimed at critically analyzing the role of advertising in constructing and communicating women empowerment narratives in contemporary India. While the core of the research remains rooted in thematic analysis of selected Tanishq advertisements, the design is broadened to include audience reception insights, contextual discourse, and comparative reflections for richer empirical depth and social relevance.

10. Research Design

This research primarily employs a qualitative interpretive design, guided by the thematic analysis framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), which enables the identification of recurring patterns, symbolic messages, and ideological discourses in visual and narrative media. The study goes beyond surface-level representation to examine how the selected advertisements challenge or reinforce cultural norms related to gender, identity, and power.

To address critiques around superficiality and tokenism in empowerment advertising, the study incorporates elements of reception analysis, drawing on audience responses through social media sentiment, media coverage, and public discourse. Additionally, where possible, secondary insights into brand authenticity—such as Tanishq’s corporate responses to controversy and inclusion statements—are examined to contextualize the findings.

11. Selection of Advertisements

The selection of advertisements for this study was purposive and strategically aligned with the research objectives. Campaigns were chosen based on their relevance to the overarching theme of women empowerment, particularly those that explicitly or implicitly portrayed narratives of agency, inclusion, resistance to stereotypes, and personal or professional autonomy. Another key criterion was the diversity in representation; selected advertisements reflect a wide range of social and relational contexts, including themes such as motherhood, interfaith relationships, workplace identity, and redefined family roles. Social impact was also a determining factor—only those campaigns that sparked substantial public discourse, media attention, or engagement with progressive ideals were included. Finally, accessibility played a critical role; the chosen advertisements are publicly available and supported by supplementary materials such as brand interviews, media reviews, and audience comments, enabling a comprehensive and contextually rich analysis.

Table: 1 Selected Campaigns

Advertisement	Primary Theme	Key Stereotypes Challenged	Empowerment Dimension	Societal Impact
<i>Wedding Remarriage</i> (2013)	Breaking Gender Stereotypes	Single motherhood, remarriage taboo	Agency, second chances	Normalizing remarriage narratives
<i>Ekatvam Campaign</i> (2020)	Inclusive Festive Harmony	Interfaith relationship restrictions	Cultural integration, acceptance	Promoting interfaith unity amid backlash
<i>Mia by Tanishq</i> (2016)	Professional Women Empowerment	Domestic-only roles for women	Economic independence, ambition	Recasting workplace identity as feminine strength
<i>Pehla Heera</i> (2014)	Transforming Family Dynamics	Toxic mother-in-law tropes	Intergenerational respect	Celebrating supportive female relationships
<i>The Interview</i> (2021)	Motherhood as Professional Capital	Career breaks as professional weakness	Recognition of caregiving skills	Reshaping perceptions of parenting and careers

These campaigns were selected for their alignment with the study's goals and their ability to initiate or reflect shifting public conversations around gender and empowerment.

12. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process for this study involved multiple layers of engagement with both the primary visual texts and their socio-cultural context. Each selected advertisement was viewed repeatedly to capture not only overt narrative content but also subtle visual cues such as gestures, costume symbolism, set design, and non-verbal messaging. Transcripts of dialogues and voiceovers were created to facilitate line-by-line analysis. This process allowed

for the identification of both explicit and implicit representations of gender roles and empowerment themes.

To supplement the primary material, a contextual and discourse analysis was conducted using secondary sources. These included social media reactions—such as user comments, trending hashtags, and sentiment analysis on platforms like YouTube and Twitter—as well as editorial coverage and journalistic critique published in mainstream media. Special attention was paid to campaigns that generated public debate, such as the *Ekatvam* advertisement, to understand the dynamics between brand messaging and public reception. Brand statements, interviews with spokespersons, and official responses to criticism were also analyzed to assess the brand's positioning and authenticity.

Additionally, a supplementary component of audience reception sampling was employed. Selective examples of public feedback from digital platforms were thematically analyzed to capture the spectrum of audience reactions, ranging from appreciation and support to resistance and skepticism. This triangulated approach enriched the dataset and provided insights into how different demographic groups interpret and engage with empowerment narratives in advertising.

13. Thematic Analysis and Discussion

The following section presents a critical thematic analysis of five selected Tanishq advertisements that articulate different facets of women's empowerment in Indian society. Each advertisement is interpreted not only as a narrative of individual transformation but also as a cultural text situated within broader discourses on gender, family, tradition, and modernity. The analysis draws upon feminist media theory, cultural semiotics, and audience reception insights to unpack how empowerment is portrayed, received, and contested.

Theme 1: Breaking Stereotypes – Redefining Remarriage and Maternal Identity

The *Wedding Remarriage* (2013) advertisement challenges one of India's most entrenched taboos: remarriage for single mothers. The visual narrative portrays a confident woman, adorned in traditional bridal attire and Tanishq jewellery, marrying a man who not only embraces her but also her daughter. The ceremony, conducted with ritualistic dignity, is enriched by the child's joyful participation, culminating in an emotionally resonant moment when the groom carries her during the wedding ritual.

This ad deconstructs the normative image of womanhood by foregrounding a mother's autonomy and right to love and companionship, independent of societal judgment. It counters the pervasive stereotype that remarriage taints a woman's dignity or that her past motherhood is a burden to her future. The subtle yet powerful symbolism—jewellery as both heritage and freedom—serves to merge traditional aesthetics with progressive values.

Importantly, the ad sparked widespread public discussion, with many lauding its inclusive messaging while others debated its acceptability, especially among conservative audiences. Its significance lies not just in its portrayal, but in its capacity to initiate social dialogue about agency, second chances, and the dignity of choice.

Theme 2: Inclusive Festive Harmony – Interfaith Bonds and Cultural Coexistence

The *Ekatvam* campaign (2020) centers on a Hindu woman lovingly embraced by her Muslim in-laws during her baby shower (godbharai), which is celebrated with Hindu rituals. Through understated yet evocative visuals, the ad challenges rigid communal binaries by showcasing interfaith familial warmth, cultural adaptability, and mutual respect.

The woman is positioned not as an outsider assimilating into a different culture, but as a bridge that harmonizes traditions—a symbolic role often played by women in multicultural families. The ad reframes interfaith unions not as social aberrations but as expressions of shared humanity and evolving family structures. The colour palette and mise-en-scène amplify this tone of emotional warmth and unity.

However, despite its artistic sensitivity, the ad encountered significant backlash from right-wing groups, accusing the brand of promoting "love jihad." Tanishq's subsequent withdrawal of the advertisement prompted debates on brand courage, creative freedom, and the limits of progressive storytelling in commercial media. This incident underlines the fragility of cultural narratives in polarised societies and the risks brands face when attempting to normalize inclusion.

Theme 3: Celebrating Working Women – Economic Independence and Modern Femininity

The *Mia by Tanishq* campaign (2016) departs from the conventional trope of jewellery as a familial gift, instead positioning it as a symbol of self-expression and self-earned achievement. The ad features women in varied

professional settings—presenting data, leading teams, and solving problems—framing ambition as inherently feminine rather than masculine.

This visual storytelling disrupts long-standing binaries that separate professionalism from femininity. Jewellery, often emblematic of dependency or marital status, is reimagined as a marker of personal success and confidence. The aesthetics—clean workspaces, understated accessories, and purposeful movement—convey a sense of focus and determination.

The campaign resonates particularly with millennial and Gen Z women navigating dual identities as professionals and individuals in a changing society. It addresses the latent assumption that success is either granted or inherited, and instead places the spotlight on earned recognition—a subtle yet powerful shift in narrative.

Theme 4: Reframing Family Relationships – Recognition and Emotional Labour

The *Pehla Heera* ad (2014) presents a tender exchange between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law, disrupting another entrenched stereotype: intergenerational female rivalry in Indian households. By depicting a moment of genuine affection and recognition, the ad elevates the daughter-in-law's role from silent domestic contributor to valued family member.

Here, empowerment is framed through emotional reciprocity and intergenerational solidarity. The symbolism of gifting a diamond—typically associated with life's major milestones—redefines value not by status but by emotional contribution. The setting is minimal, allowing the emotional nuance and body language to take centre stage.

This representation encourages audiences to reimagine traditional familial roles as evolving sites of support and affirmation. While the ad lacks the overt societal provocation of others, its quiet radicalism lies in humanizing domestic relationships and normalizing empathy within traditionally hierarchical structures.

Theme 5: Motherhood as Leadership – Reclaiming Career Narratives

In *The Interview* (2021), a woman confidently explains her career break by highlighting the leadership and organizational skills honed during motherhood. This reclaims caregiving not as a liability but as professional capital—challenging the dominant view that career gaps denote regression.

The ad aligns with global feminist debates that advocate for recognition of unpaid domestic labour as a form of intellectual and emotional training. In reframing motherhood as a site of skill development, the ad challenges recruiters, corporate culture, and society to reconsider definitions of competence and commitment.

Its resonance among working mothers and HR professionals was evident across social media, where it received praise for shifting the discourse from apology to assertion. The subtle aesthetics—the poised demeanour, confident speech, and polished corporate setting—lend credibility to the narrative while keeping the jewellery understated yet meaningful.

14. Cumulative Insights Across Campaigns

Across all five campaigns, Tanishq constructs a coherent brand narrative that centres women as agents of transformation—whether in their families, professions, or communities. Each ad tactfully addresses a social taboo or invisible labour, packaging complex themes within emotionally compelling and visually rich storytelling.

A key takeaway is the redefinition of jewellery from a patriarchal symbol of possession to a metaphor for identity, agency, and self-worth. Rather than alienating traditional aesthetics, Tanishq embeds progressive messages within familiar cultural idioms—thus inviting reflection rather than rejection.

Moreover, these campaigns collectively illustrate the potential of advertising to serve as a pedagogical tool in a media-saturated society. By embedding empowerment within everyday narratives, Tanishq bridges the gap between aspiration and accessibility, making feminism not only visible but relatable.

However, the question of authenticity remains crucial. While the campaigns gesture toward social change, the study recognizes that genuine empowerment must extend beyond screen representations to institutional practices—such as workforce diversity, brand transparency, and engagement with marginalized voices.

15. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of Tanishq's selected advertising campaigns reveals that the brand has strategically positioned itself as a storyteller of social change, using the idiom of jewellery to narrate evolving gender roles and challenge deeply ingrained stereotypes. These campaigns collectively reflect an intentional shift from traditional depictions of women as passive recipients of familial validation

to empowered agents navigating personal, professional, and relational domains with autonomy and confidence.

16. Strategic Disruption of Stereotypes

Each advertisement studied engages with a specific stereotype prevalent in Indian society—be it the taboo around remarriage (*Wedding Remarriage*), the conservatism surrounding interfaith unions (*Ekatvam*), or assumptions regarding women's professional limitations (*Mia by Tanishq*). The findings demonstrate that Tanishq's brand narrative is deliberately aligned with progressive values, opting for symbolic transgressions that are subtle yet powerful. Instead of overt activism, the ads employ emotional storytelling to gently challenge patriarchal norms—making them palatable across generational and cultural divides.

17. Empowerment as Situated, Relational, and Everyday

Empowerment in these campaigns is not abstract or grandiose. Rather, it is portrayed as an everyday negotiation—a daughter-in-law being recognized (*Pehla Heera*), a mother reclaiming her professional identity (*The Interview*), or a working woman embracing ambition (*Mia*). This situational and relational framing of empowerment makes the message both aspirational and accessible. It affirms that change begins in familiar spaces—homes, workplaces, and relationships—and that empowered identity does not require abandoning tradition but rather redefining it from within.

18. Symbolic Reframing of Jewellery

Traditionally, jewellery in Indian advertising has symbolized status, dowry, or marital affiliation. Tanishq reappropriates this symbolism to represent agency, individuality, and modern femininity. Whether as a reward for professional success, a gift of recognition, or an artefact of unity, jewellery becomes a medium through which stories of transformation are told. This shift from patriarchal objectification to symbolic expression is one of the most significant findings of the analysis.

19. Balancing Cultural Continuity with Social Innovation

Tanishq's ability to embed progressive messages within culturally resonant aesthetics—weddings, rituals, familial bonds—emerges as a core strength. The campaigns maintain visual familiarity (sacred rituals, warm familial settings, traditional garments) while simultaneously altering their semantic framing. This

dialectic of continuity and change is key to why these narratives succeed in engaging mainstream Indian audiences, including those who may not identify with overtly feminist rhetoric.

20. Audience Reception: Inclusion and Controversy

Audience reception analysis reveals a bifurcation of response. On one hand, progressive segments of society welcomed the advertisements as bold, inclusive, and emotionally intelligent. On the other, backlash—especially in the case of *Ekatvam*—exposed the fragility of inclusive messaging in polarised socio-political environments. The discussions around brand courage, social responsibility, and commercial risk-taking highlight the complexities of corporate storytelling in contemporary India. These campaigns do not exist in a vacuum; they are situated in a public sphere where interpretation is shaped by personal belief systems, media framing, and political climate.

21. Authenticity and the Risk of Tokenism

While Tanishq's campaigns are widely appreciated for their narrative sensitivity, questions remain regarding the authenticity of the brand's empowerment agenda. As Repisky (2018) and Gill (2007) warn, the commodification of feminist values in advertising often risks reducing empowerment to a marketing aesthetic. This study finds that while the brand achieves narrative authenticity, a critical gap persists between message and measurable institutional practice. Future inquiries must examine whether such campaigns are supported by inclusive corporate policies, equitable representation in leadership, and sustained social engagement.

22. Implications for Advertising Practice and Theory

The findings of this study affirm that advertising, when thoughtfully crafted, has the power to function as cultural pedagogy—educating, influencing, and reshaping public attitudes, particularly around gender and empowerment. Tanishq's campaigns exemplify how commercial storytelling can coexist with social responsibility when grounded in emotional authenticity, cultural nuance, and an intentional commitment to inclusivity. Through subtle, symbolic narratives that challenge entrenched stereotypes, the brand has demonstrated that advertising can serve not just as a marketing tool but as a platform for initiating meaningful conversations about identity, tradition, and transformation.

In theoretical terms, these campaigns extend the definition of empowerment advertising beyond aesthetic feminism. Rather than limiting

female agency to visual representation or consumer aspiration, Tanishq presents empowerment as relational, embedded in everyday roles, and negotiated through personal choices. This reorientation aligns with intersectional feminist thought and contributes to advertising theory by framing gendered narratives as evolving through cultural, familial, and professional dynamics.

Practically, the study underscores the need for the advertising industry to embed social responsibility within brand strategy, not merely as a campaign tactic but as a sustained value system. Tanishq's work demonstrates that authentic narratives—when supported by culturally grounded visuals and emotional storytelling—can resonate with diverse audiences. However, the risk of tokenism remains significant if such messages are not mirrored by a brand's institutional practices. Campaigns that embrace empowerment rhetorically, but fail to reflect it in hiring, leadership, or social investment, risk being dismissed as performative activism.

One of the most critical implications concerns the representation of diversity. The reception of the *Ekatvam* ad highlights both the opportunity and the risk in attempting to normalize pluralism. Brands must engage with India's complex socio-political realities, acknowledging that inclusive messaging can provoke resistance. This demands preparedness—developing robust crisis communication strategies and clearly articulating brand values that remain consistent in the face of public scrutiny. Tanishq's temporary withdrawal of the ad exposed the vulnerability of even well-intentioned campaigns and illustrated the importance of brand courage and narrative continuity.

Moving forward, advertising practice must deepen its engagement with underrepresented voices. While Tanishq's campaigns portray a relatively urban, upper-middle-class slice of womanhood, future campaigns can expand the frame to include themes such as LGBTQ+ inclusion, rural women's leadership, inter-caste relationships, aging, mental health, and disability. Empowerment should not be confined to aspirational lifestyles but must be grounded in lived experiences across India's diverse social spectrum. Collaborating with grassroots organizations and cultural influencers could offer brands deeper insights into the realities they aim to represent, ensuring narratives are not only inclusive but also authentic.

Furthermore, the impact of such campaigns must be evaluated not only through brand visibility or sales metrics but through their capacity to foster attitudinal and behavioral change. Tools such as surveys, focus groups, and digital sentiment analysis can offer insights into how messages are received, interpreted, and acted upon by different demographic groups. This form of impact assessment would provide brands with a more ethical and meaningful understanding of their social footprint.

Tanishq's campaigns also provide a compelling case for integrating educational and community-based initiatives into brand storytelling. Beyond advertisement, the brand could invest in content and outreach—such as workshops on financial literacy, gender equality, and leadership development—to bridge the gap between symbolic representation and tangible empowerment. Such initiatives would extend the narrative arc of the advertisements into real-world impact.

Lastly, it is crucial that empowerment does not remain a seasonal theme or a public relations tactic. The study emphasizes the importance of long-term advocacy, whereby brands adopt a consistent and enduring commitment to social change across all platforms, including product design, corporate partnerships, public messaging, and internal culture. By embodying empowerment as an ethos rather than a motif, brands can build deeper trust and foster meaningful change.

In conclusion, Tanishq's advertising efforts represent a noteworthy example of how brands can balance commercial imperatives with progressive social vision. These campaigns illustrate the power of advertising to challenge stereotypes, humanize marginalized narratives, and inspire cultural dialogue. Yet, their impact is contingent on a brand's willingness to invest in authenticity, accountability, and sustained engagement. For the advertising industry, this case study offers a model—one in which storytelling is not just about selling but about shaping the society in which we live.

23. Conclusion

This study reaffirms that advertising, when intentionally crafted, can transcend its traditional commercial role to become a powerful tool for shaping public discourse on gender and social equity. Through the analysis of five Tanishq advertisements, it becomes clear that the brand's campaigns extend beyond marketing to actively engage with pressing cultural issues—such as remarriage, interfaith unity, and professional identity for women. These advertisements construct empowerment as lived experience and relational agency, challenging deep-rooted stereotypes while remaining emotionally resonant and culturally grounded. The findings illustrate that storytelling, when coupled with symbolic imagery and inclusive representation, can initiate meaningful dialogue and reposition women not just as consumers, but as protagonists of change.

By situating advertising within the framework of cultural pedagogy and feminist media theory, the paper highlights how brands like Tanishq can shape evolving social norms while fulfilling business objectives. However, the true impact of such efforts depends on sustained narrative integrity, audience

engagement, and a commitment to authenticity. *Beyond Marketing*, this case demonstrates that advertising holds the capacity to reflect, influence, and even reimagine societal values—making it a vital participant in the larger project of women’s empowerment and social transformation.

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A Case Study of Social Change in Soda Village by India's First Female MBA Sarpanch

Arpit Patadiya

Abstract:

When society supports women education, it gives back Chhavi Rajawat to the society. Despite her privileged background, extensive education in renowned schools and colleges, and holding an MBA degree, the first female MBA sarpanch in India chose to forgo a lucrative corporate career. Instead, she decided to actively contribute to her community by joining the panchayat in her native village of Soda, Rajasthan. This paper presents a comprehensive case study analyzing the transformative impact of social change initiatives spearheaded by Chhavi Rajawat in Soda village, Rajasthan, India. The study investigates the multifaceted strategies employed by Rajawat to address and alleviate various socio-economic challenges faced by the community. Key areas of focus include improvements in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic development. The study evaluates the effectiveness of interventions such as educational initiatives, healthcare camps, and sustainable development projects in fostering a more inclusive and resilient community.

The methodology involves a qualitative analysis of Chhavi Rajawat's tenure, examining the policies, initiatives, and community engagement strategies she implemented to address the challenges faced by Soda Village. Additionally, the study investigates the perceptions of community members towards women

leadership and the tangible outcomes of Chhavi Rajawat's efforts in promoting sustainable development.

Overall, it highlights the role of women education in achieving social change through the best example of the Chhavi Rajawat.

Keywords: Women Education, Gender Equality, Grassroot Governance, Women leadership

Introduction

Historically marginalized and often relegated to predefined societal roles, women have, nonetheless, been at the forefront of movements, initiatives, and reforms that redefine the contours of their communities. From grassroots activism to leadership roles in various sectors, women have demonstrated resilience, innovation, and a profound commitment to fostering positive change.

In recent times, there has been a discernible shift in recognizing and celebrating the leadership capacities of women. Empowered by education, advocacy, and a growing sense of agency, women are increasingly assuming roles that extend beyond traditional boundaries. women have been instrumental in challenging societal norms, dismantling gender-based barriers, and contributing to the emergence of more inclusive and equitable societies. Education, particularly for women, is key to breaking down barriers and fostering gender equality.

Despite progress, many Indian women still face challenges accessing education. This study aims to explore how women's education influences broader social dynamics in India. By analysing real-life example of Chhavi Rajawat, we aim to show the link between improved educational opportunities for women and positive changes in attitudes, economic participation, and community development

Education empowers women, enabling them to challenge traditional norms, participate in decision-making, and contribute to their communities. Understanding this connection is crucial for developing effective policies and interventions that address the root causes of gender inequality. Our goal is not only to highlight the transformative power of women's education but also to encourage renewed efforts in removing barriers that hinder the full potential of women in India's evolving social story.

Women consists of half of the population of world. For representation, their community must be enough empowered and educated. It all starts by involving them into decision-making scenario. To maintain the spirit of democracy and to make political activities more inclusive and promising, women must be represented and actively involved in politics at all levels of governance. Their participation can give completely different perspective in the administration. It is believed that including women in decision-making is essential to empowering both them and the country. Chhavi Rajawat, elected twice as sarpanch of soda village of Rajasthan, is such representation of women in grassroot politics.

Background of Soda Village, Rajasthan.

Soda is a small village in Malpura tehsil of Tonk district, Rajasthan. According to census 2011, Soda Village has total population of 3,960. Out of which male population dominates. Literacy wise male population (65.96%) is more literate than women (37.47%) counterpart (censusindia.gov.in). There were 725 houses in the village.

Rajasthan is a state with many different traditions and customs that is bound by culture. In such a situation, women's status was miserable. They are voiceless in the political, social, and cultural spheres of society (Negi & Singh , 2019). Patriarchy was and is still deep ingrained in the society. Considering this, Soda village was no exception. Soda was one of the most backward villages in the

Rajasthan. Soda is an agrarian economy. Necessities of village were muddled with grave problems. Disastrous droughts, unsafe groundwater, irrigation problems, contamination induced health problems and so on. Priorities and development in the village were complete mismatch.

Chhavi's Odyssey of becoming Sarpanch

Historically, women have played pivotal roles in nurturing social cohesion, sustainable development, and community well-being. Their unique perspectives and empathetic approaches often translate into holistic and inclusive solutions to address the diverse needs of societies. However, despite these innate capabilities, women's leadership in governance has been historically underrepresented, particularly in rural settings. The evolving landscape of women's empowerment has witnessed a gradual shift, with trailblazers like Chhavi Rajawat challenging norms and breaking barriers.

Soda was an ancestral home of Chhavi Rajawat. She would come for vacations to stay with her grandparents. She belonged to the affluent section of the village. Her Grandfather Brig Raghubir Singh had been elected thrice as the sarpanch until 1990. She has completed her schooling from Rishi Valley school in Bengaluru and Mayo college girls' school in Ajmer. Later on she went to Lady Shree Ram college, Delhi University to complete her graduation with Honors in English Literature. She continued her education till she completed MBA from Balaji Institute of Modern Management, Pune. She was determined to enter the corporate world completely unknown of what is out there in the future. She held various positions and worked for companies such as Times of India, Carlson Group of Hotels, Airtel, etc during 2003 to 2009. Her corporate career was at peak when the people of soda village approached her to contest the elections for the post of sarpanch. As if destiny calls her, the soda panchayat must come under the women's reservation bill in 2010. Initially, People wanted her to be puppet

sarpanch, but she denied being puppet. After examining the appeals of villagers, Chhavi finally gave in and contested elections for the post. She recalled that it won't be possible without the reservation for women. The idea of puppet sarpanch also hails from women reservation system, where men of the village take decisions on behalf of women candidate. The hesitation also came from her not being experienced in governance and grassroot level politics. In 2010, She contested and won the elections as an independent candidate. She did not have affiliation with any political party which in turn made her credible and vulnerable at the same time. She took complete control as a sarpanch, denying the possibility of puppet sarpanch and using her education and corporate experience for the welfare of the people of village. With winning of elections, she unlocked her 'firsts'. She was the youngest sarpanch of the time. She was the first MBA degree holder women sarpanch. She came with a vision. A vision to make soda village, a model village. She had vision to bring holistic developmental work at such extent that it becomes inspiration for other villages, and they replicate it. She wanted a village to be self-sustainable, so even she is long gone, progress of village shouldn't go downhill. She served as sarpanch for two terms from 2010-2015 and 2015-2020. After her two terms of sarpanch, village men with deep seated caste and gender biasness appreciated her. Her goal was to empower the people of the village itself for future. She has been threatened, assaulted twice despite of having best intentions for the village and villagers, but that didn't stop her. She was awarded with her commendable works to be followed during her tenure as sarpanch she received the Young Indian Leader Award by CNN-IBN in 2010 and the Young Global Leaders award by the World Economic Forum in 2012 and the Karamveer Puraskar in 2012. She is a Fellow of the fourth class of Kamalnayan Bajaj Fellowship. She is Fellow at the Aspen Global Leadership Network.

Chhavi Rajawat's Initiatives

She outlined strategy for the holistic development of the village prioritizing water, roads, electricity, and sanitation. The social aspects of development were also discussed below.

Water Management

Soda is an rainfed agrarian economy. The biggest challenge faced by the village was the drought. From past 14 years, Soda hasn't seen good rainfall. Additionally, the groundwater of soda was declared unsafe in 2009 from contamination and dangerous levels of salinity (Shah, n.d.). In addition to birth abnormalities, incidences of skeletal fluorosis were reported because of drinking this water. Most of the health issues were happening due to the water. She identified that rainwater harvesting is the only way to provide clean water to villagers but the biggest challenges in front of her was the de-silting of reservoirs due to high salinity in the soil. Reservoir were spread across the 100 acres and to desilt it required estimation of 2 crore rupees. The reservoir was falling under the category of 'drought hit zone' by government. It was daunting task. The budget was too large, and funds were short. She approached centre, state and even private sector but in vain. Government schemes didn't have provision to use heavy machinery as earthmovers were required for the desilting process. With the help of friends, family and villagers, fundraiser was organised, and she managed to raise 20 lakh rupees of fund. It helped to desilt the 1/10th of the reservoir. In upcoming monsoon, it was filled and helped villagers to get clean water. Crowdsourcing and fundraising events helped her in solving the fund related issues in some way. She travelled extensively to garner the support in form of funds or adoption of her projects by others. She actively took support from Government, NGOs, Private sector, Individuals etc. Water management was the first challenge she worked on. Meanwhile, seven more acres of the

reservoir were adopted by Coke for desilting (Shah, n.d.). During her second term, she dreamt of providing piped water directly to the homes. She got sanction of 600 houses out of 800 from the government. Water management was remained a challenge.

Infrastructure

She worked extensively on infrastructure of the village. She built around 40 roads interconnecting the village. Electrification of the village was done through solar powered device. She roped the TIL as a partner to build the concrete toilets in the approx. 950 houses, She improved the area of sanitation by building 800 toilets out of 950 within two years. Drainage systems were laid down. Most of the infrastructure was built in a way that sustainability can be achieved in the long term. She convinced the Mahindra & Mahindra group to adopt their village under their Samriddhi Programme. State Bank of India branch was opened in the very first year of her tenure in the village, she managed to conduct financial literacy seminars to bring awareness among villagers to open their bank accounts for them and children too. It was difficult to find collaborators in the area of skill development, waste management and educational programs but except these all-basic areas for infrastructures were covered under her tenure. She focused on changing the old techniques to the new one to increase the efficiency. The area continues to be very backward in terms of education and farming. Schools and hospitals conditions were improved. To keep youth from going to the other cities in search of education and jobs, Various counselling centres and skill training centres were opened. The village relies on the funds, alongside technical assistance, to improve farming practices, establish vocational training centres, sewage system, waste management and more. (Goswami, 2013)

Women Development

She recognized that lack of safety and respect was major roadblock towards gender inequality (ELLE, n.d.). She took up the initiative to make women aware about their basic rights. She believed that value can be added in women's life not only through the education but also skill development. Women can become financially independent through acquiring skills. She can financially contribute to the family too. She became bridge between the government, non-governmental organizations, and the village. Around 70 Self Help groups with 500 women have been formed. She set up the skill development hubs for the women to learn income generation activities like tailoring, grinding spices & pulses, candle-making, painted *diyas*, embroidery etc. (Upadhyay, 2013) This in turn were exhibited by her to the exhibitions for marketing purpose. Professionals were brought in SHGs to help in costing and selling of the products. Initially, Men of the houses were hesitated to send their women to the self-help groups, but she opened her for such activities. She owned different techniques to win the trust of the villagers. International Women's Day was celebrated for the first time. Her presence as leader itself was empowering for the women of her village. Now, women were coming forward more and more and talking about their personal issues due to the presence of women leader. Earlier, there was hesitation due to presence of men at all administrative levels. She was able to bring partnerships and collaborations in other areas, but In education sector it was still lacking behind. The girls' college, which had 300 or so students primarily pursuing B.Eds., was about to close at the start of her second term due to financial difficulties faced by the owners. In order to revitalise it, the Rajawats made the decision to purchase it from them. Himalaya has pledged to power it solely using solar energy (Shah, n.d.). Not only Himalaya, but the other company Bosch Power Tools also donated 200 tables and benches for the school built by her. Girl child were studying in the open

space and there was no formal school building for them. She identified the defunct building and renovated it to provide formal school building. She would extensively seek out the support to fuel her purpose. The next challenge was to make the youth more employable by providing them not only formal education but also soft skills. She appealed to the youth, to come and stay in Soda village and provide their expertise as donation. Not only funds, or money but to provide whatever assistance to develop the soda village. Expertise donation was one of the techniques.

Chhavi Rajawat's techniques:

- **Collaboration and Partnership with Agencies**

Chhavi Rajawat strategically collaborated with governmental and non-governmental agencies, forming alliances to amplify the impact of her initiatives. These partnerships allowed for the pooling of resources, expertise, and a coordinated effort to address diverse community needs.

- **Bridging gap between governmental and non-governmental organizations.**

Recognizing the importance of synergy, Chhavi worked towards bridging the gap between governmental and non-governmental organizations. By fostering dialogue and cooperation, she created a united front that efficiently tackled social challenges, leveraging the strengths of both sectors.

- **Developing strong civil society**

Chhavi emphasized the development of a strong civil society, empowering local communities to actively participate in decision-making processes. This approach facilitated community-led initiatives and ensured a sense of ownership and accountability among the residents.

- **Sustainable practices for development**

In her pursuit of sustainable development, Chhavi integrated eco-friendly and resource-efficient practices into her initiatives. By prioritizing sustainability, she not only addressed immediate needs but also ensured the long-term viability of projects, leaving a positive environmental impact. One of strong example is solar powered electrification of the village.

- **Foreign aid**

Chhavi tapped into foreign aid to support her projects, leveraging international collaboration for shared global development goals. This approach allowed her to infuse additional resources into the initiatives, contributing to the resilience and growth of the communities she served.

- **Crowdsourcing and Fundraising events**

To mobilize community support, Chhavi organized crowdsourcing and fundraising events. These initiatives not only raised funds but also fostered a sense of community involvement and solidarity. Participants became active contributors to the projects, creating a sustainable network of support. Women self-help groups were biggest support.

- **Involving Private sectors**

Chhavi actively engaged the private sector, attracting corporate support for her social initiatives. These partnerships brought in innovation, resources, and expertise, enhancing the efficiency and scalability of her project.

Outcomes of Chhavi Rajawat's Initiatives

Chhavi Rajawat's initiatives as the Sarpanch of Soda Village yielded several positive outcomes, reflecting her commitment to sustainable development and community empowerment. Some notable outcomes include:

- **Improved Infrastructure:** Chhavi focused on enhancing the village's infrastructure, leading to improved roads, sanitation facilities, banking facilities and access to clean water. These initiatives positively impacted the overall quality of life for the villagers.
- **Women's Empowerment:** Chhavi's tenure witnessed a significant emphasis on women's empowerment. Through various programs and initiatives, she aimed to uplift women, providing them with opportunities for skill development, entrepreneurship, and active participation in decision-making processes. Self-Help Groups were created. Education especially for women were focused more. Breaking some stereotypes, women were brought in to become financial Independent through work.
- **Educational Empowerment:** Chhavi prioritized education as a cornerstone of development. Her initiatives led to the establishment and improvement of educational facilities, providing better access to quality education for children in Soda Village.
- **Health and Sanitation Initiatives:** Chhavi implemented health and sanitation initiatives to address prevalent issues in the village. These efforts included the construction of sanitation facilities, awareness campaigns, and healthcare programs, contributing to improved overall well-being.
- **Agricultural Development:** Chhavi focused on sustainable agricultural practices, introducing modern techniques, and providing support to farmers. This resulted in increased agricultural productivity, economic upliftment for farmers, and a more robust local economy.
- **Environmental Conservation:** Recognizing the importance of environmental sustainability, Chhavi initiated projects to conserve natural resources and promote eco-friendly practices. This included tree plantation drives and awareness programs to instil a sense of

environmental responsibility among the villagers. Solar Powered Electrification of the village.

- **Community Engagement and Participation:** Chhavi encouraged active community participation in decision-making processes. Her initiatives fostered a sense of ownership and responsibility among the villagers, promoting a participatory approach to development.
- **Technological Integration:** Chhavi leveraged technology to streamline governance and improve service delivery. This included initiatives to digitize administrative processes, facilitating transparency and efficiency in village affairs. Panchayat were made digitally accessible.

These outcomes collectively reflect the holistic and inclusive approach that Chhavi Rajawat adopted during her tenure as Sarpanch, leaving a lasting impact on the social, economic, and environmental fabric of Soda Village.

Conclusion

Chhavi Rajawat's transformative leadership as the Sarpanch of Soda village, Rajasthan, stands as a testament to the profound impact education can have on societal change. Leveraging her educational background, she embarked on a journey to bring about social transformation in the village. Chhavi Rajawat's approach exemplifies the ripple effect of educating girls. As girls receive education, they become not just educated individuals but also catalysts for positive change within their families and communities. The knowledge and skills imparted to them transcend mere academic pursuits; they become agents of social change, challenging stereotypes, and fostering a more inclusive and progressive society.

In conclusion, the case study of social change in Soda Village, led by Chhavi Rajawat, India's first female MBA Sarpanch, encapsulates a profound narrative

of transformative leadership and community empowerment. Chhavi's pioneering journey challenges preconceived notions about traditional roles in rural governance, illustrating the immense impact that visionary leadership can have on grassroots development.

Chhavi's story serves as a beacon of inspiration for breaking gender barriers, showcasing the transformative potential of women in leadership roles. Through strategic collaborations and partnerships, she effectively bridged the gap between governmental and non-governmental organizations, fostering a holistic approach to addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by Soda Village.

The development of a strong civil society under Chhavi's leadership empowered local communities, instilling a sense of ownership and accountability. Sustainable practices embedded in the initiatives underscore the long-term viability of the projects, emphasizing the importance of environmentally conscious development.

The strategic utilization of foreign aid and active involvement of private sectors reflect Chhavi's foresight in mobilizing resources for sustainable and scalable projects. Crowdsourcing and fundraising events not only generated financial support but also nurtured community engagement, establishing a resilient network of support.

In essence, Chhavi Rajawat's tenure as the Sarpanch of Soda Village highlights the transformative potential of grassroots leadership. Her legacy reverberates as a testament to the positive outcomes that result from visionary, inclusive, and community-centric governance. As we reflect on this case study, it prompts a broader conversation about the replicability of such models in fostering social change across diverse rural landscapes. Chhavi's journey becomes a compelling case for the continued exploration of innovative, inclusive, and sustainable approaches to community development in India and beyond.

In essence, the education of women is not merely an end but a powerful means to usher in a more just, equitable, and progressive world. The call to educate women for social change is a call to invest in the collective potential of half of the population.

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Women's Leadership: Conflict Resolution Styles and Entrepreneurial Success

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Abstract

This chapter explores the unique intersections of women's leadership styles, conflict resolution methods, and entrepreneurship. Emphasizing how women leaders employ various conflict resolution styles, it discusses the effectiveness of these styles in entrepreneurial settings and their influence on business growth, team cohesion, and innovation. Drawing upon current research in leadership, conflict management, and gender studies, this chapter offers insight into the characteristics that make women leaders uniquely positioned to foster resilient and adaptive businesses in a rapidly evolving global economy.

Keywords: Women's leadership, entrepreneurship, conflict resolution, transformational leadership, collaborative leadership, business innovation, negotiation, team management.

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, the narrative of women in leadership has transformed significantly. While once limited to specific roles and industries, women today have permeated virtually every sector, reshaping the global business landscape. Women entrepreneurs are no longer the exception but a formidable force, with women-owned businesses contributing substantially to economic growth and innovation worldwide. With this growing presence, women bring unique leadership styles and conflict-resolution strategies that stand out in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023)

A LinkedIn report titled "Gender Equity in the Workplace." notes that at the entry level, 46% of roles globally are held by women, but this percentage decreases at higher seniority levels. For instance, only 35% of managerial roles are occupied by women. In addition to this, women hold 25% of C-suite roles

worldwide. In India, this figure is 15%, compared to 19% in Germany, 24% in France, 25% in South Africa, and 27% in the United States. This trend indicates that women are underrepresented in leadership positions, with the disparity becoming more pronounced at higher levels of seniority. (GitMap LinkedIn, 2022) (Fuhrmans, 2024b)

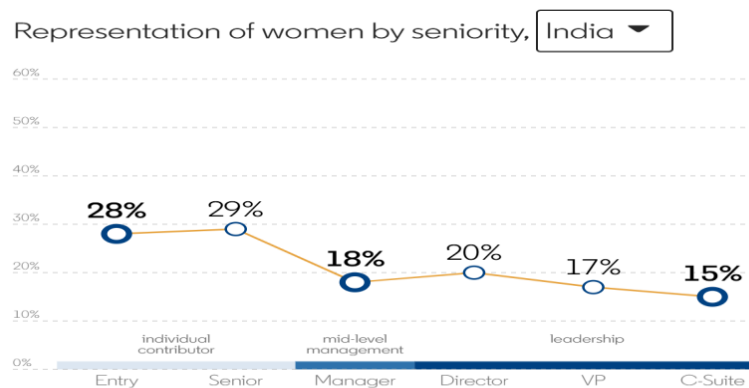


Figure 1 Representation of Women by Seniority in India

(GitMap LinkedIn, 2022)

Figure 1 reveals a concerning trend in the **career progression of women professionals in India**: while entry and early career stages show promising levels of participation, a sharp decline emerges as women move into leadership roles. This pattern indicates the presence of **systemic barriers**—commonly referred to as the “leaky pipeline” or “glass ceiling”—that hinder women's upward mobility within organizations.

The most significant drop occurs at the **mid-management level**, suggesting that organizational cultures, lack of mentorship, limited access to decision-making roles, and work-life balance challenges disproportionately affect women during this phase. Even though there is a minor rebound at the **director level**, the consistent downward trajectory toward the **C-suite** underscores a lack of sustained support and strategic inclusion practices at the top tiers.

These insights carry several implications for leadership development in India:

- **Structural interventions are needed** at the manager and VP levels, including leadership pipelines tailored for women, flexible work policies, and transparent promotion criteria.
- The data calls for **targeted mentorship and sponsorship programs**, especially between mid-management and senior leadership, where the drop-off is most evident.

- Organizations must address **unconscious bias** in performance evaluations and succession planning to ensure that women are equally considered for top leadership positions.

- Policymakers and corporate stakeholders should invest in **gender-equity audits** and enforce accountability mechanisms for improving women's leadership representation.

Ultimately, this figure is not just a reflection of the current state but a **call to action**—to redesign leadership pathways in a way that retains and elevates the talent and potential of women throughout their careers in India.

This chapter explores the multifaceted dimensions of women's leadership, particularly focusing on how women entrepreneurs manage conflicts that foster cohesion, adaptability, and innovation within their businesses. Women's leadership styles, often grounded in empathy, inclusivity, and collaboration, differ from traditional male-dominated models, providing new pathways to resolve disputes and build resilient teams.(Krauss & Kroeber, 2021) Moreover, women in leadership face unique challenges stemming from societal expectations, structural barriers, and historical limitations. These factors influence how women navigate conflicts and adapt their leadership styles to create sustainable business practices.

We will first outline the historical and contemporary landscapes of women's leadership in entrepreneurship, examining how the evolution of societal norms and organizational structures has enabled more women to step into leadership roles. This chapter will then delve into the predominant leadership styles exhibited by women entrepreneurs, such as transformational and inclusive leadership, and explore how these approaches are applied in real-world settings. The second half of the chapter addresses conflict resolution styles, discussing how women entrepreneurs handle disputes in a manner that prioritizes team cohesion, long-term partnerships, and ethical considerations. Through case studies, we will illustrate how these conflict resolution strategies contribute to business success, resilience, and innovation. Finally, the chapter will discuss challenges that women leaders face and consider future implications for research and practice in women's entrepreneurship.

2. The Landscape of Women's Leadership in Entrepreneurship

2.1 Historical Context

Historically, women's participation in the workforce and, more specifically, in leadership roles, was restricted by various cultural, social, and economic barriers. Early 20th-century norms often confined women to domestic

roles, with few options for professional advancement. (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023) Even as women began entering the workforce in larger numbers, they were commonly limited to support roles rather than positions of power. Leadership roles in business, especially entrepreneurial leadership, were largely dominated by men, reinforcing stereotypes that associated leadership with masculine traits such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and control.(Kimbu et al., 2021) (Gupta et al., 2009)

The shift began to occur during the latter half of the 20th century, catalyzed by significant social and economic changes, including the feminist movement and legislative advancements supporting gender equality. These shifts enabled women to access education, professional networks, and resources previously out of reach.(O'Neill, 2017) However, it wasn't until the 21st century that women began achieving notable parity in some sectors, stepping into roles traditionally occupied by men and bringing a fresh perspective on leadership. Women's leadership styles, which often emphasize empathy, collaboration, and relationship-building, began to challenge the conventional notions of effective leadership.(Burton, 2019) (Eagly & Carli, 2007) As women entered entrepreneurship, they carried these values into business ventures, reshaping how enterprises are managed and led.

2.2. Contemporary Trends

Today, the entrepreneurial landscape for women is characterized by a dynamic blend of innovation, diversity, and resilience. Women entrepreneurs are leading in fields ranging from technology and finance to social enterprises and sustainable businesses.(Kurek et al., 2023) Despite facing unique challenges—such as gender biases, funding gaps, and limited access to networks—women continue to launch and lead successful ventures globally.(Arcuri et al., 2023)(StartupStory, 2024)(News Desk, 2024) For example, a 2020 report by McKinsey & Company highlighted the impact of women-led businesses, finding that companies with greater gender diversity on their leadership teams are more likely to outperform financially than their less diverse counterparts.(Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020)

For a business to achieve sustainable growth, it is essential to cultivate an environment characterized by open, accountable communication and effective execution. Engaging in constructive challenges and collaborating with individuals from diverse perspectives fosters creativity, often leading to transformative innovations that propel organizations forward. (Outlook Business Desk, 2024) A recent report by Ernst & Young (EY) highlights the significant impact of women in leadership roles, noting that their presence on corporate boards is associated with enhanced stock performance, stronger corporate

governance, and greater innovation outcomes.(Kasad, 2023) While technical expertise and knowledge remain critical for career advancement, CEOs consistently prioritize soft skills as the most valuable professional attributes. Key traits include effective communication, empathy, and self-awareness—qualities that enable individuals to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics and leverage their strengths while addressing personal limitations.(Outlook Business Desk, 2024)

Contemporary research suggests that women leaders are often driven by values beyond mere profit, including a commitment to social responsibility, community building, and environmental sustainability.(Baker, n.d.; McKee, 2024) This broader perspective aligns with the priorities of today's consumers, who are increasingly interested in supporting businesses that prioritize ethical practices and social impact. Thus, women's leadership styles are not only enhancing the entrepreneurial space but are also creating meaningful connections with customers and stakeholders. By focusing on empathy, inclusivity, and ethical practices, women entrepreneurs foster a culture that resonates in today's socially conscious market.(Daniszewski, 2024)

3. Leadership Styles Among Women Entrepreneurs

3.1. Transformational Leadership

Among women leaders, transformational leadership is one of the most prevalent styles. Transformational leadership is defined by a focus on vision, inspiration, and the empowerment of team members. Women who adopt this style motivate their teams by instilling a shared sense of purpose, which is critical in entrepreneurial ventures where the risks are high, and the stakes are personal.(Abasilim et al., 2019; Ardi & Meilani, 2024) Transformational leaders inspire and energize their employees, encouraging them to transcend their self-interests for the good of the organization. This approach is particularly beneficial in entrepreneurial settings, where team cohesion and motivation are essential for navigating the challenges of a start-up environment.(Bennett, 2020; Easton & Steyn, 2023)

Studies indicate that transformational leadership is not only effective but also highly suited to women's natural communication styles and relational tendencies (Bass & Riggio, 2006). By focusing on empowerment rather than authority, women leaders who adopt this style create an environment where team members feel valued and are willing to go the extra mile for the organization. This collaborative and motivating environment drives innovation, as employees feel encouraged to contribute their ideas and take ownership of projects. Moreover, in the context of conflict resolution, transformational leaders are

more likely to mediate disagreements by encouraging open communication and compromise, reinforcing the trust and respect within the team.(Thanh & Quang, 2022)

3.2. Collaborative Leadership

Another defining style among women entrepreneurs is collaborative leadership, which emphasizes partnership, shared responsibility, and a collective approach to problem-solving. Collaborative leaders seek input from their team members and often involve them in key decision-making processes.(Busola Oluwafemi et al., 2020) This style contrasts with more hierarchical approaches, where authority and decision-making power are concentrated at the top.(Fuhrmans, 2024) By involving team members in discussions and valuing diverse perspectives, women who adopt a collaborative leadership style create an inclusive environment where creativity and innovation thrive.(The Women CEO, 2022, 2024)

The collaborative style is particularly effective in start-up cultures, where flexibility and adaptability are essential. Unlike more rigid leadership structures, collaborative leadership allows for greater agility, as team members are encouraged to respond to changes in the business environment quickly.(Voltage Control, 2024) Research has shown that women leaders are more likely to employ this style, as they tend to value interpersonal relationships and team dynamics highly (O'Neill & Bilimoria, 2005). In entrepreneurial settings, where resources are often limited, this collaborative approach can enhance efficiency and help identify innovative solutions to complex problems. Additionally, collaborative leadership is instrumental in conflict resolution, as it encourages open dialogue and a focus on finding mutually beneficial solutions.(Laker, 2023; Mathijs, 2024; Voltage Control, 2024)

3.3. Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership is another common style among women entrepreneurs. This approach focuses on fostering a culture of acceptance and diversity, where every team member's perspective is valued. Inclusive leaders go beyond merely assembling diverse teams; they actively seek to create an environment where all voices are heard and respected. Women are often noted for their ability to empathize and connect with others, making them naturally inclined toward inclusive leadership. By embracing inclusivity, women entrepreneurs can leverage the varied experiences and backgrounds of their teams, driving innovation and adaptability in their businesses.

Inclusive leadership has proven particularly beneficial in entrepreneurial ventures. Start-ups often face complex challenges requiring innovative thinking and diverse perspectives. An inclusive approach enables women leaders to draw upon the strengths of a multifaceted team, generating creative solutions and fostering a sense of belonging among employees (Fine, 2009). This leadership style is also highly effective in conflict resolution, as it values empathy and understanding. When conflicts arise, inclusive leaders are more likely to listen to each side, facilitating respectful discussions that prioritize long-term relationships and team cohesion over short-term wins.

4. Conflict Resolution Styles in Women's Leadership

Effective conflict resolution is central to leadership, especially in environments characterized by innovation, ambiguity, and diverse stakeholder interests—conditions common in entrepreneurial ecosystems. Women leaders often approach conflict not only as a challenge but as an opportunity to reinforce team cohesion, align values, and foster growth. Their strategies are frequently rooted in emotional intelligence, inclusive communication, and relationship-oriented decision-making. This section examines the established models of conflict resolution and explores how women in leadership positions interpret and adapt them within dynamic professional settings.

4.1. Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)

The Thomas-Kilmann model outlines five primary modes of conflict resolution: **Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding, and Accommodating**, based on the dimensions of assertiveness and cooperativeness. Each mode has its unique application, and women leaders often show a nuanced ability to switch between styles depending on the situation.

- **Collaborating (High Assertiveness, High Cooperativeness):**

Many women entrepreneurs prefer this style as it aligns with inclusive leadership values. For example, during internal disagreements about resource allocation, a woman leader may facilitate a brainstorming session where all voices are heard and a mutually beneficial solution is developed. This approach enhances buy-in and supports psychological safety within the team.

- **Competing (High Assertiveness, Low Cooperativeness):**

Though often stereotyped as less aggressive, many successful women leaders effectively adopt a competing style when necessary—especially when quick, decisive action is essential. For instance, in negotiations with

external stakeholders or during legal disputes, they may assert their position firmly to protect organizational interests.

- **Compromising (Moderate Assertiveness, Moderate Cooperativeness):**

Compromise is frequently employed by women leaders to resolve short-term conflicts without damaging long-term relationships. In scenarios like setting project deadlines or negotiating budgets, this style allows them to balance differing viewpoints and maintain momentum.

- **Avoiding (Low Assertiveness, Low Cooperativeness):**

While generally less favored, the avoiding style can be strategically used when tensions are high, or the issue is trivial. Some women leaders use this style temporarily to prevent escalation or to allow time for emotions to settle before revisiting the issue.

- **Accommodating (Low Assertiveness, High Cooperativeness):**

Women leaders may adopt this style to preserve harmony, particularly in early-stage teams or when managing interpersonal tensions. However, overuse may lead to self-sacrifice and resentment, so successful leaders deploy it judiciously and often pair it with assertive boundary-setting in the long term.

4.2. Rahim's Model of Conflict Management Styles

Rahim's framework adds depth by distinguishing conflict handling based on concern for self-versus concern for others. The five styles—**Integrating, Obliging, Dominating, Avoiding, and Compromising**—mirror the TKI model but offer more emphasis on the interpersonal aspect of conflict management.

- **Integrating (High Self, High Others):**

This style is highly aligned with transformational leadership, which many women entrepreneurs embody. They often use integrating when managing cross-functional teams, fostering an environment where all team members feel ownership over the final decision.

- **Obliging (Low Self, High Others):**

This style reflects empathetic leadership—a trait often associated with women leaders. It is particularly effective in nurturing junior team members or when building trust with new partners. However, mature leaders balance obliging with assertiveness to avoid exploitation.

- **Dominating (High Self, Low Others):**

In fast-paced or high-stakes situations, women leaders may adopt this style to protect critical business outcomes. For example, a founder may assert control when a supplier breach endangers product delivery timelines.

- **Avoiding (Low Self, Low Others):**

As in TKI, this style may be used as a short-term tactic. Women leaders might avoid conflict to observe team dynamics before intervening or when they recognize that timing is not optimal for resolution.

- **Compromising (Intermediate on Both Dimensions):**

This style is often used by women to bridge diverse viewpoints, especially in multicultural teams or client-facing roles. It is practical and often ensures progress without prolonged debate.

4.3. Adaptive Use of Conflict Styles by Women Leaders

What distinguishes effective women leaders is not rigid adherence to one style but **situational flexibility**. They are often **context-sensitive**, blending emotional intelligence, empathy, and assertiveness to adapt their conflict resolution style to the team's culture, the stakes involved, and the personalities at play. For example:

- In startups, where resources are scarce and roles are fluid, women leaders might lean more on **collaborating** and **integrating** styles to build alignment and collective ownership.
- In male-dominated industries, they might need to assert themselves using **competing** or **dominating** styles to challenge bias and establish authority.
- In social enterprises or creative industries, where consensus and values-driven decisions are paramount, **compromising** and **obliging** styles may be more prominent.

Moreover, research suggests that women's propensity for **relational leadership**—valuing trust, connection, and collaboration—can enable more effective resolution of complex, emotionally charged conflicts. However, this also requires managing the risk of being perceived as less assertive or overly conciliatory, especially in hierarchical or high-power-distance environments.

5. Entrepreneurial Success: Linking Leadership and Conflict Resolution

Women's leadership in entrepreneurship is increasingly acknowledged for its distinctive impact on organizational culture, innovation, team performance, and sustainability. These outcomes are not only shaped by what women leaders do but also **how they lead**—their leadership styles directly inform how they approach and resolve conflicts. This section explores how **transformational, collaborative, and inclusive leadership** styles translate into **specific conflict resolution behaviours**, enabling women entrepreneurs to drive innovation, build resilient teams, and sustain long-term business success.

5.1. Enhancing Innovation Through Inclusive Conflict Resolution

Women entrepreneurs who exhibit **inclusive leadership** foster a culture where diverse perspectives are welcomed and valued. Inclusive leaders actively seek input from all team members, especially underrepresented voices, and treat conflict as a constructive force.

In terms of conflict resolution, inclusive leaders tend to:

- Use **collaborating** and **integrating** styles to generate creative, multi-perspective solutions.
- Encourage **dialogue over debate**, enabling psychological safety during disagreements.
- Mediate rather than dominate, promoting shared ownership of outcomes.

This approach contributes to **organizational adaptability and innovation**, as conflict becomes a source of idea generation rather than tension (Women Tech Network, 2023). Women-led businesses often outperform in rapidly changing markets due to their ability to resolve tensions inclusively and creatively (Alsos, Isaksen, & Ljunggren, 2006).

5.2. Building Resilient Teams

Transformational leadership, common among women entrepreneurs, emphasizes motivation, emotional connection, and shared vision. These leaders inspire team members, especially during moments of crisis or disagreement.

In conflict situations, transformational leaders typically:

- Adopt **supportive conflict resolution strategies**, such as the **integrating** or **compromising** styles, to maintain group harmony.

- View conflict as a developmental opportunity to strengthen relationships.
- Empower team members to handle interpersonal friction with empathy and mutual respect.

As a result, such leadership promotes **team resilience**—the collective ability to withstand and adapt to challenges. These leaders cultivate trust, cohesion, and emotional well-being within the team, all of which are vital in the entrepreneurial context where uncertainty and rapid change are the norm (Carter & Williams, 2003).

5.3. Long-Term Sustainability in Business

Collaborative leadership—marked by shared decision-making and transparency—is closely linked to conflict resolution behaviors that prioritize ethical, long-term outcomes over short-term wins. Women leaders who demonstrate this style are often driven by values of social responsibility and stakeholder inclusion.

In practice, this translates into:

- Preference for **compromising** and **accommodating** styles when relationships and ethical considerations outweigh positional wins.
- Proactive conflict engagement aimed at **aligning stakeholder interests**, especially in partnerships and community-facing initiatives.
- Decision-making processes that reflect both **empathy** and **strategic foresight**.

This alignment between leadership and conflict resolution contributes to **business sustainability**—not just in economic terms, but in building a purpose-driven, positive workplace culture that earns long-term trust from employees, customers, and society (Brush, de Bruin, & Welter, 2009).

6. Case Studies: Women Entrepreneurs and Conflict Resolution in Action

Understanding how women leaders manage real-world conflicts provides valuable insight into the application of leadership and conflict resolution theories. The following case studies illustrate how prominent women entrepreneurs have applied their unique leadership styles to resolve challenges and foster sustainable success.

6.1. Sara Blakely (Founder of Spanx)

Sara Blakely, the self-made billionaire behind Spanx, is often described as a **transformational leader**—empowering her team through vision, positivity, and creativity. As the company grew from a start-up to a global brand, Blakely encountered numerous conflicts related to scaling operations and maintaining team cohesion.

Conflict Example:

During Spanx’s early expansion phase, internal disagreements emerged over product diversification and whether the brand should move beyond shapewear. Some team members feared diluting the brand, while others pushed for broader market reach.

Resolution Approach:

Blakely adopted a **collaborating and integrating conflict resolution style**. She organized open strategy workshops where every team member—regardless of hierarchy—was invited to contribute ideas and express concerns. This allowed her to surface hidden tensions and co-create a shared vision for product innovation.

Outcome:

The open communication fostered trust and psychological safety, leading to the successful launch of new product lines while preserving the brand’s core identity. Her style not only resolved the conflict but also reinforced a culture of innovation and inclusion.

6.2. Indra Nooyi (Former CEO, PepsiCo)

Indra Nooyi is widely recognized for her **inclusive and visionary leadership**, guiding PepsiCo through a transformation focused on health, sustainability, and stakeholder alignment. Her leadership emphasized **empathetic negotiation and long-term thinking**, which proved critical in high-stakes conflicts.

Conflict Example:

One major conflict involved pushback from investors and executives over her initiative to shift PepsiCo’s product line toward healthier options (“Performance with Purpose”). Stakeholders were concerned about revenue loss due to reducing reliance on sugary drinks and snacks.

Resolution Approach:

Nooyi used a **negotiation-based and integrating style**, combining data-driven persuasion with empathetic listening. She addressed shareholder concerns through transparent dialogue and reframed the debate by showing how long-term brand value and consumer trust would outweigh short-term losses.

Outcome:

Despite initial resistance, PepsiCo successfully rebranded itself with a broader focus on nutrition and sustainability. Nooyi's conflict resolution strategy not only aligned the company with global health trends but also strengthened its corporate reputation and stakeholder loyalty.

6.3. Whitney Wolfe Herd (Founder & CEO, Bumble)

Whitney Wolfe Herd's leadership at Bumble is deeply rooted in **collaborative and people-first values**. She built the company on the premise of empowering women—not only on the platform but also within the workplace.

Conflict Example:

In the early days of Bumble, the company faced external conflict in the form of a lawsuit and public criticism from a competitor, Tinder. Internally, this created stress and uncertainty among employees and partners about the company's future.

Resolution Approach:

Herd employed a **supportive and transparent conflict resolution style**. She communicated openly with her team about the situation, held regular town halls to address concerns, and reassured employees about the company's values and direction. Simultaneously, she took a firm public stance through legal channels and PR, defending Bumble's mission and differentiating its brand.

Outcome:

Her approach preserved internal morale and strengthened the team's commitment during a time of external adversity. Bumble not only survived the legal conflict but leveraged it as a platform to amplify its unique identity and values, resulting in strong brand loyalty and eventual IPO success.

7. Challenges and Barriers for Women Leaders in Conflict Resolution**7.1. Gender Stereotypes in Conflict Management**

Women often face stereotypes that they are either overly emotional or passive in conflict scenarios. These biases can create additional hurdles,

requiring women leaders to balance assertiveness with perceived social expectations (Rudman & Glick, 2001).

7.2. Limited Access to Leadership Networks

Despite the rise of women in business, many still struggle to access male-dominated professional networks, limiting mentorship opportunities and resources necessary for conflict resolution training (Brush et al., 2009).

7.3. Balancing Leadership with Personal Roles

Women often face societal expectations to balance family responsibilities with professional obligations. This dynamic can influence conflict resolution styles, as they may adopt more accommodating approaches to manage time and stress effectively (Eddleston & Powell, 2008).

8. Implications for Future Research and Practice

While notable strides have been made in understanding women's leadership, the nuanced relationship between **conflict resolution styles** and **entrepreneurial success** remains underexplored. As the entrepreneurial landscape evolves—marked by increasing diversity, digitalization, and global collaboration—there is a pressing need to examine how women entrepreneurs navigate conflict in contextually rich and effective ways.

Future research should move beyond generalizations and investigate how **specific conflict resolution strategies**, when employed by women in leadership, contribute to measurable outcomes such as business growth, team retention, innovation rates, and stakeholder satisfaction. Moreover, it is crucial to consider how **cultural, social, and industrial variables** intersect with gender to shape conflict dynamics.

9. Suggested Future Research Questions

- **RQ1: How do specific conflict resolution styles correlate with entrepreneurial success in women-led firms?**

Investigating this could involve identifying patterns between styles (e.g., collaborative vs. competitive) and firm-level outcomes such as profitability, scalability, and market innovation.

• **RQ2: How do cultural contexts affect leadership and conflict resolution styles among women entrepreneurs?**

This question invites comparative studies across regions or countries to understand how norms, power distance, and societal expectations influence the choice and effectiveness of conflict management strategies.

• **RQ3: What are the most effective interventions for developing conflict resolution skills in aspiring or early-stage women entrepreneurs?**

Practical inquiry in this domain may focus on training programs, mentorship models, or experiential learning methods that strengthen women's ability to handle interpersonal and organizational conflict constructively.

• **RQ4: To what extent do gendered expectations influence how conflict behaviors are perceived and evaluated in women leaders versus their male counterparts?**

This research could uncover biases in how assertiveness or emotional expressiveness is interpreted in leadership settings and how this impacts the conflict resolution process.

• **RQ5: How do women entrepreneurs adapt their conflict resolution styles in male-dominated industries versus gender-neutral or female-dominated sectors?**

Understanding these adaptations can help tailor support mechanisms and leadership development approaches based on industry-specific dynamics.

10. Practical Implications

Drawing from the conflict resolution styles, leadership models, and case studies discussed, the following actionable insights can help women entrepreneurs navigate leadership challenges more effectively:

1. Know Your Conflict Style—And Expand It

Identify your natural conflict resolution preference (e.g., collaborating, compromising) using tools like the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. Then, consciously **develop flexibility** to adapt styles depending on the situation, such as using a more assertive style in negotiations or a collaborative style in team settings.

2. Lead with Empathy, Not Passivity

Empathy is a strength, not a weakness. Use it to understand the root of conflict and to mediate tensions, but also set clear boundaries and communicate your expectations assertively to avoid being overlooked.

3. Build a Feedback Culture Early

Foster open communication channels from the start of your business. Encourage your team to raise issues early, which allows for **preventive conflict resolution** and builds a culture of trust and innovation.

4. Use Conflict as a Strategic Tool

Don't shy away from disagreement—**well-managed conflict can spark creativity** and uncover hidden problems. Frame conflict discussions around problem-solving and shared goals.

5. Seek Out Diverse Mentorship

Learn from leaders who have successfully navigated conflict—both women and men, across industries. Different perspectives can prepare you to lead in complex and often male-dominated entrepreneurial environments.

6. Invest in Soft-Skills Development

Just as you'd invest in marketing or operations, **prioritize training in communication, negotiation, and emotional intelligence**. These skills will pay off in handling clients, partners, and teams effectively.

7. Track and Reflect on Conflict Outcomes

Keep a personal journal or team log to reflect on how you handled specific conflicts—what worked, what didn't, and what you'd do differently. This helps you **grow as a leader through experience**.

11. Conclusion

Women's leadership and conflict resolution approaches bring valuable dimensions to entrepreneurship. Their focus on inclusivity, collaboration, and resilience aligns with modern demands for ethical and sustainable business practices. As more women enter and thrive in entrepreneurship, their unique conflict resolution styles will continue to shape the future of business.

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Beyond Tradition: The Evolving Role of Women in Indian Politics

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Abstract

This research paper explores the journey of women's active participation in politics in India, highlighting the ongoing struggle for women's rights and societal progress. It examines key milestones, from early political involvement to contemporary efforts aimed at empowering women in governance. A central focus of this study is the Women's Reservation Bill, which proposes a 33% reservation for women in Parliament and state legislatures. This bill represents a crucial step toward achieving gender parity in political representation and has the potential to reshape India's political landscape by breaking traditional barriers and amplifying women's voices in decision-making. Additionally, the paper aligns this progress with the vision of Vikshit Bharat (Developed India), which underscores the essential role of women in driving national development. By ensuring greater participation of women in political leadership, India can foster an inclusive democracy, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and prosperous society.

Keywords: Women in Politics, Women's Rights, Women's Reservation Bill, Vikshit Bharat, Women in Local Governance, Reservation for Women in Politics, Women's Role in National Development, Awareness, Democracy in India.

1. Introduction: Women in Indian Politics

Women in Indian politics have made significant strides in the country's journey toward democratic governance, yet their representation and participation continue to face challenges due to cultural, social and institutional barriers. While India's constitution guarantees political equality to all citizens, including women, their involvement in formal political processes has evolved gradually, shaped by historical, economic and gendered factors. The journey of

women in Indian politics is not just one of overcoming barriers but also of influencing major political movements, policy changes and leadership roles at various levels of governance.

As of 2024, women constitute approximately 15% of the Indian Parliament, showcasing progress yet falling short of the global average of 26.7% for female representation in national legislatures. India has introduced policies like the 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, ensuring grassroots representation. Several states have even expanded this quota to 50%, driving increased participation in local governance.

Globally, countries like Rwanda and Nordic nations have set higher benchmarks for women's political representation, exceeding 40%. However, in India, societal norms, limited access to resources and fewer opportunities for leadership roles in political parties remain barriers. Although women's voter turnout in elections is now nearly equal to men's, their representation as candidates remains disproportionately low, indicating the need for systemic reforms and cultural shifts.

This progress is pivotal for achieving gender parity in governance, as increased female representation can lead to more inclusive policies and equitable societal development.

2. The journey of women's rights in India

The journey of women's rights in India has been a complex and evolving process, shaped by socio-cultural, political and economic changes. Here's an overview of the progression

Ancient Period: In ancient India, women enjoyed a relatively high status. They were respected in family and society, participated in education and had property rights. Texts like the Rigveda mention women scholars like Gargi and Maitreyi. However, with time, practices such as child marriage and restrictions on widow remarriage started emerging.

Medieval Period: During the medieval period, practices like purdah, sati and restrictions on women's mobility became prevalent. Education and public participation for women declined. Resistance and Reform like Bhakti and Sufi movements provided some women with platforms to challenge societal norms. Figures like Mirabai became symbols of defiance.

Colonial Era: Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Jyotirao Phule advocated for abolishing sati, promoting widow remarriage and improving women's education. Laws like the Widow Remarriage Act (1856) and the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) were

enacted. Women like Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant and Kasturba Gandhi became prominent figures in the independence struggle. The nationalist movement emphasized women's rights as integral to India's progress.

Post-Independence Period: The Indian Constitution (1950) guarantees equality (Article 14), prohibits discrimination (Article 15) and allows affirmative action for women (Article 15(3)). Laws like the Hindu Succession Act (1956) granted property rights.

Social Movements: The 1970s and 1980s saw women's movements advocating against dowry, domestic violence and for reproductive rights. The Vishaka Guidelines (1997) and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013) addressed workplace harassment.

Contemporary Era: Women have increasingly participated in politics, corporate sectors and the arts. Campaigns like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao emphasize education and empowerment.

The evolution of women's rights in India reflects a constant tension between traditional norms and progressive reforms. It highlights the intersectionality of caste, class and religion in shaping women's experiences and struggles.

3. Women's Rights and Political Participation in Indian Democracy

The Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950, laid a strong foundation for women's rights by prohibiting discrimination based on sex and ensuring equality before the law. Today, women in India actively participate in the political process, with many engaging in voting, political activism and decision-making roles. Women's rights in Indian democracy and the Constitution are grounded in principles of equality, non-discrimination and empowerment. These rights are enshrined in various constitutional provisions, legal frameworks and policies aimed at ensuring gender justice. Here's an overview:

Equal Opportunity: Article 16 guarantees equal opportunities in matters of public employment for all citizens, including women.

Political Participation: Article 325 & 326 Guarantee universal adult suffrage, ensuring that women have the right to vote and contest elections without discrimination.

Panchayati Raj Institutions (73rd Constitutional Amendment, 1992): Reserves 33% of seats for women in local governance, empowering women at the grassroots level.

Women's Reservation Bill (2023): Aims to reserve 33% of seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, pending implementation.

4. Women in Panchayati Raj System

The **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992)** introduced one-third reservation for women in rural local governance bodies (Panchayats). This has allowed women to hold leadership positions at the grassroots level, significantly enhancing their political participation. Today, millions of women serve as **Sarpanch** (village heads) or in other positions in Panchayats, helping shape policies and contribute to local governance. The **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992)** mandates at least **33% reservation** for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) across all levels—village, block and district levels. **50% of Panchayat positions** are held by women in almost 22 states of India, this policy has led to more women-centered initiatives, like health and sanitation programs. Women have made significant strides in leadership roles within the **Panchayati Raj System** in India, thanks to constitutional provisions and efforts to promote gender equity in grassroots governance.

Notable Initiatives:

- Training programs by organizations like the **National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD)** aim to enhance the leadership skills of women representatives.

- Schemes like **Mission Shakti** and state-specific initiatives promote the active participation of women in local governance.

As per Ministry of Panchayati Raj Representation in Panchayats, Posted On: 23 SEP 2020 2:42 PM by PIB Delhi Number of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) are 1453973 out of 3187320 Total Panchayati Raj Institutions Representatives in Total State / UTs – 32.

5. Breaking Barriers: Women in Political Decision-Making

Women's participation in decision-making is essential for the development and progress of a country. Below are key examples of women in political decision-making roles in India, followed by relevant references. Here's a shortened version of each biography while keeping the key details:

Indira Gandhi – Prime Minister of India (1966–1977, 1980–1984), she shaped foreign policy, defence and economic reforms, led India to victory in the 1971 war with Bangladesh, nationalized banks and advanced the Green Revolution. Her Emergency-era governance drew both praise and criticism.

Sonia Gandhi– Leader of the Indian National Congress, she steered the party to 2004 and 2009 election wins and oversaw landmark laws like the RTI Act, NREGA and National Food Security Act under the UPA government.

Pratibha Patil – President of India (2007–2012) and the nation’s first female head of state, she promoted women’s visibility in politics, strengthened foreign relations and supported social cause.

Mayawati – Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and BSP leader, she was the first Dalit woman in the role, advocating Dalit rights, women’s empowerment and welfare schemes for marginalized communities.

Nirmala Sitharaman– Finance Minister (2019–present), she managed economic policies during COVID-19, implemented GST and launched initiatives like Atmanirbhar Bharat to boost self-reliance and manufacturing.

Kiran Bedi– India’s first woman IPS officer, later entered politics and served as Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry, driving reforms in education and police administration. Known for her anti-corruption stance and strong governance, she also contested the 2015 Delhi Assembly elections with the BJP, focusing on law enforcement and policy reforms.

Anandiben Patel–Gujarat’s first woman Chief Minister (2014–2016), was known for her pragmatic governance, focusing on women’s empowerment, infrastructure and education. She advanced urban development, improved women’s safety and led key decisions on economic growth and public sector reforms.

Sushma Swaraj– India’s Minister of External Affairs from 2014 to 2019, was admired for her diplomatic skill and empathetic outreach to Indians abroad. She strengthened bilateral ties and played a key role in shaping India’s foreign policy and international relations.

Each of these leaders has influenced decision-making processes, bringing forward practical and empathetic leadership while breaking gender barriers in traditionally male-dominated political spheres.

6. Understanding the Women’s Reservation Bill and its Benefits

The Women's Reservation Bill, officially known as the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, was introduced in the Lok Sabha on September 19, 2023. This introduction took place during a special session of Parliament and was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, marking it as a significant step towards enhancing gender equality in Indian politics.

The bill aims to reserve one-third (33%) of all seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, addressing the historical underrepresentation of women in these decision-making bodies. The journey of the Women's Reservation Bill has been long and complex, with previous attempts to introduce similar legislation dating back to 1996. Earlier versions of the bill were introduced in 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2008, but faced various challenges and ultimately lapsed due to the dissolution of the Lok Sabha or lack of consensus. The successful passage of the bill in 2023 represents a culmination of these efforts and a historic achievement for women's rights in India.

Key Provisions of the Bill

Reservation Quota: One-third of the total seats in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies are to be reserved for women. Rotation of reserved constituencies occurs every election cycle.

Reserved Seats for SC/ST Women: A portion of the 33% is designated for women from Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) categories.

Duration: Reservation will last for **15 years** from the enactment of the law but can be extended by Parliament.

Exclusions: No reservations in the Rajya Sabha (upper house) or State Legislative Councils.

Benefits of the Women's Reservation Bill

Increased Representation: Currently women in Lok Sabhais about 15% and even less in state assemblies. The bill ensures stronger female representation in decision-making.

Advancing Gender Equality: Increased participation helps address issues affecting women, including education, healthcare and safety.

Improved Governance: Studies indicate that women in politics often bring greater transparency and focus on social issues.

Holistic Development: Women's empowerment in politics complements economic and social progress, reducing gender disparities.

7. A vision of "Vikshit Bharat" (Developed India)

A vision of "Vikshit Bharat" (Developed India) inherently includes promoting gender equality and empowering women in all spheres, including politics. Encouraging women's political participation in India under this vision would involve the following strategies:

Leadership Training and Capacity Building: Launch nationwide training programs for aspiring women politicians in leadership, public policy, governance and campaign management. Programs like the **National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD)** can focus on political empowerment.

Encouraging Grassroots Leadership: Strengthen and expand the 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, proven to be a successful model for grassroots empowerment. Women Sarpanches have effectively improved education, healthcare and sanitation in villages.

Increasing Visibility of Women Leaders: Highlight the achievements of women in politics through media and public campaigns. Promote success stories of women leaders and Role models which inspire young women to enter public life and challenge stereotypes.

Leveraging Technology: Use of digital platforms to connect women aspirants with political training and resources. Encourage e-campaigning to reduce logistical challenges. Platforms like **Shakti - Political Power to Women** can be scaled to offer virtual support.

Recognizing Intersectionality: It Ensures participation of women from marginalized communities including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and minorities. This would create a more representative democracy, addressing diverse perspectives.

National Commitment to SDGs: Align policies with **Sustainable Development Goal 5** (Gender Equality) to ensure systematic efforts toward empowering women in politics. International commitments strengthen domestic policies and funding for gender-equal governance.

A Vikshit Bharat prioritizing women's political participation will result in more inclusive governance, better representation of women's issues and holistic national development. Empowering women leaders not only fulfils the principles of democracy but also accelerates India's journey toward becoming a developed nation.

The Integrated Theory of Political Science combines three main perspectives like normative (values and ideals), empirical (facts and data) and institutional (rules and structures) to understand and improve politics. Applied to women's political participation in India, it shows how values, evidence and institutions work together.

Normative perspective: Political thinkers like Dahl (1989) say democracy must guarantee equality and representation. The Indian Constitution reflects this in Articles 14, 15 and 16, which ensure non-discrimination and equal

opportunities. For example, the Women's Reservation Bill (2023) supports the moral principle that women should have an equal voice in Parliament.

Empirical perspective: The data tells us that in 2024, only 15% of Lok Sabha members are women far below the global average of 26.7% (Inter-Parliamentary Union). Even though women now vote almost as much as men, they are still underrepresented as candidates. This gap shows the need for stronger measures.

Institutional perspective: Structures like the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments reserved at least 33% of seats in local bodies for women (and 50% in many states). This led to a huge rise in women leaders at the grassroots level. For example, women-led Panchayats in Rajasthan and West Bengal have prioritized drinking water, sanitation and health care issues often neglected before (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004).

The Women's Reservation Bill, 2023, is a perfect example of the Integrated Theory in action. It turns the normative ideal of equality into an institutional reform that will likely improve representation and policy outcomes. From a systems theory angle (Easton, 1965), feminist movements and public opinion are the "inputs," and the Bill is the "output," which will then shape future laws and priorities.

Historically, India has had women leaders from ancient thinkers like Gargi and Maitreyi, to freedom fighters like Sarojini Naidu, to modern figures like Indira Gandhi, Pratibha Patil and Nirmala Sitharaman. These examples show how individual agency and supportive structures work together.

From a Political Development Theory standpoint, India is at a turning point. Legislative changes (reservation), skills programs (like NIRD's training for women leaders) and changing cultural norms (positive media portrayal of women politicians) can create a feedback loop more representation → more inclusive policies → stronger democracy → more development.

Thus, the study gives a holistic framework for understanding and advancing women's political empowerment by merging values, evidence and institutions into one approach.

8. Suggestions

To boost women's active participation in politics, a multi-pronged approach involving societal, structural and individual efforts is essential. Below are some practical suggestions:

Education and Awareness

- **Promote Gender-Sensitive Education:** Include gender equality in school curriculums to shape progressive mindsets from an early age.

- **Workshops and Seminars:** Organize events to educate women about political rights, responsibilities and the impact of their involvement.

- **Leadership Training:** Offer programs focused on public speaking, leadership and political campaigning to build confidence.

Support Networks

- **Mentorship Programs:** Aspiring women politicians with experienced leaders to guide them.

- **Women's Forums and Networks:** Establish platforms where women can share experiences, resources and strategies to succeed in politics.

Political Party Reforms

- **Encourage Inclusion:** Political parties should prioritize women candidates for elections and leadership roles.

- **Equal Opportunities:** Provide financial support and resources for women candidates to reduce disparities in campaign capabilities.

- **Safe Work Environments:** Develop robust mechanisms to address harassment and ensure safe participation.

Media and Public Perception

- **Positive Representation:** Highlight the achievements of women politicians in media to inspire others.

- **Address Gender Stereotypes:** Run awareness campaigns to challenge societal biases against women in leadership roles.

Financial and Logistical Support

- **Funding Schemes:** Create grants or subsidies for women candidates to ease financial barriers.

- **Access to Resources:** Provide access to training centers, campaign resources and logistical support.

Grassroots Engagement

- **Mobilize Community Support:** Collaborate with local NGOs and activists to encourage women's participation in grassroots politics.

- **Civic Participation Drives:** Conduct awareness campaigns to inform rural women about their voting and candidacy rights.

Encouraging Family and Social Support

- **Family Counselling Programs:** Educate families about the importance of supporting women in politics.

- **Community Support Systems:** Develop initiatives to reduce societal stigma around women in leadership.

Digital Platforms

- **Use Social Media:** Leverage digital platforms to connect, educate and mobilize women.

- **E-Governance Tools:** Provide online tools for training and connecting women in politics.

Recognition and Role Models

- **Celebrate Achievements:** Recognize and reward successful women leaders to motivate others.

- **Highlight Stories:** Share inspirational journeys of women politicians to foster ambition and confidence.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, the journey of women in politics in India from 1950 to the present has been marked by significant strides towards gender equality and political empowerment. From the early years of independence, women like Indira Gandhi made their mark, but progress has been slow due to societal and structural barriers. The passage of the Women's Reservation Bill 2023, which mandates 33% reservation for women in Parliament and state legislatures, marks a transformative shift towards equitable political representation. This aligns with the Vikshit Bharat vision, which recognizes the vital role of women in driving the nation's development. By ensuring women's active participation in decision-making, India can foster a more inclusive democracy. While challenges remain, the strengthening of women's rights and political participation is essential for a more progressive society. With continued reforms, India can realize a future where women are central to political leadership and contribute to national growth.

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Educating for Equality: The Role of Education in Women's Empowerment in Gujarat

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Abstract

Empowerment of women through education is a key driving force for sustainable and equitable development. This article attempts to analyze the present status of women in Gujarat and emphasizes on the progress made in education and literacy as well as the continuing challenges of sociocultural obstacles, economic constraints and inadequate infrastructure. The paper analysed the changing role of education in women empowerment, highlighting its impact on economic autonomy, social participation, health awareness and political representation. Among them high dropout rates, limited access to higher education, digital exclusion and such subjects have been covered along with the essential government campaigns like *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas*, *Shala Praveshotsav* and *Kanya Kelavani*. It writes, introducing a few measures to improve women's access to quality education and employment: better infrastructure in women's colleges; developing skills relevant to women's employment by engaging local communities and private players; lessons from Tamil Nadu and Kerala. A central theme of the paper highlights the role of education in the improvement of lives and living standards of the women of Gujarat and how it forms the bedrock for inclusive development.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Women Education, Gender Equality, Inclusive Development, Women's Rights

1. Introduction

Women empowerment is fundamental to achieving sustainable and equitable development. Despite decades of advancement women and girls frequently continue to face systemic obstacles to their life opportunities, especially in certain regions of India like Gujarat. Today, the role and condition

of women in Gujarat vary; remarkable progress has been made, but significant challenges remain. According to the 2011 Census, the literacy rate in the state has crossed the national average of 65.5% with female literacy reaching 70.7%. In Gujarat, women, however, still grapple with low workforce participation, restricted opportunities for higher education, sociocultural hurdles, particularly in the rural and tribal belts.

Empowerment of women, whether it be in the social, political, economic or any other sphere, is possible only through education, which not only bridges these gaps, but helps women be financially independent and make informed choices and take part in social and political life. Though the state has taken several steps to increase childhood education, its female literacy is still well below that of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, both of which have over 90% female literacy rates, and both of which established more aggressive policies for advancing access to schools. These states have shown that progressive social policies and some sustained investment in education can empower women.

This article examines the matter of women in Gujarat, their upliftment through education, and take lessons from other states to build a more inclusive and equal society.

2. Women in Gujarat: An In-Depth Status Analysis

In terms of women development, Gujarat has made great strides, but a lot remains to be done for ensuring total empowerment in all sectors.

2.1. Education and Literacy

Gujarat's female literacy of 70.7% (2011) is higher than the national average of 65.5% but lower than advanced states like- Kerala (92%). Though initiatives like Kanya Kelavani have helped improve enrolment rates at primary schools, dropouts rise sharply at secondary and higher school levels, mainly for socio-economic and cultural reasons.

2.2. Labour Force Engagement

Women only join formal and informal labor markets at 25%, which limits their economic participation. Women own 70% of small businesses and dominate the agriculture, textile and handicraft industry, however, they face huge barriers in profit-generating sectors such as IT and management where they are under-represented.

2.3. Health and Wellness

While maternal mortality has improved, serious barriers to accessing care remain, especially in rural and tribal areas. And, of course, women — especially

from tribal regions — still suffer from malnutrition, which affects overall health and civic engagement ability.

2.4. Socio-Cultural Landscape

Patriarchal socio-cultural frames especially in rural areas impact women the most. Other ongoing challenges are early marriage, gender-based violence and dowry practices.

2.5 Political Representation

Politically speaking, women are few and even fewer are in ID decision-making positions at state and national level. While local governance affects many other areas, there are too many challenges to gain political engagement.

3. The Function of Education in Women's Empowerment: A Transformative Odyssey

Education is not a tool to educate the masses, education is a very big tool that gives power and empowerment to people. Education opens the doors to new possibilities and shatters the chains of society and allows women to be themselves.

3.1. Economic Metamorphosis

Education provides the knowledge and skills which keep a woman economically empowered, and you ensure that this opportunity does not stop to anyone with you. This enables them to reduce their financial reliance on relatives of the opposite sex, and to become a crucial driver of economic development in their households and neighbourhoods.

3.2. Dynamics of Social Empowerment

Education also empowers women as it fights against many patriarchal norms and leads to the generation of critical and conscious people of the world. It helps redress societal evils like child marriage and gender-based violence and it empowers women by giving them tools that they need to better their future, thus building a more equitable society.

3.3. The effect on health and well-being

Women who are educated are likelier to invest in their own health, and that of their families. They have a better understanding of healthcare practices, are more educated about family planning and are more likely to pursue medical treatment. Such approaches will ultimately lead to improved health for people and communities.

3.4. Political and Community Leadership

It is through education that men and women are able to rise to the leadership of their community and beyond. It increases their own confidence, encourages them to call for gender equality and enhances their representation in local government and policymaking.

3.5 Initiatives of Gujarat

State schemes such as *Kanya Kelavani* and *Shala Praveshotsav* in Gujarat, and the status of states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu for moving towards the education of women suggest that education works wonders in enhancing their stature. Education can make huge differences in society through opening up opportunities for girls' enrolment, vocational training and overcoming gender divide.

3.6 Key Learnings from Best Practices

Through education to transformative progress, states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu can lead the way. These are states that demonstrate that literacy is a little deeper than a superficial feature of education; it's a driver of social transformation. Moreover, getting a degree of higher education is a part of getting experience in different life fields. These states have made incredible progress in empowering its women and feeding its communities through education and putting gender equity on their to-do list.

4. Strategic Initiatives for Women's Education in Gujarat

The Gujarat government has undertaken widespread initiatives to improve women's access to education in the state, breaking down the many financial, social and infrastructural barriers.

4.1. A few key integral programmatic ways to be involved

4.1.1. Enrolment and Retention Efforts

- ***Kanya Kelavani Campaign:*** A campaign to make parents aware of the importance of sending their girl child to school, runs through community participation to ensure the girl child is enrolled in schools especially in rural and tribal area.

- ***Shala Praveshotsav:*** Objective of this initiative is to reduce dropout rate, especially for girls hailing from economically disadvantaged sections.

- ***Mission Vidya:*** Identification & Re-enrolment of girls who are out of school to the mainstream education.

4.1.2. Economic Empowerment for Women Education

- **Free Girls Education:** The education is provided free of cost till higher secondary.

- **Vidya Laxmi Bond Yojana:** It speaks of issuance of roothless bonds for the education of daughters.

- Scholarships and waivers to remove financial barriers.

4.1.3. Comprehensive instructional Support

- **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyayas:** Residential education for underprivileged girls

- Free of charge lodging, food and educational resources
- Embed vocational education across the curriculum

4.1.4. Competence Enhancement and Empowerment

- **Sakhi Mandals:** Adult literacy programs in inaccessible areas
- Vocational training on various disciplines including information technology, tailoring and entrepreneurship.
- Collaborations with industry for job-centered skills development.

4.1.5. Technological development and innovations

- E-Learning Projects for Education Sugars: Measures of smart classrooms and electronic learning tools
- Provide tablets to underserved areas
- Educator training online modules

4.1.6. Social Protection and Awareness

- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme:** Combating gender discrimination
- Campaigns against female foeticide
- Economic incentives to help girls get an education

4.2 Strategic Consequences

While such projects have dramatically improved literacy rates and educational opportunities, public interest must be maintained. The multidimensional approach highlights a determined effort to remove systemic hurdles towards women's education in Gujarat.

4.3. Conclusion

Through this, it illustrates a potent pattern of women empowerment on behalf of the education programs in Gujarat — a holistic tool of monetary assistance, skill development, and social awareness.

5. Enhancing Women's Education in Gujarat: A Holistic Approach

A holistic strategy that eliminates fundamental barriers and also enabled a sea change in the educational attainment of women in Gujarat.

5.1 Cultural Transformation

This requires large scale awareness campaigns to counter deep-seated patriarchal values. Focusing on how successful women achieved their goals makes for better role models to strive for and aspire towards in the generations to come.

5.2. Leverage Data for Remote Learning.

In order to provide equal access education, it is imperative to set up educational institutions in remote areas and provide safe transportation for girls. Gender DRR awareness in pre- and in-service teacher training programs can help create a supportive learning environment. Furthermore, inclusive curricula that promote gender equity and life skills building can equip students with the ability to make informed decisions.

5.3. Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment is one of the keys to women empowerment itself. Access to finance, encouraging entrepreneurship, vocational training, closing gender pay gaps, and building inclusive but flexible workplaces can all collectively empower women to achieve financial independence and drive societal progress.

5.4. Mitigating Obstacles

This includes flexible educational options to support many responsibilities, so girls can overcome the obstacles they face. Adolescent-specific challenges can be addressed through supportive policies, and women have a better chance of entering the workforce if they have received vocational and technical training.

5.5. Strategic Focus Areas

Young women can benefit from mentorship programs, and female-only institutions of higher education can offer a safe space for women to thrive academically. Well-designed targeted interventions for at-risk populations will ensure no one is left behind. Data collection and policy evaluation are crucial in

allowing governments (and other sectors such as private enterprises) to measure progress and make decisions based on evidence.

5.6. Mechanisms for Implementation

Partnering with NGOs and the for-profit sector can build on expertise and resources to support better programs. Most importantly, it is necessary to allocate extra budgetary resources specifically for girls' education. These can help in the development of skill development and job placements. Lastly, community accountability mechanisms can reinforce transparency in, and inclusion in decision-making processes.

The comprehensive plan causes a disruption of the (educational) opportunities that every girl in and outside of Gujarat will have access to, and can be reared and contribute to the social and economic development of the state.

6. Obstacles to Women's Education in Gujarat: A Thorough Examination

There are a number of hindrances in women's education specifically in Gujarat. Here we are discussing the key factors that comes in the way of women's education:

6.1. Socio-Cultural Obstacles

Deeply entrenched patriarchal customs also bias education within the family, with a preference for educating boys and discrimination against girls. Early marriages prevent girls from pursuing education, and myths and stereotypes restrict their aspirations and capabilities.

6.2. Economic Constraints

With respect to the education of siblings, poverty often means boys get priority, because boys are considered future breadwinners. More weight is put on Opportunity Costs for girls relative to education and education for post-secondary education is a support not offered to girls, further compounding the issue between the two genders.

6.3. Issues Poor Accessibility and Infrastructure

Girls are faced with numerous challenges: lack of schools in rural areas, lack of accommodation and poor sanitation. Safety concerns can also restrict girls' mobility and access to education.

6.4. Critical Dropout Factors

These resulted making girls drop out even higher such as lack awareness, menstruation hygiene management problems, Adolescents challenges and social pressures.

6.5. Workforce & Opportunity Related Barriers

The skill gap that women acquire versus available employment, workplace discrimination and lack of access to career opportunities, and technological and digital literacy deprivation are barriers directly affecting women's participation in the economy.

6.6. Barriers to Behaving Like Systems Change

Floors in the policy implementation, underinvestment in women's educational programs, and low representation of women in various levels of governance further compound the problem associated with not only access to education but also women availing the benefits of education.

These interlinked constraints constitute a complex network of factors that contribute to disproportionately stifling women's educational and professional development in Gujarat, requiring comprehensive and multi-dimensional interventions to produce tangible changes.

7. Conclusion

Education for women serves as a social advancement that correlates highly with the sustainable growth of the region in Gujarat. While the state has made significant strides in increasing access to education and implementing programs, major challenges persist, particularly in areas that are rural and tribal. We cannot close the gender gap in education and employment engagement without mitigating socio-cultural barriers, improving infrastructure, and ensuring economic and digital inclusion.

This could guide Gujarat to better policies, promote grassroots activism and strategize on the higher education and skill development for women, inspired by the success stories of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The impact of an educated and empowered woman can be on her own life but she also uplifts her family and neighbored and creates an effect to social and economic progress.

Women empowerment and gender equality is a work in progress in Gujarat. This effort will be able to harness one of the state's biggest assets, its women, and provide them with opportunities to contribute to a more equal, a more just and a more prosperous society.

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Empowering Women: Advancing Rights and Expanding Opportunities

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Abstract

Women's rights and opportunities have undergone a sea change over the last century, but challenges persist in attaining true gender equality in all spheres of society. While legislative strides, such as the right to vote, property rights, and equal education, have been made, women still face systemic barriers in the workplace, healthcare, and political participation. The research evolving on women's rights and opportunities, concerning the socio-political and economic views, is a conversation that tries to bridge the loopholes in representation of women, access to leadership, and problems in global south countries. It goes further to dig into race, class, and gender inter-sectionalism to reflect on how different identities develop opportunities and rights for women. The research method will involve a qualitative analysis of secondary data drawn from peer-reviewed journals, books, and official reports to understand the key trends and barriers to gender equality. The paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the critical areas where progress is needed and provide recommendations for policy reforms and societal changes to advance women's rights and equal opportunities globally.

Key Words: Women's Rights, Gender Equality, Opportunities, Economic Empowerment, Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Intersectionality, Gender Disparities, Legal Reforms, Education, Political Participation

1. Introduction

Women's rights and opportunities have dominated global discussions on gender equality and social justice. Historically, women have been marginalized and denied education, suffrage, and economic liberty. Although women in many regions of the world today have equal legal rights to males, the reality of their prospects in school, work, and leadership roles sometimes tells a different picture. (Scully, 2016). The gap between legislation and practice continues to hinder progress toward true equality.

Women's rights and opportunities have played an important role in the present gender equality movement. Within a century of human history, great

steps have been made to create a new generation that is supported and valued, with equal acknowledgment for their rights in areas such as political involvement, educational, and occupational equality. Despite legislative victories and policy changes, women continue to suffer systemic impediments in many areas of life, including in the job, political involvement, and access to health and education. (Sen, 1999). The fight for women's rights has evolved from basic human rights to a broader spectrum of social, political, and economic opportunities.

In many places of the world, gender inequality persists. Women continue to experience salary inequalities, underrepresentation in leadership positions, and gender-based violence. (Kahn, 2000). However, such limits are accentuated in specific locations due to cultural, economic, and social factors, such as in nations in the global south with weak health and educational infrastructures. (Bank, 2020). Despite the fact that many nations have ratified international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), these agreements are not always followed in reality; women are still marginalized and at risk of being marginalized. (CEDAW, 1979).

Further, (Crenshaw, 1991) presented the idea of intersectionality to demonstrate how discrimination against women is exacerbated by overlapping social identities such as race, class, and ethnicity. This is a crucial method for comprehending the requirements of women from various backgrounds. Additionally, the digital gap has created additional obstacles to women's economic empowerment, particularly in countries that rely heavily on innovation and technology. (Cheston et al., 2006).

In order to achieve gender equality, this study aims to analyse the ongoing obstacles to women's rights and opportunities, highlighting the necessity of extensive legislative reforms, social transformation, and international cooperation.

2. Literature Review

Women's Rights and Economic Empowerment Women's economic empowerment has been recognized as a critical component of poverty eradication and overall economic growth. According to (Kabeer, 2005), Women's economic empowerment allows them to obtain control over resources and make decisions that benefit both themselves and their family. While there is progress, women remain disadvantaged in the labour market due to systemic inequalities: unequal compensation, limited access to leadership positions, and job discrimination. (World Economic Forum, 2020)

Political participation and representation Political participation of women is an important subject of study in gender equality. According to (Inglehart, 2001), Women's political engagement is essential to the growth of democratic governance. Nonetheless, women are underrepresented in international politics. Their participation is hampered by structural barriers such as prejudice, patriarchy, and a lack of support systems. (Paxton et al., 2020).

Health and Reproductive Rights although women generally still face barriers to receiving high-quality healthcare, reproductive rights and health are essential components of women's rights. According to the (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2015), "reproductive rights are human rights, and access to reproductive healthcare should be enjoyed by all regardless of where she lives." Several issues impede reproductive rights, including restrictive legislation, a lack of education, and the availability of family planning services, the latter of which is primarily a problem in poor countries.

Education and Gender Equality Education is one of the most effective methods for promoting gender equality. As (Duflo, 2012) points out that increasing women's education levels has a huge impact not only on their well-being but also on society's overall economic growth. Despite this, there are still significant discrepancies in education access, particularly in low-income and conflict-affected areas where cultural norms and economic hurdles hinder girls' education.

Intersectionality of Gender and Social Identities According to intersectionality theory by (Crenshaw, 1991), Race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation are some of the social identities that impact women's lives. Women of color and marginalized populations experience compounded forms of discrimination that limit their prospects for progress. Applying this intersectional viewpoint is crucial while attempting to comprehend the types of obstacles that women face in achieving gender equality. (Cho, 2013).

South Global Women and Development: Women in the Global South face numerous obstacles, ranging from systemic poverty and lack of access to education to the deeply ingrained cultural norms. According to Sen's 1999 study, gender inequality and the inability to access specific resources combine to exacerbate the severe status disparities that women face in developing countries. More coordinated policies at all levels are required to support the rights and potential power of women in the global south.

Legal Protections and Gender-Based Violence one of the most pervasive abuses of women's rights is still gender-based violence (GBV). According to (Heise, 2011), the legislative framework and social support mechanisms are critical for addressing and preventing gender-based violence. Even if international frameworks such as CEDAW exist, their implementation is patchy, particularly in conflict zones.

Gender Differences in Pay and Employment Gender pay disparities and occupational segregation are prevalent over the world. According to (Kahn, 2000), Gender wage disparities are driven by labour market discrimination, occupational segregation, and women's disproportionately heavy burden of unpaid household work. Paid parental leave and fair pay policies are therefore important to closing these gaps.

Cultural norms and gender roles Opportunities are heavily influenced by cultural attitudes of women's responsibilities in society. According to Alesina et al. (2013), traditional gender roles generally consider women as caretakers, limiting their participation in the formal sector. Many wealthy countries have these.

Women and Technology: The digital divide is a crucial issue for women's rights and opportunity.

According to (Cheston et al., 2006), Women's participation in the contemporary economy is greatly improved by having access to technology and digital literacy. However, due to cultural, economic, and educational restrictions, women are disproportionately excluded from technological progress in many regions of the world.

3. Objectives

1. Examine the History of Women's Rights: To explore the past development of women's rights around the world, with key legal milestones such as suffrage, access to education, property rights, and reproductive rights, with a special focus on diverging timeliness and contexts in the Global North and Global South.

2. Discover Socio-Economic and Political Obstacles: To evaluate enduring socio-economic and political barriers that are impeding women's fair access to workforce participation, political participation, and leadership positions, with comparative examination between the urban and rural areas and marginalized populations in the Global South.

3. Measure Global Gender Disparities: In order to analyse the global gender disparity in education, health, and economic opportunities, specifically with respect to cultural norms, systemic poverty, and geopolitics affecting women in the Global South versus women in the Global North.

4. Discover Intersectionality in Women's Rights: To examine the intersection of overlapping social identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, disability, and migration status in influencing women's rights

and lives in diverse regional settings with a focus on intersectional oppression in the Global South.

5. Impact of Gender-Based Violence (GBV): To measure and compare the incidence and effects of gender-based violence—systemic and domestic—transnationally and regionally. Assess how legal and institutional responses differ and usually fail, especially in war-torn and low-income areas.

6. Research the Role of Education in Promoting Women's Socio Economic Empowerment: To assess the contribution of education towards promoting women's socio-economic empowerment, specifically the impediments to girls' education in the Global South and the emancipatory power of education towards mitigating poverty and gender disparities.

7. Examine Legal and Institutional Structures: In order to critically analyse the effectiveness of legal frameworks, international conventions such as the CEDAW, and institutions such as the UN and World Bank in promoting gender equality, and determine the implementation and enforcement gaps, particularly in resource-poor countries.

8. Analyse Research and Policy Gaps: To determine under-researched themes and inefficient policy instruments within the present debate of women's rights. Context-sensitive research and the challenges of implementation in low-governance and fragile states will be emphasized.

9. Propose Policy Solutions: To build evidence-informed policy recommendations for governments, international organizations, and NGOs to build stronger legal protections and social programs targeting gender imbalances. Particular attention will be devoted to policies specifically addressing rural women and indigenous groups in the Global South.

10. Foster Inclusive Technological Progress towards Gender Equality: To discuss: How technology can be used and digital inclusion can be used in order to empower women economically and socially. Special focus: The digital divide that disproportionately impacts women in the Global South and policy solutions to address this divide, such as digital literacy and access to innovation that is not unequal.

4. Research Gap

The literature on the history of women's rights is extensive, but it is lacking in information on how race and class intersecting variables interact with gender to make it more difficult for women to access opportunities. The majority of research focuses on the western setting, with little or no attention paid to what is going on in the global south.

5. Research Methodology

Secondary Data Collection: A systematic review of existing literature will be conducted, including scholarly journal articles, policy reports, and documents from international organizations such as the United Nations, World Bank, and relevant governmental and non-governmental bodies. These sources will be selected based on relevance, credibility, and regency, focusing on themes related to women's rights, intersectionality, gender disparities, and legal frameworks, with a special emphasis on studies covering the Global South.

6. Limitation

1. This study was based on secondary data only. So this study was not covered **thematic analysis**.
2. This study could not consider **Regional Studies**. While the review mentions global perspectives, there could be more focus on **research gaps** in specific regions, especially in the **Global South**.

7. Findings

Numerous findings from studies on women's rights and opportunities highlight both the progress made and the ongoing difficulties that women face around the world. These conclusions are based on an examination of secondary data gathered from a number of academic publications, international organization reports, and international research.

1. **Advancement of Legal and Policy Changes:** Legal rights have expanded during the last century, including the right to education, the ability to own property, and the right to vote for women. The global advancement of women's rights has been sparked by international agreements on CEDAW and SDGs. (CEDAW, 1979); (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2015)). These agreements have brought about significant changes in many countries, with more gender equality in laws and policies.

Case Study: *Tunisia* has incorporated gender equality into its constitution and family law, while *Sweden* leads globally with a feminist foreign policy that mainstreams gender equality across all its international engagements.

2. Persistent Gender Inequality in the Workforce: Women are still underrepresented in leadership positions and continue to face significant wage gaps. The (Bank, 2020) reveals that women are overrepresented in lower-paying, less secure jobs and that the gender pay gap is still 16% worldwide. The "glass ceiling" and occupational segregation still prevent women from achieving senior management roles. Additionally, women perform a disproportionate amount of unpaid household work, which limits their access to professional prospects. (Kahn, 2000).

Case Study Comparison: In *Japan*, women make up only **15% of senior leadership roles**, whereas in *Iceland*, which mandates gender balance on corporate boards, women hold **45% of such positions**.

3. Underrepresentation in Political and Leadership Roles: In positions of decision-making and politics, women are underrepresented. Although there are now more women in national parliaments, gender parity has not yet been achieved. According to (Paxton et al., 2020), Just 25% of seats in national parliaments around the world are occupied by women, and the situation is significantly worse for executive leadership. Their political engagement is hampered by structural obstacles such as patriarchal traditions, gender prejudices, and a lack of support for female candidates.

Case Study Comparison: In *Rwanda*, women hold **61%** of parliamentary seats—the highest globally—due to strong quotas and political will. In contrast, *Nigeria* has only **4%** female representation in parliament, reflecting deep-rooted patriarchal barriers and limited policy enforcement.

4. Education and Health Barriers Education is still one of the major problems in the globe, especially in conflict areas and low-income nations. Due to certain cultural customs, early marriages, and poverty, girls are denied equal access to education. (Duflo, 2012). It significantly restricts women's economic progress and general well-being. Another crucial concern is the health of women, particularly their reproductive health. High maternal death rates are a result of women's continued lack of access to safe abortion services, contraception, and maternal healthcare in many nations. (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2015).

Statistics: In *South Sudan*, female literacy is only **28%**, while in *Germany*, it exceeds **99%**. Reproductive health remains critical: maternal mortality rates in *Sub-Saharan Africa* average **542 deaths per 100,000 live births**, compared to **11 per 100,000** in *Norway* (WHO, 2022).

5. Effects of Gender-Based Violence: Globally, gender-based violence (GBV) against women is common and prevalent. A third of women worldwide will

experience physical or sexual assault at some point in their lives, according to Heise (2011). In addition to causing bodily and psychological harm, GBV restricts women's options in the political, professional, and educational spheres. The vulnerability of women is increased by the fact that legal remedies against GBV are typically either extremely inadequate or improperly executed.

Case Study: In *India*, the 2012 Delhi gang rape case spurred reforms such as the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013. Yet, enforcement remains weak, with conviction rates for sexual violence cases still below **30%**.

6. Intersectionality and Discrimination: According to the concept of intersectionality, among other identities, women's lives of discrimination are shaped by their sexual orientation, race, class, and ethnicity. (Crenshaw, 1991). Women of color, for example, frequently face disadvantages in areas such as work, education, and healthcare. This study demonstrates the need of an intersectional viewpoint in understanding and meeting the unique needs of women.

Case Study: In the *United States*, Black and Latina women are disproportionately affected by wage inequality and maternal health disparities. In *Brazil*, Afro-Brazilian women face both racial and gender bias, resulting in lower education outcomes and higher rates of domestic violence.

7. Digital divide and Economic opportunity: This type of digital divide is creating new obstacles for women's economic empowerment in some places, especially in the context of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines. There is currently a significant disparity in the participation of men and women in the majority of STEM fields in the workforce. (Cheston et al., 2006). Women are now economically marginalized and have less access to more profitable and secure employment as a result of this technical barrier.

Case Study Comparison: In *India*, women comprise only **14%** of the STEM workforce, while in *Finland*, this figure rises to **33%**, reflecting stronger gender-inclusive educational policies and digital literacy initiatives.

8. The Global North vs the Global South Differences: Women in the global south face very different obstacles than those in the global north. In addition to poverty, illiteracy, and limited access to healthcare, women in the global south may also experience cultural and societal norms that limit their autonomy. (Sen, 1999). Despite having better access to healthcare and education, women from the global north frequently face more covert kinds of inequality, such as underrepresentation in leadership roles and income disparities.

Statistical Comparison: Female labour force participation in *Norway* is **61%**, while in *Pakistan* it stands at just **22%** (World Bank, 2022).

The results of this study demonstrate that although there have been great advancements in women's rights and opportunities, there are still major obstacles in these areas, particularly in the areas of economic involvement, political representation, health, and education. These persistent disparities have complex institutional, social, and cultural roots. A variety of strategies are needed to put these changes into effect, including targeted policies that support women's pursuit of equal opportunity in all other areas, cultural shifts, and legislative reforms.

8. Conclusion

One of the most recent obstacles to achieving globalization in gender inequality is the issue of women's rights and opportunities. Women's rights have advanced significantly during the past century, particularly in the areas of education, political engagement, and legislative reforms. A fundamental framework for advancement has been established by international accords including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, despite all of these successes, structural injustices still exist, and many women still encounter major obstacles that limit their access to equal opportunities in a variety of areas of life, including as the workforce, political engagement, education, and health.

One of this study's primary results is that gender disparity persists in the labour sector. Women continue to face major income discrepancies, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and disproportionate responsibility for unpaid domestic work. These variables work together to hinder women's economic independence and prospects for professional growth. The "glass ceiling" in professional sectors and the "sticky floor" in low-wage occupations highlight the reality that women continue to be confined to specific tiers of the economy, which are exacerbated by intersectional factors such as race, class, and ethnicity. It is evident from the data that while women have made great progress in obtaining employment, there is still a long way to go before they are truly on an equal footing in terms of economic status. Although paid parental leave and equal pay for equal work are essential, there should be stronger enforcement tools and wider application of these rules across all industries.

The study also discovered that women are still underrepresented in leadership roles and political office. Despite some encouraging developments, there are still fewer women than men in parliaments, boards of directors, and other decision-making organizations. Women are prevented from holding leadership positions by structural obstacles such as gender bias, patriarchal standards, and a lack of support for female candidates. In addition to ensuring gender equity in governance, political engagement is crucial for addressing the

unique demands of women in the formulation of public policy. Because of their underrepresentation, women are not given a voice in important national and international decisions and their needs are not adequately addressed by laws and regulations. In addition to being a question of justice, increasing the number of women in leadership roles and politics is essential to the creation of more inclusive communities.

Another significant issue where women continue to face widespread challenges is gender-based violence (GBV). In all of its forms, GBV restricts women's autonomy and opportunity for their own personal and professional development. Adequate legal frameworks and support mechanisms are necessary because GBV is on the radar of the world, particularly from institutions like the United Nations and the World Health Organization. Furthermore, the ongoing problems with women's health, particularly with regard to reproductive health, demonstrate that even in industrialized countries, women's access to healthcare remains a major concern. Women are denied access to essential health services like family planning, safe abortion, and maternal care in the majority of sub-regions, particularly the low-income and crisis-affected areas. For women to participate fully in society without being hindered by avoidable health issues, this component of health disparities should be ignored.

Even while there are still disparities, education has also improved. Since education increases economic opportunities and offers chances to break the cycle of poverty, it is a crucial instrument for empowering women. However, girls from all over the world, especially those from developing nations, are denied the chance to receive an education due to cultural, financial, and practical limitations. Gender-based abuse, child labour, and early marriage are significant obstacles that prevent females from obtaining an education. In addition to impeding women's complete development, this significant learning gap also hinders the economic advancement of entire regions. In an increasingly globalized world, there is an urgent need for more targeted interventions to guarantee that all girls, preferably those from underprivileged backgrounds, have complete access to high-quality education and skills for economic development.

Understanding intersectionality is essential to comprehending why women's rights and opportunities ought to be multifaceted rather than uniform. Women have been oppressed along gender-related dimensions that connect with race, class, ethnicity, etc., which influences how they will be marginalized and subjected to discrimination. Women of various racial backgrounds, sexual orientations and identities, poor socioeconomic status, and others have similar complicated situations that require interventions to recognize and meet their particular needs. Because of the overlapping issues brought about by these various identities, policymakers and scholars must use the intersecting method to ensure that no woman is left behind in achieving gender equality.

Lastly, the most recent obstacle to women's economic empowerment is the digital divide. Their inability to fully participate in the digital economy is hampered by their lack of technological advantages and other exclusions, particularly for women from underdeveloped nations. Women's underrepresentation in technical professions further restricts their ability to obtain well-paying technology positions. Equal chances for women in the digital economy will be made possible by closing the "digital divide" and ensuring that more women have access to the internet through digital literacy programs.

In conclusion, despite numerous touted advancements in women's rights and opportunities, issues still exist. The necessity for ongoing efforts to guarantee women's equal chances in all spheres of life is indicated by the persistence of gender disparity in the workplace, political representation, access to healthcare and education, gender-based violence, and the digital gap. A comprehensive and multifaceted strategy, involving targeted policies, cultural shifts, legal reforms, and international solidarity, is needed to achieve gender equality. We can only start to build such a world—one in which women's rights and opportunities go beyond simply improving their presence and involvement in society—by making consistent, group efforts.

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Kiran Bedi: The Epitome of Woman Empowerment

Deepalee Ambalal Mahida

Abstract

Kiran Bedi, the epitome of woman empowerment is India's first woman IPS officer, is a trailblazer who has shattered glass ceilings and inspired countless individuals with her remarkable journey. This article aims to provide an in-depth account of the life, achievements, and contributions of Kiran Bedi, the first lady officer of the Indian Police Service. Kiran Bedi is a unique confluence of courage, conviction and credibility. Being a true altruistic person she has shattered all glass ceiling as a prominent woman leader. Her life is the best embodiment of both a humane approach and woman empowerment.

Bedi's outstanding leadership acumen is a fine blend born out of her experiences, innovative mindset, challenges, and achievements. Her unique approach towards problem solving, fondly known as 'Kiran Bedi's style', continues to inspire leaders worldwide. This article aims to examine her **leadership** facets and the vital role it played in scripting her success story. It unlocks the ingredients of her 'visionary leadership' that made her an epitome of determination and courage.

Key words: Epitome, Woman Empowerment, Glass Ceiling

1. Introduction

Kiran Bedi, a name synonymous with courage and determination, is a prominent figure in Indian history as the first female officer in the Indian Police Service. Her remarkable journey from a proficient tennis player to a respected social activist and her stint in the United Nations Police have all contributed to her being a role model for countless women in India and beyond. Her tenure in the Indian Police Service was marked by significant

reforms, particularly in the prison sector, which have not only inspired but also motivated women to pursue challenging professions.

2. The leader in making

Born on June 9, 1949, in Amritsar, Punjab, Kiran Bedi grew up in a family that valued education and encouraged her to pursue her dreams. Her parents were much ahead of the times. They sent all their four daughters to the best schools and encouraged them to participate in sports like tennis for their all round development despite the resistance from the elders in their family. Kiran Bedi won many awards in tennis. An important lesson which can be learnt from her is time management. She used to have a fixed schedule and never ever wasted a single moment. All her focus was on her studies and tennis practice. She excelled in academics and sports, winning numerous awards and accolades. Her autobiography, "I Dare," is a testament to her courage, resilience, and determination.

3. A Significant Milestone

Kiran Bedi's entry into the Indian Police Service (IPS) in 1972 marked a significant milestone in her career. She introduced innovative policing methods, focusing on community engagement, rehabilitation, and social justice and thus exhibiting the courage and conviction to change lives of many people. She was the first woman IPS of India and was allocated the Delhi cadre. She led the Delhi Police Contingent on Republic Day, 1975 and the then PM Smt. Indira Gandhi was impressed and called her for a breakfast meeting. She was impartial and never favoured anyone, whatever their rank or position. She towed the car of the PM which was parked in the no parking zone.

She worked in Delhi, Goa, Mizoram and Chandigarh. Everywhere she implemented her unique style of work. Always her main focus and the top most priority was the welfare of the citizens. She devised new ideas and methods to carry out the work effectively and efficiently. Thus she won numerous national and international awards. She always inspired her juniors to fulfill their duties towards the nation by working wholeheartedly.

4. Tihar Jail: A destination for Constructive Reforms

As Inspector General of Prisons, Kiran Bedi transformed Tihar Jail into a model prison, introducing reforms that emphasized rehabilitation, education, and vocational training. Her efforts significantly reduced recidivism rates and improved prisoner welfare. Serving in difficult assignments ranging from New

Delhi traffic postings, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Mizoram, Advisor to the Lieutenant Governor of Chandigarh, Director General of Narcotics control bureau to a United Nations delegation where she became the Civilian Police Advisor in United Nations Peace keeping operations, she was awarded a UN medal. Known by the name 'Crane Bedi' for towing Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's car for parking violation, she showed her dedication to her profession. During her period as the Inspector General of Prisons, in Tihar Jail, she made a number of reforms in the management of the prison.

Some of the programs that she initiated include detoxification programs, Art of Living Foundation Prison Courses, Yoga, Vipassana meditation, Murat redressing of complaints by prisoners and literacy programs and she won the 1994 Ramon Magsaysay Award and the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship to write about her work in Tihar jail. Her last appointment was of Director General of India's Bureau of Police Research and Development.

Her work in the Tihar Jail won her the prestigious Magsaysay Award. The jail which was earlier a terrible, frightening place was converted into an Ashram. The prisoners were treated with a human touch. Classes were held by the NGOs where they could learn new languages, soft skills etc. Festivals of all the religions were celebrated with same fervor. Smoking was banned and thus the health of the prisoners improved. All this happened in a short duration and was possible due to the efforts put in by Kiran Bedi.

5. A Unique Blend of Social Altruism and Politics

Kiran Bedi's commitment to social justice and activism led her to join politics. She became a prominent figure in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and served as the Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry from 2016 to 2021.

In May 2005, she was awarded an honorary degree of Doctor of Law in recognition of her 'humanitarian approach to prison reforms and policing'. Her social acts include setting up of Navjyoti India Foundation (NIF) in 1987 along with 17 other police officers. The foundation started with a de-addiction and rehabilitation initiative for drug addicts and now the work sphere of this organization has expanded to other issues like illiteracy and women empowerment. In 1994, she also set up India Vision Foundation to bring about police reforms, prison reforms, women empowerment and rural and community development. Her organizations were awarded the 'Serge Soitiroff Memorial Award' for drug abuse prevention by the United Nations. This great lady is also a member of the India Against Corruption (IAC) along with Anna Hazaare and Arvind Kejriwal.

6. Kernel statements from I DARE –her biography

I Dare is a biography of Kiran Bedi, the first woman to join the Indian Police Service (IPS). The book is a narrative of her life, including her work in policing, managing prisons, and her work with the UN.

Here are some key statements from Kiran Bedi's book *I Dare*:

- Change is the law, growth is optional
- My self-respect, my innate sense of justice and my beliefs and values in life propelled me to throw off the "yokes"
- I'm a product of opportunities, rare opportunities in the '50s and the '60s
- I did not want to be a part of such dubious history
- I now made up my mind to set myself free and be a master of my own time

Kiran Bedi's inspiring story is a testament to the power of determination, hard work, and a commitment to making a difference. Her legacy continues to inspire future generations of leaders and change-makers.

7. Conclusion

Kiran Bedi's leadership style has been transformative in nature, making waves in workplace as well as in society. Notably, her tenure as a top-ranking officer in Indian Police Service showcased her *balanced approach towards problem-solving* and decision-making.

She mastered the art of maneuvering society's negative forces into positive endeavours, truly epitomising transformative leadership. Bedi's **relentless zeal towards seeing issues** through social, humanitarian perspectives bagged her the sobriquet of a courageous reformer.

Cascading this influence down to her subordinates, she cultivated a culture of *ethical conduct earning nationwide respect*. She embraced transparency and accountability, setting an example for aspiring leaders.

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The Role of Indian Women in Societal Change: A Contemporary Perspective

Neha J. Nandaniya

Abstract

Indian women have been pivotal in driving societal change, navigating traditional roles while breaking barriers across social, economic, and political domains. This article examines their contributions, from grassroots activism to leadership in governance and entrepreneurship, highlighting how education, policy reforms, and evolving societal attitudes have facilitated their progress. However, significant challenges persist, including gender-based violence, wage disparity, and cultural expectations. This paper reviews the current literature to analyze the role of Indian women in shaping a modern and inclusive society. It underscores the need for sustained efforts to empower women and promote gender equality as fundamental components of societal development.

Keywords: Indian women, societal change, gender equality, empowerment, leadership, education, policy reforms

1. Introduction

The role of women in shaping society has been both significant and transformative, particularly in India, a country with a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Historically, Indian women have contributed immensely to various facets of society, from nurturing families to participating in socio-political movements. However, the recognition of their role in societal development has evolved considerably over time, especially in the modern era.

In ancient India, women enjoyed a relatively high status, evident in texts like the Vedas and Upanishads, which emphasized their role in education and spiritual guidance (Sharma, 2022). The medieval period, however, witnessed a decline in their status due to societal and cultural changes, leading to restrictions on their rights and participation in public life (Banerjee, 2021). The advent of colonialism brought mixed outcomes for women. While it reinforced certain patriarchal norms, it also laid the foundation for reform movements championed by social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy,

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Savitribai Phule, who advocated for women's education, abolition of practices like sati, and widow remarriage (Desai & Sharma, 2023).

In contemporary India, women have emerged as key agents of change, significantly impacting the social, economic, and political fabric of the nation. Their contributions are evident in diverse fields, from grassroots activism to leadership in governance, education, healthcare, and business. For instance, the role of women in India's freedom struggle, exemplified by leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, and Rani Lakshmibai, showcased their courage and resilience in fighting against colonial oppression (Mehta, 2023). Post-independence, women's participation in the workforce, politics, and social movements has expanded significantly, driven by constitutional guarantees of equality and affirmative action policies.

2. Concept of Societal Change in the Indian Context

Societal change refers to the transformation of social structures, cultural norms, values, and behaviors over time. In the Indian context, societal change has been influenced by a combination of historical, cultural, economic, and political factors. India's diverse socio-cultural landscape, shaped by its ancient traditions and colonial history, has witnessed significant transformations, particularly post-independence. Key drivers of societal change in India include industrialization, globalization, technological advancements, urbanization, and progressive reforms aimed at addressing social inequalities (Banerjee, 2021).

3. Definitions of Societal Change

Sociological Perspective

“Societal change is the significant alteration of social structures and cultural patterns over time.”- (William F. Ogburn, 1950)

Historical Perspective

“The process through which societies evolve from traditional to modern systems due to changes in political, economic, and cultural paradigms.”- (Arnold Toynbee, 1934-61)

Indian Perspective

“In the Indian context, societal change reflects the transition from traditional systems influenced by religion and caste to a modern framework emphasizing democracy, equality, and secularism.” - (Yogendra Singh, 1973)

Historically, India has experienced societal shifts through movements such as the Bhakti and Sufi movements, which challenged caste hierarchies

and promoted inclusivity (Desai & Sharma, 2023). The Indian freedom struggle further catalyzed societal change, introducing concepts like self-rule, equality, and democracy. In the modern era, societal change in India is characterized by a growing emphasis on gender equality, education, economic empowerment, and environmental sustainability.

Government policies and legal reforms have played a pivotal role in facilitating societal change. Initiatives like the Right to Education Act, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, and the Nirbhaya Fund for women's safety underscore efforts to address systemic inequalities and promote inclusive growth (Patel, 2022). Simultaneously, grassroots movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been instrumental in addressing issues such as gender-based violence, environmental conservation, and rural development.

4. Role of Women in Social Change

Women have been key drivers of social change throughout history, and in India, their roles have been especially transformative. From challenging entrenched societal norms to leading movements for education, health, and empowerment, Indian women have contributed to every aspect of societal development. This section delves into their contributions across various domains, illustrating the scope and impact of their efforts in driving social transformation.

1. Education: Transforming Society Through Knowledge

Education has been a cornerstone for empowering women, enabling them to challenge systemic inequalities and drive societal progress. Women have not only been beneficiaries of education but also catalysts for its dissemination in Indian society.

Savitribai Phule (1831–1897): As the first female teacher in India, Savitribai established schools for girls and marginalized communities, challenging the rigid caste and gender hierarchies of her time. Her efforts laid the foundation for women's education in India (Sharma, 2022). Savitribai Phule was a revolutionary social reformer, educator, and poet in 19th-century India. Alongside her husband, Jyotirao Phule, she fought against caste and gender oppression, championed women's education, and worked for the upliftment of marginalized communities. Her contributions laid the foundation for modern education and social justice movements in India (O'Hanlon, 1985; Rao, 2009).

Early Life and Struggles

- Birth: Born on January 3, 1831, in Naigaon, Maharashtra, into a Mali (OBC) family (Rege, 2013).
- Child Marriage: Married at nine years old to Jyotirao Phule (then 13), who later became her mentor and partner in social reform (Paik, 2014).
- Education: Despite societal opposition, Jyotirao taught her to read and write. She further trained at a missionary school in Pune (Keer, 1974).

Pioneering Work in Education

Savitribai Phule is recognized as India's first female teacher and a key figure in women's education (Natarajan, 1999).

1. First School for Girls (1848)

In 1848, she and Jyotirao opened India's first school for girls in Pune at Bhide Wada (Phule, 1991).

Faced severe backlash:

- Orthodox Hindus opposed women's education (O'Hanlon, 1985).
- People threw dung, stones, and verbal abuses at her (Rege, 2013).
- She carried an extra sari to change after being attacked (Paik, 2014).
- By 1851, they ran three schools with over 150 students (Keer, 1974).

2. Advocacy for Marginalized Communities

Opened schools for Dalit and lower-caste children, who were denied education (Natarajan, 1999). Established the Indigenous Library to promote literacy (Rao, 2009).

Social Reforms and Activism

Savitribai worked tirelessly to dismantle caste and gender oppression.

1. Fighting Caste Discrimination

Challenged Brahminical dominance by educating Shudras and Dalits (O'Hanlon, 1985).

Organized inter-caste dining and marriages (Rege, 2013).

2. Women's Rights & Anti-Widow Oppression

- Started the Mahila Seva Mandal (1852) to empower women (Paik, 2014).
- Opened a shelter for widows (1863) to protect them from abuse (Keer, 1974).
- Fought against child marriage and Sati (Natarajan, 1999).
- Encouraged widow remarriage and adopted a child (Yashwant) from a widow (Phule, 1991).

3. Satyashodhak Samaj (1873)

Founded this organization to promote rationalism, equality, and social justice (Rao, 2009). Conducted non-Brahmin marriages without priests (O'Hanlon, 1985).

Anandibai Joshi (1865–1887): A pioneer in medicine, she became the first Indian woman to study and practice Western medicine abroad. Her achievements inspired many women to pursue higher education and professional careers (Mehta, 2023).

Anandibai Gopalrao Joshi was a trailblazing Indian woman who became the first female of Indian origin to earn a degree in Western medicine (Furth, 1999). Despite immense social opposition, she earned her MD in the United States in 1886, paving the way for women in medicine in India (Shetty, 2018).

Early Life and Struggles

- Birth: Born March 31, 1865, in Kalyan, Maharashtra, into a conservative Brahmin family (Kosambi, 2007).
- Child Marriage: Married at nine years old to Gopalrao Joshi, a postal clerk who supported her education (Chakravarti, 2016).
- Personal Tragedy: Lost her first child at 14 due to lack of medical care, which motivated her to study medicine (Furth, 1999).

Journey to Becoming a Doctor

1. Overcoming Social Barriers

- Faced severe backlash for pursuing education (Kosambi, 2007).
- Gopalrao encouraged her studies, even writing to American missionaries for help (Shetty, 2018).

2. Studying in America (1883–1886)

- Accepted at Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania (now Drexel University) (Chakravarti, 2016).
- Thesis: "Obstetrics Among the Aryan Hindoos"* (1886) (Furth, 1999).
- Graduated with an MD on March 11, 1886, becoming India's first woman doctor (Shetty, 2018).

3. Challenges in the U.S.

- Suffered from tuberculosis and cultural isolation (Kosambi, 2007).
- Refused to convert to Christianity despite missionary pressures (Chakravarti, 2016).

Return to India and Early Death

- Appointed physician-in-charge of the female ward at Albert Edward Hospital, Kolhapur (Shetty, 2018).
- Died on February 26, 1887, at 21, due to tuberculosis (Furth, 1999).
- Legacy: Inspired generations of Indian women to enter medicine (Kosambi, 2007).

Sarala Devi Chaudhurani (1872–1945)

Sarala Devi was a prominent social reformer and an advocate for women's education. She established the Bharati Balika Vidyalaya in Kolkata, one of the first schools for girls in Bengal, and worked tirelessly to empower women through education. Her efforts inspired nationalist ideals and fostered a sense of independence among young women.

Sarala Devi Chaudhurani was a pioneering feminist, freedom fighter, writer, and political activist in British India. A key figure in the Swadeshi Movement, she founded the first women's organization in India (Bharat Stree Mahamandal, 1910) and promoted female education, nationalism, and armed resistance against colonial rule (Borthwick, 1984; Forbes, 1998).

Early Life & Education

Birth: Born on September 9, 1872, in Kolkata, into the illustrious Tagore family (nephew of Rabindranath Tagore) (Sarkar, 2001).

Education:

- One of the first female graduates from Bethune College (1890) (Forbes, 1998).
- Trained in music, martial arts (lathi & swordplay), and horse riding—unusual for women at the time (Borthwick, 1984).

Key Contributions

1. Women's Empowerment & Education

Founded Bharat Stree Mahamandal (1910)—India's first national women's organization—to promote female education and economic independence (Sarkar, 2001).

Established schools for girls and vocational training centers (Forbes, 1998).

Advocated for widow remarriage and opposed child marriage (Borthwick, 1984).

2. Role in the Independence Movement

- Organized Swadeshi fairs to promote Indian goods and boycott British products (Sarkar, 2001).
- Inspired revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh through her writings in Bharati magazine (Chakrabarty, 2004).
- Secretly supported armed resistance groups, including Anushilan Samiti (Forbes, 1998).

3. Literary & Cultural Contributions

- Edited Bharati magazine, promoting nationalism and women's rights (Borthwick, 1984).
- Composed patriotic songs, including "Vande Mataram" renditions (Sarkar, 2001).
- Wrote an autobiography, "Jibaner Jharapata" (Scattered Leaves of My Life) (Chakrabarty, 2004).

Fatima Sheikh (1831–1877)

Fatima Sheikh, a contemporary of Savitribai Phule, was among the first Muslim women educators in India. She collaborated with the Phules in their efforts to establish schools for marginalized communities. Fatima Sheikh's work challenged gender and caste-based inequalities, promoting education as a tool for social mobility.

Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880–1932)

Begum Rokeya was an educationist and social reformer who championed the cause of women's education in Bengal. She established the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' School in Kolkata, which aimed to provide education to Muslim girls. Through her writings and activism, Rokeya emphasized the transformative power of education in liberating women from societal constraints.

Kiran Bir Sethi (b. 1966)

Kiran Bir Sethi, the founder of The Riverside School and the Design for Change movement, has been a transformative figure in education. Her initiatives promote student-centered learning and empower children to become agents of social change. The Design for Change program has been implemented in schools worldwide, fostering a generation of socially conscious youth.

Kiran Bir Sethi is an Indian educator, designer, and social entrepreneur best known for founding The Riverside School (2001) and launching the Design for Change (DFC) movement, the world's largest youth-driven social change initiative (Sethi, 2019). Her work empowers children with the mantra: "I Can" (IDEO, 2018).

Early Life & Career

Birth: Born in 1966 in Chandigarh, India.

Education: Studied design at National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad (Sethi, 2019).

Turning Point: Dissatisfied with traditional schooling, she designed an education model prioritizing student agency & real-world problem-solving (IDEO, 2018).

Key Contributions

1. The Riverside School (Ahmedabad, 2001)

A student-centric school where children lead projects addressing social issues (e.g., sanitation, literacy) (Sethi, 2019).

Pedagogy: "Feel-Imagine-Do-Share" framework fosters empathy and action (DFC, 2023).

2. Design for Change (DFC, 2009)

Global Reach: Operates in 60+ countries, impacting 2.2 million+ children (DFC, 2023).

Methodology: Kids solve local problems using:

- Feel (identify an issue),
- Imagine (brainstorm solutions),
- Do (implement),
- Share (inspire others) (IDEO, 2018).

Awards:

Ashoka Fellowship (2008) for social innovation (Ashoka, 2021).

INDEX: Design to Improve Life Award (2011) (INDEX, 2011).

3. Advocacy for Child Agency

TED Talk: "Kids, Take Charge" (2009) highlights children's capacity to lead change (TED, 2009).

UN Recognition: DFC featured in the UN's SDG Education Agenda (UNESCO, 2020).

Shaheen Mistri (b. 1971)

Shaheen Mistri is the founder of Teach For India, an organization dedicated to bridging educational inequities. By mobilizing young professionals and placing them as teachers in underserved schools, she has contributed to improving access to quality education for children from marginalized communities.

Shaheen Mistri is a pioneering Indian educator, social entrepreneur, and founder of Akanksha Foundation (1990) and Teach For India (2008). Her mission is to bridge India's education inequality gap by empowering underprivileged children and nurturing youth leadership (Mistri, 2020; Forbes India, 2019).

Early Life & Inspiration

Birth: Born in 1971 into a Parsi family; grew up across Indonesia, Greece, and the U.S. due to her father's diplomatic career (Mistri, 2020).

Turning Point: At 18, she visited Mumbai's slums and was shocked by educational disparities, sparking her lifelong commitment to equity (YourStory, 2018).

Key Contributions

1. Akanksha Foundation (1990)

Started with 15 children in a Mumbai slum; now impacts 10,000+ students annually through after-school programs and schools in partnership with municipal corporations (Akanksha, 2023).

Model: Combines academics, arts, and life skills to break the poverty cycle (Mistri, 2020).

2. Teach For India (TFI, 2008)

- Adapted from Teach For America, TFI recruits top graduates to teach in low-income schools (TFI, 2023).
- Impact:
- 1,000+ Fellows placed annually across 7 Indian cities.
- 50,000+ children reached directly; alumni lead systemic reforms (Forbes India, 2019).

3. Advocacy & Systemic Change

- Co-founded The Collective (2017), a coalition of NGOs working on education equity (The Better India, 2021).
- Policy Influence: Advises governments on teacher training and curriculum reform (Mistri, 2020).

Krishna Hutheesing (1907–1967)

A member of the Nehru family, Krishna Hutheesing worked to improve education for women and children in rural India. She helped establish schools and vocational centers that focused on skill development and literacy for women, laying the groundwork for their economic and social empowerment.

Krishna Hutheesing (née Nehru) was an Indian author, freedom fighter, and member of the influential Nehru-Gandhi family. Younger sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, she documented India's freedom struggle through her writings while advocating for women's rights and social justice (Hutheesing, 1944; Sahgal, 2010).

Early Life & Family

- Birth: Born November 2, 1907, in Allahabad, into the politically prominent Nehru family (Zachariah, 2004).
- Siblings: Sister of Jawaharlal Nehru (India's first PM) and Vijayalakshmi Pandit (UN diplomat) (Sahgal, 2010).

- Marriage: Married Raja Hutheesing (industrialist) in 1933, balancing family life with activism (Hutheesing, 1967).

Role in India's Freedom Struggle

- Non-Cooperation Movement: Participated in protests against British rule, including the Salt Satyagraha (1930) (Zachariah, 2004).
- Prison Time: Jailed for nationalist activities, later wrote about her experiences (Hutheesing, 1944).
- Women's Mobilization: Encouraged women to join the movement, linking freedom with gender equality (Forbes, 1998).

Dr. Anima Das (1930–2000)

Anima Das was a pioneering educator who worked extensively to promote science education among women. She established initiatives to encourage young women to pursue careers in STEM fields, challenging traditional gender roles in Indian society.

Sudha Murthy (b. 1950)

A philanthropist, educator, and author, Sudha Murthy has contributed significantly to education through the Infosys Foundation. She has funded schools, libraries, and vocational training centers in underserved regions, promoting literacy and skill development among disadvantaged communities.

Sudha Murthy is one of India's most beloved social workers, authors, and educators, known for her contributions to literature, philanthropy, and women's empowerment. As the first female engineer hired at TATA Engineering and Locomotive Company (TELCO, now Tata Motors) and the chairperson of the Infosys Foundation, she has transformed countless lives through education and grassroots initiatives (Murthy, 2018; Forbes India, 2020).

Early Life & Education

Birth: Born August 19, 1950, in Shiggaon, Karnataka, into a middle-class family (Murthy, 2015).

Education:

Earned a BE in Electrical Engineering from BVB College of Engineering, Hubli (1972)—one of the few women in her field.

Completed an MTech in Computer Science from IISc Bangalore (1974) (Murthy, 2018).

Breaking Barriers:

Wrote a bold postcard to JRD Tata protesting TELCO's gender bias, leading to her historic hiring (Tata Group, 2015).

Key Contributions

1. Engineering & Corporate Trailblazer

- First Female Engineer at TELCO (1974), working on heavy vehicle design (Murthy, 2015).
- Later joined Infosys (co-founded by her husband, Narayana Murthy), shaping its CSR initiatives (Infosys, 2023).

2. Infosys Foundation (1996–Present)

- As Chairperson, she has:
- Built 70,000+ libraries and 16,000+ toilets in schools (Infosys Foundation, 2023).
- Supported healthcare, rural development, and disaster relief (e.g., 2004 tsunami, COVID-19).
- Funded orphanages, hospitals, and scholarships for underprivileged students (Murthy, 2018).

2. Political Leadership and Activism: Shaping Governance and Policies

Indian women have played vital roles in political movements and leadership. Their activism has shaped policies promoting social justice, gender equality, and community welfare.

- **Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949):** Known as the “Nightingale of India,” Naidu was a prominent leader in the Indian independence movement and the first woman president of the Indian National Congress. Her leadership highlighted women's capabilities in governance and advocacy (Nair, 2022).
- **Indira Gandhi (1917–1984):** As India's first female Prime Minister, she made bold decisions like the Green Revolution and nationalization of banks, significantly impacting India's socio-economic landscape.

Modern-day leaders such as Nirmala Sitharaman (India's first full-time female Finance Minister) exemplify women's growing presence and influence in Indian politics.

3. Economic Empowerment: Redefining Traditional Roles

Economic empowerment has been a critical factor in societal change, with women reshaping local economies and national industries.

- **Ela Bhatt (1933–2022):** Founder of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Bhatt revolutionized women's economic roles through microfinance and self-employment opportunities, fostering financial independence and community development (Gupta, 2023).
- **Kalpana Saroj:** Often referred to as the "real slumdog millionaire," Saroj transformed Kamani Tubes, proving that women could lead in traditionally male-dominated industries.

4. Social Reform Movements: Advocating for Justice and Equality

Indian women have been at the forefront of social reform movements, challenging oppressive practices and advocating for human rights.

Role of Women in Social Work after Independence

After India gained independence in 1947, women have played a crucial role in the field of social work, addressing a wide range of issues including poverty, education, healthcare, gender equality, and rural development. Their contributions have been instrumental in shaping modern India, often driving grassroots initiatives and policy changes.

1. Aruna Roy (b. 1946)

Contribution:

- Founder of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in Rajasthan, Aruna Roy has been a champion of grassroots empowerment.
- Played a pivotal role in the enactment of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, which enhanced transparency and accountability in governance.
- Worked extensively to improve the lives of rural communities, focusing on workers' rights, minimum wages, and equitable access to resources.

2. Medha Patkar (b. 1954)

Contribution:

- Founder of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, she has been a staunch advocate for the rights of marginalized communities displaced by development projects.
- Worked on issues related to environmental conservation, tribal rights, and equitable development.
- Her activism has drawn national and international attention to the plight of displaced communities.

3. Ela Bhatt (1933–2022)

Contribution:

- Founder of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), an organization that empowers women through self-employment and microfinance initiatives.
- SEWA has helped thousands of women achieve financial independence and social dignity.
- Advocated for labor rights and economic empowerment of women in informal sectors.

4. Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy (1886–1968)

Contribution:

- Although her work began pre-independence, her efforts continued post-1947 in improving healthcare and women's rights.
- Instrumental in establishing the Adyar Cancer Institute in Chennai, one of India's leading cancer care facilities.
- Advocated for the abolition of the devadasi system and worked on women's welfare.

5. Amala Akkineni (b. 1968)

Contribution:

- Co-founder of Blue Cross of Hyderabad, an organization that focuses on animal welfare, community health, and environmental sustainability.
- Promotes education about animal rights and has been actively involved in social awareness campaigns for cleaner cities.

6. Kiran Bedi (b. 1949)

Contribution:

- India's first female Indian Police Service (IPS) officer who also became a social reformer.
- Implemented innovative reforms in prison management at Tihar Jail, including education and skill development programs for inmates.
- Founded the Navjyoti India Foundation and India Vision Foundation, focusing on drug abuse prevention, education for underprivileged children, and police reforms.

7. Laxmi Agarwal (b. 1990)

Contribution:

- An acid attack survivor and advocate for acid attack victims.
- Through her activism and NGO Chhanv Foundation, she has raised awareness about the rights of acid attack survivors and campaigned for stricter regulations on the sale of acid.

9. Shabana Azmi (b. 1950)

Contribution:

- Renowned actress and social activist, she has worked extensively on issues like communal harmony, HIV/AIDS awareness, and slum development.
- Active with the Nivara Hakk movement, which focuses on the rights of slum dwellers to housing and dignity.

10. Anshu Gupta (b. 1971) (Honorary mention for Goonj Foundation efforts led collaboratively with women)

Contribution:

- Founder of Goonj, which addresses poverty, disaster relief, and community development with a strong focus on women's participation in rural development and recycling for social good.

11. Kamla Bhasin (1946–2021)

Contribution:

- A feminist and social scientist, she worked tirelessly for gender equality and women's rights in South Asia.
- Her work with Sangat: A Feminist Network has influenced gender justice policies and grassroots activism.

- Known for her engaging feminist songs and writings, which have been a source of inspiration for many.

12. Chetna Gala Sinha (b. 1959)

Contribution:

- Founder of the Mann Deshi Mahila Bank and Mann Deshi Foundation, which provide financial literacy and entrepreneurship training to rural women.
- Her initiatives have empowered thousands of women in rural areas to become entrepreneurs and leaders in their communities.

5. Impact of Women in Social Work Post-Independence

Women in social work have contributed significantly to:

1. **Advancing Gender Equality:** Through activism, education, and policy reform, women have fought against patriarchal norms and systemic discrimination.
2. **Empowering Marginalized Communities:** Grassroots movements led by women have given voice to underprivileged groups, ensuring access to resources and justice.
3. **Improving Health and Education:** Initiatives targeting healthcare access, literacy, and vocational training have directly impacted societal development.
4. **Promoting Environmental Conservation:** Women-led movements like the Chipko Movement and Narmada Bachao Andolan have highlighted the intersection of environment and social justice.

6. Conclusion

The role of women in shaping Indian society has been transformative and continues to evolve, reflecting their resilience, determination, and commitment to social progress. From ancient times, when women were revered as sources of knowledge and spiritual guidance, to contemporary India, where they lead in diverse fields, women have left an indelible mark on every aspect of societal development.

Historically, women like Savitribai Phule, Fatima Sheikh, and Begum Rokeya laid the foundation for education as a tool of empowerment, challenging deep-seated patriarchal norms. Leaders such as Sarojini Naidu and

Indira Gandhi showcased women's ability to lead with vision and courage, influencing governance and policy. Activists like Aruna Roy and Medha Patkar exemplify how grassroots efforts can drive societal change, addressing issues like transparency, environmental conservation, and the rights of marginalized communities. Women have also been instrumental in economic reform, with figures like Ela Bhatt and Chetna Gala Sinha empowering countless women through microfinance and entrepreneurship.

In post-independence India, legal and policy reforms, coupled with the efforts of female social reformers, have catalyzed significant changes in gender equality, education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability. Women's initiatives have not only uplifted disadvantaged communities but also fostered inclusivity and economic growth. Their impact is further magnified through organizations like SEWA, Pratham, and Teach For India, which continue to address systemic inequalities.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain. Gender disparities, violence against women, and limited representation in leadership roles still hinder progress. However, the contributions of women to societal transformation have set a powerful precedent, inspiring future generations to pursue equality and justice.

In essence, the role of women in India has transcended traditional boundaries, fostering a society that increasingly values inclusivity, innovation, and equity. Their relentless efforts underscore the belief that the empowerment of women is synonymous with the advancement of society, making them indispensable agents of change in shaping a better future.

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Women Education in Hindu Civilisation: Past and Present

Rita Parmar

Abstract

There are some monographs which deal with the education of Hindu women in particular periods of Indian history, but very rare work has been written which reviews their education throughout the long history of Hindu civilization. An attempt has therefore been made in this paper to describe the education of women in Hindu civilization from prehistoric times to the present day. Every effort has been made to utilize all possible sources of information, — Vedic, epic, Jain, Buddhist, Smriti and classical Sanskrit literatures, sculptures and paintings, coins and inscriptions, narratives of foreign travelers, both ancient and medieval, accounts of European merchants and missionaries, Government blue books and reports, modern works on the feminist movement, both in the East and the West. Most of the above authorities have been consulted in the original. The result reveals that in the prehistoric times the education of Hindu women is similar to boys and it remain till almost 10 th Century A.D. and women were educated in all fields of education. Apart from this, they were also engaged in arts, military training, leisure time activities, earning money by doing business, etc. Thus, women were powerful in all fields in Hindu civilization. During the Muslim period it started declined. After independence the attempt has been made by the government and it reached 65 % according to 2011 Census. Hence, efforts to equalize the literacy rate between men and women should be taken seriously. For that, curriculum reform and changes in the education structure should be made.

Key words: Women Education, Hindu Civilisation

1. Introduction

Indian tradition has generally respected womanhood, though occasionally we find derogatory references to women. Even God is regarded as half man, half

woman, ardha- narishwara. Manu declares that where women are honored, there the gods are pleased, where they are not honored, all works become fruitless (3. 56).

Women are human beings and have as much right to full development as men have. In early times education of women was encouraged. The goddess of learning is Saraswati. The Mahanirvana Tantra says: 'A girl also should be brought up and educated with great effort and care' (8.47). The Devi Mahatmya declares: 'All forms of knowledge are aspects of Thee; and all women throughout the world are Thy forms (11.6).

Thus, the goddess of knowledge is a woman, so women are naturally the owners of knowledge. The researcher conducted the present study to find out the reality of the form of knowledge given to women in Hindu culture.

2. Objectives

- To study the Education of women in Hindu Civilization
- To study the Education of women & professional Performance in Vedic and Upanishadic Period
- To study the recreation activities of women in Vedic and Upanishadic Period
- To study the setback to Education of women at C. 300 B.C. and its causes
- To study the Education of women during C. 100-1200 A.D.
- To study the fine and useful arts for women
- To study the military training for women
- To study the Education of women in Muslim Period
- To study the economic independence of Hindu women
- To study the progress of Education of women in 20th century
- To draw the suggestions about the present-day problems of female education

3. Research Questions

- 1, What would be the Education of women in Vedic and Upanishadic Period?

2, What would be the recreation activities of women in Vedic and Upanishadic period?

3, What would be the setback to Education of women at C. 300 B.C. and what were its causes?

4, What would be the Education of women during C. 100-1200 A.D.?

5, What would be the fine and useful arts for women?

6, What would be the military training for women?

7, What would be the Education of women in Muslim Period?

8, What would be the economic independence of Hindu women?

9, What would be the progress of Education of women in 20th century?

4. Methodology

The study was qualitative in nature. Content analysis method has been used in the present study.

5. Sample

The women's education in Hindu Civilization, data was collected from all possible sources of information, — the books 1, The position of Women in Hindu Civilization by A.S. Altekar (in which he utilized the sources like Vedic, epic, Jain, Buddhist, Smriti and classical Sanskrit literatures, sculptures and paintings, coins and inscriptions, narratives of foreign travelers, both ancient and medieval, accounts of European merchants and missionaries, Government blue books and reports, modern works on the feminist movement, both in the East and the West) and 2, Eminent Indian Women from the Vedic Age to the Present published by the Advaita Ashrama.

6. Nature of data and its collection

It involved qualitative data. The researcher has thoroughly read the full texts of both the books and related reference books then the information related to the women's education in Hindu Civilization was collected keeping in mind the above research questions.

7. Data Analysis

The collected data related to the women's education in Hindu Civilization was coded through content analysis method and then analysed to obtain answers to the above research questions.

8. Results

8.1. What would be the Education of women in Vedic and Upanishadic Period?

The two primary responsibilities of parents are to educate their children and assist them in adjusting to life. For several decades in ancient India, both of them were well-received in relation to daughters. Upanayana, or the ceremonial entrance into Vedic studies, was as frequent for females as it was for boys as early as the Christian era. According to the Atharvaveda, a lady can only be successful in her marriage if she had the right training during her studentship (brahmacharya)¹. In the prehistoric era, lady poets were writing hymns, some of which were eventually incorporated in the Vedic Samhitas. There are up to twenty women among the "seers" or authors of the Rigveda, according to the orthodox tradition itself, as documented in the Sarvanukramanika. Internal evidence, however, indicates that Lopamudra, Visvavara, Sikata Nivavari, and Ghosha are unquestionably the authors of the Rigveda 1.179, V. 28, VIII. 91, IX. 81.11-20, and X. 39, and 40, respectively. The writers of X. 145 and 159 are definitely women, but it's unclear if their true names were Indrani and Sachi as tradition has it. A few women also appear among the writers and intellectuals to whom a daily homage of respect is required to be paid during the season of Brahmajyoti; these are Sulabha Maitreyi, Vadava Prachiteyi, and Gargi Vachaknavi (As. G. S., III, 4, 4). In order for their names to be suggested for daily memory by future generations, these women had to have made significant contributions to the advancement of academia.

The two classes of female pupils were called Sadyodvahas and Brahmavadinis. While the latter continued their studies until they were married at the age of 15 or 16, the former were lifelong theologians and philosophers. There is strong evidence that women used to regularly offer their morning and nightly Vedic prayers, just like males did. For example, Sita is mentioned as performing her daily Vedic prayers in multiple locations throughout the Ramayana². It was a given that girls would be introduced to the three R's when writing became popular.

Scholarly excellence used to be the goal of Brahmadarinis. Up until roughly the fourth century B.C., society's primary focus was on Vedic and philosophical pursuits. As a result, women are also naturally cultivating these subjects with a great deal of excitement and dedication. Many of them used to focus on Purvamimansa, which addressed the various issues related to Vedic sacrifices, in addition to studying the Vedas. Even though this topic is extremely dry and challenging—possibly even more obscure than mathematics—many women once showed a keen interest in it. A work on Mimansa called Kasakritsni was written by a theologian named Kasakritsna; female scholars who used to specialize in it were called Kasakritsnas (Mahabhashya IV, 1, 14; 3, 155). If there were so many female scholars in such a technical field of study that a phrase had to be created to identify them. We might therefore conclude that a significant portion of women must have received general cultural education.

Lady academics did not lag behind in actively participating in the new movement when the backlash against the Vedic sacrificial religion sparked philosophical explorations around 800 B.C. Maitreyi, Yajnavalkya's wife, was a member of this group. Setting new standards for dress and ornamentation was not as important to her as discovering the path to immortality³. The lady philosopher Gargi's thorough cross-examination of Yajnavalkya demonstrates that she was a highly esteemed dialectician and philosopher (Br. Up., III, 6 and 8). Another female Vedanta student was Atreyi, who studied under the sages Agastya and Valmiki. In order to continue their spiritual trials without hindrance, some of these female philosophers used to live single lives. Later, the Buddhist and Jain communities also carried on this tradition. When Mahavira first visited Kausambi, the daughter of King Sahasranika of Kausambi, discussed with him several abstruse metaphysical questions and eventually became a nun⁴.

In the past, a lot of educated women chose to become teachers, either out of necessity or passion. To differentiate them from instructors' wives, the Sanskrit language had to create a unique term. Women who were teachers themselves were referred to as Upadhyayas. It should be noted that Puranas are also aware of the legacy of female intellectuals; for example, the Bhagavata describes two of Dakshayana's daughters as theological and philosophical experts (IV, 1, 64).

When informed that female education was reasonably common, the modern reader will naturally wonder if coeducation existed or if female pupils received separate instruction. The historian must acknowledge that it is challenging to provide an answer to this issue given the current state of our knowledge. Brothers, sisters, and cousins most likely learned together under the family elders during the Vedic era, when education was primarily focused on the family. Parents must have naturally chosen to send their girls to read under qualified female teachers, or acharya, when they were available. However, there

couldn't have been a lot of these. The majority of professionals in technical fields, such as philosophy, medicine, and theology, were men, and advanced female students would often seek their education from them. This is demonstrated by the Uttararamacharita's Atreyi, who was reading under Valmiki alongside Rama's sons Lava and Kush. Since Bhavabhuti depicts Kamandaki as receiving an education alongside Bhurivasu and Devarata in his *Malatimadhava*⁵, it would appear that co-education in higher education was not unheard of even in the eighth century A.D. Remember that there were no public schools, not even for boys, until the fourth century A.D. Authors such as Harita establish that male relatives should typically teach girls at home⁶. They most likely allude to the custom of the fifth century B.C.

8.2. What would be the recreation activities of women in Vedic and Upanishadic Period?

We can only get a glimpse of the Vedic and epic periods' depictions of girls thanks to our sources. The main indoor games were dance and music. Girls used to accompany their elders or partners to attend public, dramatic concerts that were frequently organized⁷. The primary outdoor physical activity in trendy circles appears to have been playing ball games, or *kandukakrida*. In the *Mahabharata* (V, 98, 63; III, 112, 16), for example, Santa and Kunti are depicted playing this game during their free time. This game gives players the ability to control how much exercise they want. According to the *Ramayana* (11, 67, 13), girls would go to gardens in the evening to play and chat with their companions; nevertheless, this was most likely only feasible in towns and cities. Although there are allusions to girls swimming outside as well (*Kamasutra* III, 4), it is difficult to determine what proportion of girls were familiar with this extremely practical skill. The *Kamasutra* (III, 3) describes in vivid detail the various courtyard games that girls used to play, such as "run and catch" and "hide and seek". These provided the players with excellent physical activity and were designed to promote overall development and limb suppleness. These games have been quite popular with all social classes since very early times.

8.3. What would be the setback to Education of women at 300 B.C. and what were its causes?

After around 300 B.C., the new trend of child marriage started to gain popularity, which significantly hurt the cause of women's education. Due to a variety of factors, girls' marriageable age started to progressively decline over the course of several centuries. Pre-puberty marriages were the "order of the day" by the start of the Christian era. This obviously meant that further education

was severely hampered because it could not be completed by the new marriageable age of 12 or 18. In order to give women the right Aryan rank, the Initiation rite (upanayana sanskara) was first reduced to a formality and eventually abandoned completely. Their Vedic education was so terminated. They even lost the ability to recite the daily prayer hymns. The marriageable age for girls was further decreased to 9 or 10 by the 8th or 9th century A.D., which effectively killed any education worth its name. Although there were still two or three years open during which some basic education may have been given, the girls and their guardians used to focus more on the issue of marriage at this time than on education.

8.4. What would be the Education of women during 100-1200 A.D.?

A few well-known female intellectuals and poetesses certainly flourished in Hindu society during the first millennium of the Christian period. Seven poetesses—Reva, Roha, Madhavi, Anulakshmi, Pahai, Vaddha-vahi, and Sasiprabha—are among the authors from whose works Hala selected poems for his anthology of Maharashtri poetry (Gatha-Saptasati). The memory of a few notable poetesses who seem to have written poetry of a very high caliber has also been preserved in some Sanskrit anthologies. We find that Silabhattarika was well-known for her effortless, elegant manner, which was characterized by a harmonious fusion of sound and sense. Devi was a famous Gujarati poetess who, after she had ascended to heaven, still captivated her admirers on earth. The only person more famous than Vijayanka was Kalidasa. Given that renowned critic and poet Rajasekhara likens her to the goddess Sarasvati herself, she appears to have achieved a very high status among Sanskrit writers.⁸ A Kshatriya by caste, Rajasekhara's wife was a talented poetess and literary critic. From the pen of a lady courtier, the recently released drama Kaumudimahotsava, which centers on a significant political movement in Pataliputra, demonstrates how sophisticated women formerly showed a keen interest in the complexities of modern politics and history. The latter's wife served as the umpire in the pivotal dispute between Sankaracharya and Mandanamisra⁹. It goes without saying that she had to have a strong background in literature, philosophy, and theology in order to be recognized as the only judge in this significant case. Some women were drawn to medical studies as well; most of these, like today's female doctors, focused on treating illnesses specific to women. On Khalifa Harun's orders, a treatise on this topic written by a female physician whose name appears as Kusa in the Arabic garb was translated into Arabic in the eighth century A.D.¹⁰. It is evident that female physicians have authored the most authoritative literature on the topic.

Regretfully, we have no information regarding the social standing and familial situations of the aforementioned women poets, philosophers, and physicians. Most likely, some of them came from wealthy, well-educated families that could afford to provide special education for girls even after they were married, and some from Kshatriya circles, where child marriage was not common for a long time even after it had become widely accepted in society at large. Higher education for women was restricted to wealthy, well-to-do families, royals, and dancing ladies in the ninth century A.D.¹¹. It may be pointed out that most of the heroines of Sanskrit dramas written in this period, who are represented as fairly educated, belong to the classes mentioned above.

There aren't many wealthy and cultured households in society by nature. They had enough money to hire specialized teachers for their daughters' education, such as Brihannada, Ganadasa, and Haradatta. Ordinary families, however, were unable to pay this, and as a result, their daughters, who were required to marry at this time at the age of ten or eleven, were unable to obtain much schooling. Asahaya, a Naradasmṛiti critic who lived in the eighth century A.D., defends the idea of women's tutelage by arguing that women's intellects are not as developed as men's because they lack the advantages of appropriate training and education¹². This discovery makes it abundantly evident that, by the eighth century A.D., women in general had become relatively uneducated. Making any claims regarding the precise level of literacy among women around 1000 A.D. is risky since we lack the facts to support them, unlike contemporary census figures. Approximately 80% of men were literate at this time¹³. Women's literacy rates could not have been higher than 10%.

8.5. What would be the fine and useful arts for women?

Since ancient times, girls have been encouraged to pursue the beautiful arts, such as painting, dancing, and music. Ladies were initially designated to perform the Sama hymns musically¹⁴. It is obvious that they had to be specializing in music throughout the early Vedic era; otherwise, they would not have been given this significant responsibility. There are some scathing allusions to women's preference for music in the Vedic literature. Both Devas and Asuras once sought to please the Goddess of Speech; they were successful in their endeavours because they were astute enough to understand that singing and dancing in front of her was the most effective way to accomplish their goal. The author of the legend cannot resist the temptation of observing that women can be easily won over by one who sings melodiously and dances gracefully before them (S. Br., III, 2, 4, 6).

Additionally, throughout the post-Vedic era, society continued to promote dance and singing for girls. The Kamasutra gives dance and instrumental and

vocal music the highest priority among the arts that women in cultured households were supposed to develop (1,3,16). They were also advised to learn how to paint, cultivate, make garlands, make toys, decorate their homes, and other arts (Ibid, 1, 3, 1). During the first century of the Christian period, Sanskrit theatrical heroines were skilled in the majority of these skills. Frequently, maidens would perform a dance in front of a small group of people in the court without facing any social criticism¹⁵. The dance teacher was a regular officer in the royal court. It is clear that higher sections of society used to take all possible care to develop the aesthetic sense of girls.

8.6. What would be the Military training for women?

In the past, girls from governing families also received some administrative and military training. Dowager queens like Nayanika of the Satavahana dynasty (2nd century B. C.), Prabhavatl Gupta of the Vakataka family (4th century A. D.), Vijayabhattacharika of the Chalukya house (7th century A. D.), and Sugandha and Didda of Kashmir (10th century A. D.) could not have successfully ruled vast kingdoms during the minority of their sons if this had not been the case. A thorough education along the right lines was necessary for the efficient performance of these administrative responsibilities. Ladies used to have a significant degree of military training in typical Kshatriya households. This class included the female guards of monarchs mentioned in plays; they were typically proficient with both the bow and the sword. Medieval South Indian inscriptions reveal the presence of numerous Kshatriya women protecting their homes and hearths during dangerous times. Karnataka women appear to have taken the lead in this issue. It is known that a Mysorean heroine perished in a local conflict in Siddhanhalli in 1041 A.D. A nose jewel was awarded to another Karnataka heroine in 1264 A.D. by the ruling government as a token of appreciation for her valour in defeating a dacoit. A military expedition under the command of a feudatory queen is documented in a Nilgund inscription. A Mysore heroine lost her life at Shikoga Taluka in 1446 while battling to exact revenge for the death of her father¹⁶.

It is often known that Rajput princesses were skilled with both the spear and the sword. In times of need, they might command the armed forces and run the government. Following the death of her spouse, Kurmadevi, a queen of Samarasi kin, assumed control of her realm and repelled Kutub-ud-Din's attacks. Following her husband's murder, Javahirdevi, the queen of King Sariga, fought and lost her life leading her troops in the defence of Chittoor. There are many examples of this in Rajput history, and they don't all have to be listed here.

The Maratha royal dynasties, who ruled over a sizable portion of India in the 17th and 18th centuries, carried on the custom of providing girls with military

instruction. Yeshwantrao Holkar's daughter Rani Bhimabai informed Sir John Malcolm that when a Maratha princess had neither husband or son to head her army, it was her obligation to do so herself. The founder of Kolhapur state, Tarabai, once oversaw her administration and led her army. It is generally known that Queen Lakshmibai of Jhansi inspired admiration even among her opponents with her extraordinary bravery and wise general ship. The Maharaja of Gwalior's sister, the late princess Kamalabai Scindia, was skilled in all military drills. When her father included specific instructions in his will about this matter, he was merely upholding an ancient Maratha custom.

8.7. What would be the education of women in Muslim Period?

Now let's take a look at how women have been educated over the past 1000 years. The percentage of Hindu women who were literate rapidly declined during the Muslim period. The new political revolution generally destroyed wealthy and well-educated families, leaving them unable to make special arrangements for their daughters' education. With the growth of Islam, some new Hindu families undoubtedly gained prominence as well, but they were generally few in number and typically lacked the cultural background necessary to motivate them to actively support their daughters' education. While Jain nuns were often able to read their own texts, daughters from Rajput and Nair families were also able to read and write. But these were uncommon instances. Traditionally, the only people who could read and write were dancing girls and prostitutes. By the start of the 10th century, just around one woman out of every hundred in Madras and Malva could read, demonstrating how sharply and quickly women's literacy was declining. Just 1,023 girls and 1,57,664 boys were enrolled in schools in the former province in 1826 A.D. According to the population of the presidency the percentage¹⁷ of girls receiving some kind of education was only It may, therefore, be stated that, at the advent of the British rule female education had practically disappeared from Hindu community.

During this time, line arts cultivation also decreased. Hindu families were not wealthy enough to hire music teachers, who were typically males who were not well-known for having good morals. Writing, dancing, and singing were considered accomplishments appropriate only for the dancing girl class by the early 19th century. If word had gotten out that they were familiar with any of the aforementioned arts, orthodox ladies would have been horrified. Although they were mostly uneducated, Hindu women throughout the previous millennium could not be characterized as uncultured. In actuality, traditional knowledge and culture could be learned more readily from a preacher's words than from the pages of a manuscript because books are expensive and scarce. Thus, despite

their lack of education, they were able to preserve traditional customs and culture more effectively and faithfully than even males with formal education.

8.8. What would be the economic independence of Hindu women?

Could training lead to women becoming economically independent? Naturally, those who pursued careers in medicine or education could achieve financial independence. The same applied to dancers and singers. In difficult times, spinning and weaving provided a good outlet for regular women. Up to 1850 A.D., this was a very significant and successful industry in India. Because it was primarily structured and run as a cottage enterprise, it gave financially distressed women good opportunities. Early Buddhist literature around 800 B.C. describes women telling their dying husbands that they don't have to worry about their family's financial future¹⁸ because they can get the money, they need by spinning and weaving cotton and wool yarn and piece items. According to the Artha Sastra of Kautilya, the state must give impoverished women particular facilities so they can spin and make a living¹⁹. Medieval authors inform us that spinning remained the primary source of income for impoverished widows during that era as well²⁰. It should be noted that clothing was far more expensive in ancient and medieval India than it is today; also, Indian textiles were highly sought-after across the three continents until the early 20th century²¹. As a result, women in need who turned to spinning for upkeep had many of labour opportunities and received appropriate compensation.

8.9. What would be the progress of Education of women in 20th century?

As we have seen above, by approximately 1850 A.D., the literacy rate among Hindu women had fallen to its lowest point. Following the British Crown's takeover of the Indian government, the government started implementing measures to encourage girls' education. The first forty years saw very little progress. However, public opinion also started to favour its cause by the end of the 19th century, mostly because the school of social reform vigorously championed it. But for a long time, not much progress was accomplished, mostly because girls were married when they were nine or ten years old. As a result, they could only finish their education for three or four years before it had to be put on hold after marriage. The devastating effects of the early 20th-century epidemic tended to push girls' marriageable ages up to 12 or 18. Due primarily to economic concerns, it has now risen to 16 or 17 among the educated middle classes in cities.

The cause of female education has benefited greatly by the rising of girls' marriageable age. As we have seen above, the primary reason for the reduction

in girls' education was the lowering of that age to 9 or 10 by the 8th or 9th century A.D. We can anticipate a commensurate advancement in female education as this factor is now being gradually eliminated. The state of the economy is also facilitating its expansion. Services of educated women are still in great demand; this circumstance also is helping the growth of female education. As per 2011 census, literacy rate in India has been reported as 74.04% with a 14% increase to that in 2001, whereas the hike is maximum for rural women at 26% in the last decade, which may be attributed to literacy mission, Kanya Kelvani, Vidya Lakshmi bond, KGBV yojana and other policies related to girls' education of Government of India. The female literacy levels according to the Literacy Rate 2011 census are 65.46% whereas the male literacy rate is over 80%.

9. Discussion

The result reveals that in the prehistoric times the education of Hindu women is similar to boys and it remain till almost 10 th Century A.D. and women were educated in all fields of education. Apart from this, they were also engaged in arts, military training, leisure time activities, earning money by doing business, etc. Thus, women were powerful in all fields in Hindu civilization. During the Muslim period it started declined. After independence the attempt has been made by the government and it reached 65 % according to 2011 Census. Even though women's education is still inferior to men's, certain of its intricate issues should be addressed with seriousness. Thankfully, in terms of elementary schooling, these do not exist. There are two challenging issues that need to be resolved in the context of secondary and college education. Co-education is the subject of the first, and curriculum is the subject of the second. In a sense, the circumstances have compelled us to accept co-education and, consequently, a shared curriculum. Parents are essentially compelled to send their daughters to institutions primarily designed for boys because there aren't many schools and colleges outside of large cities that cater to girls. As a result, the curriculum is likewise quite standard. Despite the existence of specific schools and universities for girls, they often follow the same curriculum as boys. Since universities have, with very few exceptions, yet to implement a separate curriculum for female students, the institutions must send their pupils there for exams.

The main reason it is difficult to answer the question of whether girls in high school and college should follow a different curriculum is that neither the students nor their parents are certain at the beginning whether the students will become housewives or pursue careers. It is evident that a lady student who chooses the latter option will need to get an education equivalent to that of the boy student. It goes without saying that a woman who wishes to practice medicine or plead must have the same education as a man.

However, since the girl scholars will eventually become housewives, the main goal of girls' schools and colleges should be to cater to their requirements with a unique curriculum. In addition to making the beneficiaries effective moms and spouses, the education they receive should prepare them to earn money for their families in their free time or in times of need or hardship.

Currently, in Hindu rural society, a girl's marriage cannot be conveniently delayed past the age of 18. Therefore, we ought to plan the female education courses so that they are completed before then. Primary school should last four years, ending when a child is nine years old. The secondary course should only last six years. It will be feasible to complete the course in that time if we use the mother tongue as the primary language of instruction and modestly scale back the curriculum in disciplines like geography, math, and history. In addition to mathematics, geography, and the second language, the school curriculum should prioritize the following subjects: hygiene, nursing, domestic science, music, sewing, knitting, and house décor. The secondary course would be over at the age of 15. It should be followed by a college course extending over three years, which would be thus completed when the scholar is about 18. It will be easy to frame three years' courses in subjects like

- (A) Arts and Teaching,
- (B) Domestic science and Midwifery,
- (C) Music, Painting, and Photography,
- (D) Tailoring and Embroidery,

This will be self-sustaining and allow female scholars to earn some money in their free time and for emergencies, in addition to becoming effective and sophisticated housewives. A literature or history paper ought to be included in the final three groups. The B. A., B. T., or M. B. B. S. standards will clearly be exceeded by the courses in Groups A and B. However, women who have earned a diploma in these disciplines are eligible to take the B. A., B. T., and other exams because of NEP 2020. This would eliminate the obstacle faced by a female student who has enrolled in a women's college but subsequently wants to continue her study for a few more years to achieve the highest level of proficiency in her field. Restructuring girls' secondary and tertiary education along the aforementioned lines would eliminate flaws in the current system and meet the demands of both those who wish to pursue careers and those who wish to start a family. It is undoubtedly true that a reduction in the typical curriculum has been proposed for females' courses; nonetheless, this is required to prepare them for their typical roles as capable and successful mothers and husbands. Even though they are not as physically strong as their brothers, females nevertheless have to pass the same tests as boys and learn housekeeping skills at

home. They are undoubtedly under too much stress, and this is detrimental to the race's future welfare.

Fortunately, people are more aware of the benefits and necessity of female education in our community. In towns and cities, society has taken it seriously, and as our population's level of life and provincial governments' resources increase over time, rural areas will follow suit. Regarding the nature of female education, we have already talked about it and made the point that it should be specifically designed for women, calculated to support and harmoniously develop their reason and emotion, and allow them to simultaneously become earning members of the family, either full-time or part-time, depending on their needs. Prof. D. K. Karve's decision to establish a university specifically for women was a positive move. More educational institutions that offer courses specifically designed for women must be established.

We ourselves must acknowledge that the times have changed, that the age of authority has passed and been replaced by an era of equality and reason, and that outdated principles of extreme asepticism have tried to gain traction. Therefore, we need to implement the above-mentioned adjustments to reorient women's status to the new circumstances. If this is accomplished, Hindu women's (and consequently Hindu men's) ability, effectiveness, and happiness will rise. As a result, our community will be able to occupy its proper position in international society and significantly contribute to the advancement and well-being of humanity.

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Footnote:

1. ब्रह्मचर्येण कन्या युवानं विंदते पतिम् | Atharvaveda, XI, 5, 18.
2. E.g. संध्याकालमनाः श्यामा ध्रुवमेष्यती जानकी | नदीं चेमां शुभजलां संध्यार्थं वरवर्णिनी || Ramayana, v, 15, 48.
3. येनाहं नामता स्यां किं तेन (अतिप्रभूतेनापि वित्तेन) कुर्यामिति | Br. Up., II, 4.
4. Bhagavatisutra, Gujarati edition, Vol. III, p. 257.
5. अयि किं न वेत्सि यदेकत्र नो विद्यापरिग्रहाय नाना दिगंत वासिनां साहचर्यमासीत् | Act 1.
6. द्विविधाः स्त्रियो ब्रह्म वादिन्यः सद्योद्वाहाश्च | तत्र ब्रह्म वादिनी नाम ग्निन्धनं वेदाध्ययनं स्वगृहे च भैक्षचर्येति | Quoted in VMS, p. 402.

7. Kamasutra, III, 1.
8. शब्दार्थयोः समो गुंफः पांचाली वृत्तिरिष्यते । शीलभट्टारिकावाचि बाणोक्तिषु च या सदा ॥
सूक्तीनां स्मरकेलीनां कलानां च विलासभूः । प्रभुदेवी कवी लाटी गतापि हृदि तिष्ठति ॥
सरस्वतीव कर्णाटी विजयांका जयत्यसौ । या वैदर्भगिरां वासः कालिदासादनन्तरम् ॥
नीलोत्पलदलश्यामां विजयांकामजानता । वृथैव दण्डिनाप्युक्तं सर्वशुक्ला सरस्वती ॥
These verses are attributed to Rajasekhara in the Suktimuktavali.
9. विधाय भार्या विदुषीं सदस्यां विधीयतां वादकथा सुधीन्द्र | Sankaradigvijaya , VIII. 51.
10. Nadvi, Arab aur Bharat ke Sambandha, p. 122.
11. पुरुषवद्योषितोपि कवीभवेयुः । श्रूयन्ते दृश्यन्ते च राजपुत्र्यो महामात्र- दुहितरो गणिकाः
कौटुम्बिकभार्याश्च शास्त्रप्रहितबुद्धयः कवयश्च । Kāryamīmāṃsā, p. 53.
12. शास्त्राध्ययनानधिकारित्वात् शास्त्रमात्रोपजीविधर्मधर्मज्ञानाभावा-वस्वातंत्र्यम् । On
Naradasm, iti, X 30.
13. Altekar, Education in Ancient India, pp. 218-4.
14. पत्नीकर्मैव वै तेऽत्र कुर्वन्ति चः दुगातरः | S. Br., XIV, 8, 1, 85.
15. Stenzler, Ocean of Stories, IX, p. xiv.
16. See S. 1. E. R. t for 1921, No. 73 ; E. C., I, No. 75.
A.S.R, for 1928-9, p. 117, E.C. Vol. VII, Shikarpur No. 2.
17. Indian Education Commission, 1882 ; Report, of the Madras Provincial
Committee, p. 5.
18. फुसलाहं गहपति कप्पासं कंतितुं वेणिमोलिखितुं सक्काहं गहपति तवच्चयेन द्वारके
पोसितुम् । Ing. Ni., III, p. 293.
19. याश्चानिष्कासिन्यः प्रोधितविधवा न्यंकाः कन्यका वा आत्मानं बिभुयुः ताः सोपग्रहं
(कर्तन) कर्म कारयितव्याः । Artha sastra, II, 28.
20. भूतपतिकाया अनपत्याया असति भर्तृधनादौ वायिके व कर्तनादिना केनचिदुपायेन
जीवन्त्याः । Medhatithi on Manu, V, 157.
21. Moreland, India at the Death of Akbar, p. 179.

Challenges for Women in Health and Future Scenario

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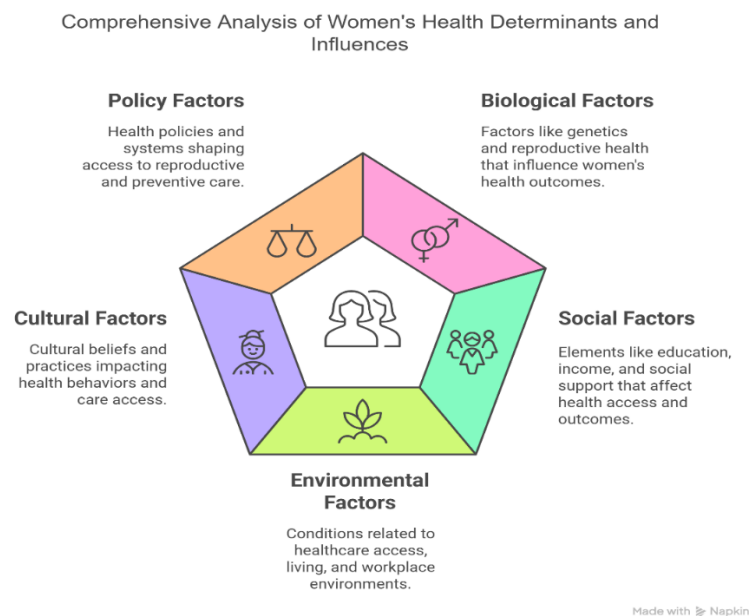
Abstract

This comprehensive review deals with integrated perspectives of women's health from traditional belief systems spreading to incorporate educational, societal, financial, and cultural components. It emphasizes the importance of appropriate academic pursuits, health awareness drives from schools, societal structure, financial situation in rural and urban scenarios to largely avoid the health consciousness associated inconsistencies. Further, this review targets existential challenges for any women to obtain equality even in healthcare systems and addresses certain traditional beliefs. Modern era women face challenges in terms of vitamins, minerals and iron-deficiency issues mainly due to poor lifestyle or trying to create a balance between professional and personal life which may pose threats to emotional burnouts, stress, anxiety, behavioral disorders, mood swings, disturbed reproductive cycles. Women even may tend to follow the unverifiable texts, videos, reels, posts from unauthenticated resources which may lead to major concerns for ethical, real and validated health literacy. Emerging artificial intelligence-based applications may also misguide the women by creating discrepancies in real and fake guidance about acute and chronic ailments and other sanitation matters. Additionally, this review even addresses ever-changing patterns in education system, employment, matrimonial system, motherhood and family structures that may lead to a sharp decline in successful marriage and lower fertility rates, the upsurge of child-free activities, and the challenges of gerontology in nuclear family system. Sensitization of prophylactic health care, need for early intrusion, affordable and sensible reproductive hygiene related education, and regular health screenings may help in creating a kind of balanced and unbiased opportunities for women. Future directions towards all-inclusive and impartial healthcare ecosystem, encouraging integration of traditional and modern healthcare approaches, legislative procedures and the decent use of technology may be able to address the varied requirements of all womanhood in *Viksit Bharat*.

Key words: Health, physical, social, emotional, spiritual, societal, woman

Women's Health: From Holistic View to Addressing Disparities

According to the definition of World Health Organization, health ranges far beyond its biological and medical dimensions that integrates physical, mental, social, and economic well-being of an individual. Conventional approaches to women's health have mainly focused on reproductive and maternal health, frequently ignoring wider elements such as mental health, gender-based viciousness and optimum access to the available healthcare amenities (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Besides, integrative perspectives consider variety of factors such as- sex, age, availability of nutrients during adolescence, puberty and reproductively fertile stages, social framework, financial status, cultural traditions and hitherto unexplored government and non-governmental regulatory requirements (Kuh *et al.*, 2003; Sen & Östlin, 2008). Since ages women of certain races and lower income groups or rural origins are under constant pressure of lack of health care facilities, awareness about overall cleanliness and taboo of sidelining them during menstrual days from routine activities thereby leading to mental agony, self-guilt and hatred towards herself and womanhood (Bowleg, 2012). Furthermore, lack of proper education and awareness about the role of adequate protein, vitamins, calcium, iron and other minerals in the daily diet continues to create never ending hormonal and emotional dysregulations (Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014).



Current scenario of women health towards equitable healthcare systems: Fact or Myth?

Western biomedical models have always dominated over the authentic contributions of Ayurveda until the covid-19 pandemic situations. Traditional medicine system deals with affordable herbal drugs and their widespread community-based medicines that are widely used for holistic wellness over centuries (Gone, 2013). Holistic health not only focuses on disease free body and physical well being but also incorporates mental, social and spiritual well-being of an individual (Park, 2023). Contemporary healthcare systems should incorporate traditional practices that generally encourages community involvement and can also help in sustenance of ancient culture (King *et al.*, 2009). Further, equalist perspectives pose serious challenges in sidelining the women in healthcare research and policy decisions by dominating male health care facilities frequently neglecting gender specific apprehensions beyond reproductive health (Lorber and Morre, 2002). Intersectionality could largely be avoided upon incorporating equalist perspectives into healthcare deliberations and policy decisions so as to address the specific needs of women across diverse contexts (Hankivsky, 2012; Bowleg, 2012).

Women's health in the modern era

Over reliance on the ready-to-eat ultra processed foods and various food delivery mobile applications in the recent past have contributed largely to higher calorie intake, poor dietary habits, rise in the sedentary life-style illnesses and metabolism related disorders (Monteiro *et al.*, 2011). Various social media platforms disseminate unachievable prettiness ideals, leading to body disappointment and chaotic dietary habits. Studies show a strong relationship between disproportionate social media use and augmented levels of anxiety and self-worth related issues, predominantly amongst the adolescent girls (Perloff, 2014). Surprisingly, women are weirdly affected by hormonal imbalance, emotional stress, mood swings and metabolic disorders such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) and lower fertility rates (Sirmans and Pate, 2013).

The changing landscape of societal roles of women

Equal rights to education and career choices have empowered many women fostering the senses of autonomy and self-determination. However, this empowerment significantly may lead to the cultural focus on self-care and achievement models that may pose challenge to newer forms of debates of

singlehood, child-free life and other family models (Gerson, 2002, Blackstone and Stewart, 2016). Conventional paradigm of women's role is transforming significantly from traditional home-makers to professional pursuits due to rising literacy rates and the needs for economic independence. Consequently, career-oriented woman frequently faces moral dilemma of steering professional success and caregiving responsibilities creates chronic stress and burn-out (Bianchi and Milkie, 2010). Besides, superwomen syndrome also escalates work-life balance, anxiety, depression, mental exhaustion, psychological distress, emotional burnout and other psychosomatic disorders are at its peak due to socio-cultural and biological factors (Albert, 2015; Nelson and Cherry, 2024). Furthermore, global marriage and fertility ratios have been gradually decreasing from 5.0 births per woman in 1960 to 2.2 in 2024 that may further decline over a period of time (United Nations Report, 2024). Many professional women these days choose for delayed motherhood and at times even relying on artificial reproductive techniques such as egg freezing and in-vitro fertilization for outspreading their fertility windows (Mertes, 2013).

Early health education: vital necessity

From the school levels its gender equality needs to be promoted to avoid gender-biasedness and discrimination for mutual respect and better understanding (Flood, 2015). Further, menstrual hygiene is an important aspect of adolescent health. Underprivileged menstrual sanitation may cause cervical infections, school absenteeism and community humiliation (Hennegan *et al.*, 2019). Appropriate access to sanitary products, fresh water, and waste disposal facilities should be arranged to promote a supportive environment in schools and communities.

Nutritional deficiencies and emotional health

Physiological requirements of any women throughout their life especially during hormonal swings such as menstruation, gestation, and menopause highlights the close correlation between nutrition and psychological health. Iron is very crucial for oxygen transport and intellectual capacities is frequently found undersupplied in menstruating women resulting into fatigue, irritability, and mood instabilities (Beard, 2000). Nutrients such as folate, vitamin D, and omega-3 fatty acids are vital during the pregnancy for the fetal growth and development as well as the maternal wellness; appropriate dosages decrease the chances of postpartum morbidity and mortality (Hibbeln *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, menopause and aging also enhances the chances of depression, burnouts and mood disorders which can be resolved generally by supplementation of vitamin B12, vitamin D, and magnesium.

Addressing holistic needs of balanced diet and appropriate age-based supplements may help in emotional stability and wellness throughout the womanhood.

Comprehensive sex education

Persistent gaps in comprehensive sex education, abstinence-only, incomplete sex education related awareness programs and policies generally fail to create the intended sensitization thereby leading to ever rising problems of unintended teen pregnancies and a risk for sexually transmitted infections (Kohler *et al.*, 2008). There are certain obstacles in accessing quality maternal healthcare and family planning services mainly in poor and marginalized groups. Different aspects such as geographic barriers, socio-economic status, and systemic biases in healthcare services may lead to adverse maternal outcomes (Taylor *et al.*, 2020).

Digital health literacy and challenges

e-Health literacy requires set of skills to search, evaluate, comprehend and apply the information available for treatment modalities (Norman and Skinner, 2006). Additionally, health issues related misinformation is widespread and even intensified by the ease of content creation and broadcasting via social media platforms. Moreover, internet derived information obstruction treatment (IDIOT) syndrome largely highlights elevated medical anxiety and delayed qualified consultation and appropriate medications (Patel *et al.*, 2024). Besides, social media influencers outline community health insights by their photos and videos with many endorsing medically unsubstantiated wellness drifts (Ventola, 2014). The commercial wellness industries largely rank profit over authenticity in the marketing of variety of products such as detox diets, alternative medicines, supplements and, weight-loss exercise patterns and lifestyle modifications (Borges *et al.*, 2022). Ironically, most reliable practitioners are least skilled in marketing and consequently it remains a challenge for the average user.

Future directions

Access to healthcare services

Preventive screenings are important for early discovery and management of ailments. Consistent screenings for cervical and breast cancer, thyroid levels, osteoporosis, and cardiovascular health may aid in improving the consequences (Smith *et al.*, 2019). Preventive HPV vaccination in teenage girls, cervical cancer testing through pap smears and breast cancer screening through mammograms is

needed for reproductive age women (WHO, 2021). Regular health check-ups for assessing cardiovascular health and osteoporosis screening through bone mineral density tests for forty plus women (NOF, 2019).

An all-inclusive approach to women's health in India must include the interplay of balanced diet, physical and emotional health, gender roles, and legislative frameworks for a better and broad-minded society. Women often look after domestic labor, household responsibilities, baby-sitting, and elderly care, restraining their access to schooling, employability, and health care facilities (Desai and Andrist, 2010). In order to accomplish the vision of *Viksit Bharat* (Developed India), gender impartiality in household tasks and policymaking needs to be lined up.

For prevention of certain common insufficiencies such as iron-induced anemia, malnourishments in adolescence and in case of early pregnancies, pre- and post-menstrual syndromes, menopause and associated osteoporosis which may have been due to the deficit nourishments perhaps due to cultural food hierarchies and socio-economic blockades (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2021). Indian government sector has already initiated *POSHAN Abhiyaan* and *National Nutrition Mission* for the betterment of nourishment associated facets, more stringent implementation practices are required for the women to obtain unbiased dietary resources. Ironically, physical activity seems to be underrated in girls specially after attaining puberty due to societal limitations (Kim *et al.*, 2010) that may be resolved by girls-friendly infrastructures at public spaces, in sports complexes, workplace wellness programs, and gender-unbiased sports initiatives. Consistent physical exercises such as yoga, aerobics and any other traditional Indian fitness routines may plays an important role in refining cardiovascular health, enhancing bone density, and promoting mental well-being (Choudhary and Patel, 2024). Ancient Indian concepts and the importance of traditions of yogic exercises and observing the respiratory patterns through modes of pranayama are now getting authenticated by modern scientific experimental protocols for regulating stress, maintenance of emotional and spiritual balance and higher cognitive capacities (Goyal *et al.*, 2014).

As a part of evolving roles and responsibilities of men and women in the current scenario, household chores, parental care tasks are to be reconsidered and reframed befitting the necessities for a healthy family structure. Paternity leave policies of merely fifteen days and maternity leave of 26 weeks creates a controversial belief system even in the 21st modernized century that nursing of babies are solely female's duty (Maternity benefit rules, 2017). Apart from the dual responsibilities of men and women as parents, it becomes pertinent to establish and monitor the well-constructed day cares to support nurturing a child and healing of women recovering

after delivery. Furthermore, women can be empowered in its true sense by obtaining equal rights for education, financial independence and optimum health and wellness. In India, there are schemes available for education of single girl child, entrepreneurship possibilities for women in science and technology through development of various competencies, participation of women in academic and management related posts and policy-guidelines are essential for holistic progress. By 2047, India would need to overcome age and gender-based differences through collective roles in household daily chores, safeguarding equal health care facilities and creating dynamic frameworks that line up women's all-inclusive well-being. In nutshell, upliftment of the health of women, not just in the context of physical well-being but also mental, social and economic empowerment and independence is very much needed to fulfil the idea of *Viksit Bharat*.

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Sleep Quality and Women's Well-Being: A Lifespan Perspective

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Abstract

Sleep quality is a crucial part of women's health throughout their lives. During the hormone-sensitive periods from adolescence to adulthood, such as menarche, pregnancy, lactation, and menopause, the well-being of women from the perspective of physical, emotional, and reproductive health is crucial. During these phases, the sleep quality is greatly affected, which may affect their physical and psychological well-being. Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) is an emerging concern among women. The women with PCOS often experience poor sleep quality, which affects their overall well-being. Menopause is also a crucial phase of women's life in which psychosomatic changes frequently interfere with sleep quality affecting sleep quality due to psychosomatic changes. Overall, promoting good sleep habits and adopting positive lifestyle changes can greatly benefit women's health at every stage of their life.

Key Words: Sleep quality, Women's life, Adolescents, Adulthood

Health is defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” according to World Health Organization (WHO). It directly affects daily activity level, physical fitness and psychological health and hence impacts quality of life. Physical well-being leads to happiness, productivity, and a longer life; ill health can stifle opportunities, generate stress, and diminish the quality of life.

From a women's health perspective, it becomes even more significant because a woman's well-being influences not only her own life but also the health and stability of families and communities. In addition, the health of a woman at various stages in her life, such as adolescence, adulthood, pregnancy, lactation, and menopause, requires particular attention as specific physical and hormonal changes affect her health during these time frames. Therefore, proper

care at these stages ensures healthy growth and a smooth transition into later life. Hence, it contributes in improving the quality of life for both women and their families. Women's health is influenced by various factors like nutritional status, psychological and physiological condition, quality of sleep and family support. Of these, the roles of physical activity and sleep quality are apparent in stabilizing overall health and physiological balance.

Quality sleep is essential for overall health. Good quality sleep is the basis of good health and well-being. According to the World Health Organization (2008), good sleep quality is a comprehensive concept that reflects how well an entire night of sleep meets an individual's personal needs and habitual patterns related to such factors as duration, onset, continuity or awakening feeling refreshed. The National Sleep Foundation (NSF) describes the defining characteristics of good sleep in healthy individuals, including falling asleep within 30 min, ≤ 1 arousal > 5 min, being awake < 20 min post-sleep onset, and sleeping efficiency $\geq 85\%$ (Ohayon et al., 2017). Good sleep quality is generally defined by sufficient total time in bed, as well as falling asleep within 30 minutes, few or no waking periods at night, and a wake after final sleep onset of less than 20 minutes (NSF, 2019). On the other hand, disturbances of these rhythms may have negative effects on health and well-being, both biological and psychological (Irwin, 2015). In a woman's life, different phases like adolescence, young adulthood, pregnancy, lactation and menopause are phases in which the sleep quality is affected. Poor sleep quality is reported among adolescent girls (41 to 46%), adult females (32.8%), pregnant females (53 to 71%), postpartum mothers (87.5%), and menopausal females (31 to 42%) (Sasaki et al., 2011; Chen et al., 2014; Bei et al., 2015; Christian et al., 2019).

It has also been observed that sound sleep quality contributes significantly to the regulation and maintenance of hormonal balance within the endocrine system. Many hormones, including growth hormone, are produced when an individual sleeps (Berhanu et al., 2018). Previous research has documented the complex relationship between sleep duration and various factors, including genetic vulnerabilities, socio-environmental pressures, and concurrent health conditions (Hale, 2005; Stranges et al., 2008). Sleep is well known to be a fundamental stage of neurophysiological recovery in which the catabolic hormones corticosteroids and adrenaline diminish. In contrast, anabolism, such as protein synthesis, cell mitosis, and secretion of growth hormone, is accelerated (Tsai et al., 2019).

Adolescents who do not get enough sleep may have different problems, like high stress levels (Roberts et al., 2002), concentration and memory problems (Steenari et al., 2003), emotional and behavioural issues (Yen et al., 2010), poor academic performance and overall lower quality of life (Lanberg et al., 2013; Chiu et al., 2018). The major factors that lead to poor sleep quality during

adolescence are academic pressure, worrying about the results, poor social life, no participation in sports or extracurricular activities, spending more time on screens, unhealthy lifestyle, not having parental supervision or adhering to bedtime (Hitze et al., 2009; Arora et al., 2013; Feng et al., 2014). Among adolescent girls, the phase is marked by the onset of menarche. From menarche to menopause, reproductive hormones that regulate reproduction undergo cyclical changes every month. These hormones affect mood, body temperature, respiration, the autonomic nervous system, and sleep in addition to their direct reproductive roles. The menstrual cycle affects sleep by affecting shifts in sleep quality and physiological modifications in homeostatic and circadian sleep regulation (Baker, 2022). Periodic variations in ovarian steroid levels across the menstrual cycle significantly influence subjective and objective sleep disturbances in women (Andersen et al., 2023) as the fluctuations in ovarian steroid levels directly affect neural activity in brain regions that are key regulators of sleep.

Moreover, menstruation-related conditions such as premenstrual dysphoric disorder, dysmenorrhea, and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) in young females also result in poor sleep issues such as subjective dissatisfaction with sleep, difficulty staying asleep, increased daytime sleepiness, and shorter sleep duration as compared to females with regular menstrual cycles (Halchul et al., 2013; Bomin & Baek, 2023). Additionally, sleep difficulties are linked to symptoms that some women experience throughout their menstrual cycle, including breast soreness, headaches, cramps, anxiety, and despair. (Kiesner and Van Reen, 2016). Some women exhibit no relationship, others exhibit an increase in sleeping difficulties during the midcycle, and still others exhibit an increase in sleeping difficulties before menstruation (Van Reen & Kiesner, 2016).

In healthy menstrual cycles, melatonin levels rise slightly in the late-luteal phase after progesterone increases. Melatonin, a sleep-inducing hormone secreted by the pineal gland, is essential for controlling circadian rhythms. In order to match biological cycles with light and darkness, its production peaks at night and decreases throughout the day. Melatonin has been shown to affect biorhythms, promote sleep, and also reported to reduce body temperature. The secretion of melatonin is severely suppressed by blue light emission from electronic devices, which leads to sleep problems (Lim et al., 2006; Teran et al., 2020). Women with premenstrual dysphoric disorder have lower nighttime melatonin and weaker daily rhythm patterns, suggesting a disruption in the link between hormones and the body's internal circadian rhythm.

Sleep disturbances in PCOS are frequently attributed to hormonal imbalance, excess weight and insulin resistance, which can further hinder the natural sleep-wake cycle, leading to decreased sleep quality. Notably, sleep-

disordered breathing is less common in adolescents with PCOS when compared with adult women (Hirelvaci et al., 2017; Lin et al., 2017).

During pregnancy and postpartum phase, sleep quality is also getting affected. According to Bei et al. (2015), inadequate sleep duration and quality during pregnancy are frequently reported, which negatively impacts the well-being of women (Pengo et al., 2018). Studies reported that 76% of pregnant women have poor sleep quality (Felder et al., 2018), 38% have inadequate sleep at night (6 hours or less), 52.6% to 65.4% are drowsy during the day (Tsai et al., 2017), 61.9% are sleep deprived, and 100% wake up during the night (Mindell et al., 2015).

Insomnia, snoring, restless nights, periodic limb movements, and sleep-disordered breathing are the main sleep problems experienced during pregnancy. These issues can lead to risks like gestational diabetes, pregnancy-induced hypertension, prolonged labour, cesarean delivery, preterm birth, and low-birth-weight infants (Jemere et al., 2021). More than 35% of pregnant women experience poor sleep quality due to nausea and moderate to severe vomiting (Li et al., 2016). Other physical symptoms that may interfere with sleep quality include backache, nausea, polyuria, and stomachache, which are frequent pregnancy symptoms (Kumar, 2016; Felder et al., 2018). In the postpartum stage, women usually experience poor sleep due to childcare responsibilities. This can result not only in postpartum fatigue but also in impaired mother-infant bonding and delayed recovery (Badr et al., 2017). Regular light-intensity exercise at least three times a week has been shown to improve sleep during this time (Lawson et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2018).

Menopause is defined as the end of menstruation for good, confirmed after twelve consecutive months of amenorrhea, marking the end of ovarian follicular activity (Gatenby et al., 2021). Conversely, the years leading up to menopause are known as the perimenopause, and they are marked by changes in hormones, clinical conditions, and metabolism that are associated with a decline in ovarian function (Santoro et al., 2016). As ovarian functions decline during perimenopause, women experience more frequent anovulatory cycles, diminished ovulation, and suppressed follicle development (Sokalska et al., 2008). The levels of progesterone and estrogen decrease, while follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinizing hormone (LH) rise in an attempt to compensate (Hall et al., 2015). This imbalance in hormones commonly produces many symptoms out of which hot flashes and night sweats, both of which can significantly disturb sleep (Thurston et al., 2018).

During the menopause transition, women are more likely to have sleep problems, including trouble falling asleep, waking up early, and disrupted sleep, which are especially associated with the decline in progesterone and estrogen

(Kravitz & Joffe, 2011). Melatonin declined from premenopause to postmenopause. Women who have vasomotor symptoms, such as hot flashes and night sweats, which are likely the most prevalent menopausal symptom, are more likely to report sleep disturbances and to develop clinical insomnia (Thurston et al., 2018).

Exercise has many benefits for improving sleep quality. Through exercises, melatonin is produced, which regulates sleep and wake cycles (Kruk et al., 2021). Exercising not only improve the sleep quality but also reduces stress which is a hurdle to falling asleep. It also positively impacts mood, boosting motivation to stay active and creating a cycle of well-being. Research indicates that during exercise, active individuals tend to feel more positive and calm, while experiencing less negativity and fatigue (Magnan et al., 2013; Wang & Boros, 2021). Moreover, while exercising, core temperature rises and then gradually drops about 30 to 90 minutes afterwards, a shift that makes it easier to fall asleep. In this way, physical activity supports both the initiation and maintenance of healthy sleep patterns.

In conclusion, lifestyle factors like sleep and physical activity are closely connected to women's health during various stages of life. Getting enough sleep helps maintain hormonal balance, supports mental health, and aids physical recovery. Regular physical activity strengthens the body, lowers the risk of chronic illnesses, and helps manage specific challenges such as pregnancy-related fatigue or menopausal stress. Taken together, good sleep and consistent physical activity foster resilience, energy, and holistic well-being, enabling women to thrive at every stage of life.

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Challenges for Women in Health and Future Scenario: Building Healthier

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Abstract

Women's health in India is a critical determinant of national development but continues to be constrained by systemic inequities and structural barriers. Persistent challenges across the female life course—including maternal mortality, reproductive morbidities, non-communicable diseases, and mental health disorders—undermine both individual well-being and broader socio-economic progress. This study draws upon current epidemiological indicators, policy frameworks, and demographic analyses to examine the determinants of women's health inequities in India. A critical review of systemic barriers, including socio-economic disparities, cultural constraints, gender-based discrimination, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure, was conducted to identify priority areas requiring intervention. The analysis reveals that these structural determinants perpetuate adverse health outcomes and limit access to equitable healthcare. Key domains for intervention include digital health integration, community-driven healthcare delivery, regulatory reforms, and initiatives fostering women's empowerment. Improving women's health in India is not only a biomedical necessity but also a strategic imperative for achieving socio-economic development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Evidence-based, gender-responsive policies and inclusive healthcare ecosystems are essential to position women as central stakeholders in building a healthier and more equitable New India.

Keywords: Women's health, Maternal health, Gender equity, Non-communicable diseases, Digital health, Policy reform, New India

1. Introduction

Women's health has a significant impact on both social advancement and national growth. It has historically been defined strictly within the field of

reproductive health, with a focus on outcomes linked to pregnancy, maternity care, and contraception. [1] Even while these fields are crucial, a narrow viewpoint like this ignores the wider range of health issues that women encounter throughout their lives. Women suffer from polycystic ovarian disease (PCOD), PCOS, anaemia, menstrual abnormalities, sickle cell disease (SCD), non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and mental health issues in addition to reproductive issues [2]. These illnesses have an impact on social, psychological, and economic well-being in addition to physical health, and they are frequently made worse by unequal access to medical care.

About 10–20% of women of reproductive age suffer from PCOD and PCOS, two of the most common endocrine disorders. They are a leading cause of infertility and metabolic problems [3]. Anaemia is also still one of the biggest public health issues; according to NFHS-5 data, 57% of women in their reproductive years are anaemic, indicating little improvement despite years of treatment [4]. Health disparities are exacerbated by SCD, especially in Scheduled Tribe communities, where socioeconomic hardship and endogamy lead to greater incidence rates [5].

Even while prenatal care (ANC), skilled birth attendance (SBA), and postnatal care (PNC) have improved maternal health, maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality are still primarily caused by gaps in access and quality [6]. These enduring issues underscore the need for a life-course approach that integrates reproductive, metabolic, chronic, and mental health concerns to manage women's health from youth to old age. Social variables such as poverty, gender-based discrimination, cultural taboos, and a lack of proper healthcare infrastructure are closely related to the health issues facing women [7, 8]. In order to address them, revolutionary initiatives that incorporate digital health solutions, community-based approaches, gender-responsive legislative reforms, and medical interventions are needed. The vision of a “New India” emphasizes inclusivity, equity, and sustainable growth. As women constitute nearly half of the population and play pivotal roles as caregivers, educators, and economic contributors, their health directly shapes national development trajectories. Healthy women strengthen families, communities, and economies, whereas persistent health disparities undermine progress. This paper examines the multidimensional challenges to women's health in India, identifies systemic barriers perpetuating inequities, and proposes a comprehensive framework to address them. By integrating biomedical, social, and policy perspectives, it seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for building a healthier, more equitable New India.

2. Current health Challenges Facing Indian Women

2.1. Reproductive and Maternal Health

In India, maternal mortality is still a major public health concern despite impressive advancements in recent decades. Despite improvements, the current Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) of 103 per 100,000 live births is still higher than the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of 70 [9]. Due to their restricted access to emergency obstetric care, skilled birth attendance, and high-quality healthcare infrastructure, rural women continue to face disproportionately higher risks [10]. Reproductive morbidities, which are frequently impacted by son preference and deeply ingrained patriarchal norms, such as anaemia, pregnancy-related malnutrition, insufficient spacing between births, and limited access to family planning, continue to compromise women's autonomy and health outcomes [11].

2.2. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs)

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have become a significant health burden for women in India as a result of the epidemiological change. These days, the main causes of morbidity and death include diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, and chronic respiratory conditions [12]. National screening programs are still poor, especially in rural and resource-limited areas, despite the significant rise in breast and cervical cancers [13]. The disease burden is increased by low awareness, delayed diagnosis, and insufficient treatment facilities [14].

2.3. Well-being and Mental Health

Despite their great incidence, mental health illnesses among Indian women are stigmatized and not well understood. Women who experience social isolation, economic difficulty, or spousal violence are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and stress-related disorders [11]. Because women were disproportionately responsible for caregiving and faced economic uncertainty, the COVID-19 epidemic exacerbated psychological suffering [15]. Systemic neglect is seen in the lack of adequate integration of mental health into primary care [13].

2.4. Nutritional Difficulties

The prevalence of nutritional inadequacies is still high, with a significant portion of women in all age groups suffering from anaemia, undernutrition, and

micronutrient imbalances [10]. Poor nutritional results are sustained by poverty and food insecurity, as well as cultural norms that prioritize the dietary demands of male family members [11].

3. Systematic Barriers to Women's Health

3.1. Socio-Economic Disparities

One of the main factors influencing health disparities is socioeconomic inequality. The feminization of poverty and women's limited influence over household resources impede access to healthcare services [16]. Women's health needs are further marginalized by families who frequently place a higher priority on spending on male members.

3.2. Cultural and Social Constraints

Women's decision-making autonomy and mobility are restricted by deeply ingrained gender conventions, which also limits their ability to access healthcare in a timely manner [17]. Many times, the limited perspective of reproduction is used to evaluate health, ignoring the demands of a wider range of people.

3.3. Gaps in Healthcare Infrastructure

Women's health results are further hampered by persistent inadequacies in the healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural areas. Significant obstacles still exist, including a lack of female healthcare professionals, poor privacy, and limited access to specialist treatments [10]. Inequities in service delivery are made worse by differences between the public and private systems [14].

3.4. Difficulties in Implementing Policies

Despite the fact that India has created a number of women-centred health policies, the efficacy of these programs is compromised by deficiencies in funding, intergovernmental coordination, and accountability [15,16].

4. Future Scenario: Opportunities and Innovations

4.1. Digital Health Transformation

Unprecedented opportunities are presented by the Digital India initiative's rapid spread of digital health. Women's access to consultations, preventative care, and health literacy can be improved by telemedicine and mobile health

apps, which can overcome geographic limitations [18]. Digital health records and artificial intelligence can enhance lifecycle monitoring, continuity of care, and early diagnosis [12].

4.2. Community-Based Models

Enhancing women's access to healthcare has been demonstrated to be possible through community-driven health initiatives. One example of the transforming power of community health workers is the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) program [11]. Women's health results can be greatly improved by fortifying such models with incentives, training, and digital support.

4.3. Integrated and Gender-Responsive Care

Future models must include integrated strategies that address social determinants of health like social security, economic empowerment, and education while combining preventive, curative, and rehabilitative treatments. [13,16].

4.4. Reforms in Governance and Policy

To create an enabling ecosystem, comprehensive reforms are essential, including gender-responsive budgeting, higher healthcare spending and more robust accountability systems.[15].

5. Women as Agents of Change in New India

Women must be positioned not only as beneficiaries but as central stakeholders in health system transformation. Women's leadership in healthcare research, entrepreneurship, and policy-making can foster innovative solutions and gender-sensitive strategies [17]. Moreover, healthier women contribute to intergenerational health improvements, driving sustainable socio-economic development [12].

5.1. Recommendations for Action

Prompt Interventions

1. Improve the infrastructure of primary healthcare with an emphasis on services that are accessible to women.

2. Increase availability to emergency obstetric care and trained birth attendance
3. Put in place thorough screening initiatives for cervical and breast cancer.
4. Use focused supplementation initiatives to address nutritional deficits.
5. Include mental health services in the provision of primary healthcare.

Strategies for the Medium Term

1. Create and implement digital health platforms tailored to the medical requirements of women.
2. Open specialized women's health facilities in neglected regions.
3. Increase the amount of women's health treatments covered by health insurance
4. Put in place extensive health education initiatives aimed at communities and women.
5. Encourage women's health technology research and innovation.

Long-Term Goals

1. Implement gender-responsive service delivery to attain universal health coverage.
2. End avoidable maternal and infant fatalities.
3. Make India a world leader in innovative women's health.
4. Establish long-term funding sources for initiatives promoting women's health.
5. Create a gender-sensitive and well-trained healthcare workforce.

6. Conclusion

India's women's health issues are intricate and multidimensional, necessitating thorough and well-coordinated solutions. Nonetheless, there is hope for revolutionary change due to the chances brought about by legislative changes, technology advancements, and shifting social dynamics. In addition to being morally required, addressing women's health issues is strategically essential to creating New India. The future of women's health in New India needs to be defined by sustainability, quality, accessibility, and equity. Communities, the commercial sector, civil society, and the government must all maintain their commitment to this. Above all, it necessitates acknowledging and utilizing women's agency and leadership in promoting changes in the health system. As India moves closer to its aim of being a developed country by 2047, protecting the health and welfare of its women will be essential to reaching this lofty objective. Today's investments in women's health will pay off in the form of better health outcomes as well as increased economic growth, social

development, and national prosperity. Recognizing that women's health is a national priority that necessitates teamwork, creative solutions, and an unshakable commitment to social justice and gender parity is the first step towards creating a healthier New India.

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डिजिटल युग में महिला सशक्तिकरण:सोशल मीडिया और तकनीक का प्रभाव

अमिता बी. पटेल

सारांश

डिजिटल युग में महिला सशक्तिकरण का महत्व अत्यधिक बढ़ गया है। तकनीकी साधनों और इंटरनेट के विस्तार से महिलाओं को अपने अधिकारों और क्षमताओं को पहचानने का अवसर मिला है। डिजिटल प्लेटफार्मों ने महिलाओं को शिक्षा, रोजगार, और उद्यमिता के नए अवसर प्रदान किए हैं। इसके अलावा, सोशल मीडिया और ऑनलाइन समुदायों ने महिलाओं को अपनी आवाज़ उठाने, सामाजिक मुद्दों पर जागरूकता फैलाने और समानता के लिए संघर्ष करने के साधन दिए हैं। डिजिटल साक्षरता महिलाओं को आत्मनिर्भर बनने और पारंपरिक बाधाओं को तोड़ने में मदद करती है।

1. महिला सशक्तिकरण अर्थ

महिला सशक्तिकरण (Women's Empowerment) का अर्थ है महिलाओं को उनके अधिकारों, स्वतंत्रता, और आत्मनिर्भरता के प्रति जागरूक करना, ताकि वे अपने जीवन के हर क्षेत्र में स्वतंत्र रूप से निर्णय ले सकें। यह सशक्तिकरण आर्थिक, सामाजिक, राजनीतिक और व्यक्तिगत स्तर पर होता है। इसके मुख्य तत्वों में शिक्षा का अधिकार,

समानता, आर्थिक स्वतंत्रता, स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं तक पहुँच, कानूनी अधिकार, और हिंसा या भेदभाव से मुक्ति शामिल हैं।

महिला सशक्तिकरण का उद्देश्य महिलाओं को पुरुषों के बराबर अधिकार और अवसर देना है, ताकि वे सामाजिक और व्यक्तिगत जीवन में पूर्ण रूप से भाग ले सकें। इसके लिए महिलाओं को उनकी क्षमताओं का विकास करने, नेतृत्व की भूमिका निभाने, और अपने निर्णय स्वयं लेने के लिए प्रोत्साहित किया जाता है।

2. महिला सशक्तिकरण के प्रमुख पहलू

- आर्थिक सशक्तिकरण: महिलाओं को रोजगार के अवसरों में बराबर हिस्सेदारी देना और उन्हें आर्थिक रूप से आत्मनिर्भर बनाना।
- शैक्षिक सशक्तिकरण: महिलाओं को गुणवत्तापूर्ण शिक्षा उपलब्ध कराना, ताकि वे अपने जीवन के हर क्षेत्र में ज्ञान और कौशल का उपयोग कर सकें।
- राजनीतिक सशक्तिकरण: महिलाओं को राजनीति में भाग लेने और नेतृत्व करने के अवसर प्रदान करना।
- सामाजिक सशक्तिकरण: महिलाओं के प्रति समाज की सोच में बदलाव लाना और उन्हें हर क्षेत्र में बराबरी का दर्जा देना।
- कानूनी सशक्तिकरण: महिलाओं को कानूनी अधिकारों और सुरक्षा का प्रावधान कराना, जिससे वे न्याय और समानता प्राप्त कर सकें।

महिला सशक्तिकरण का लक्ष्य एक ऐसे समाज की स्थापना करना है जहाँ महिलाएँ आत्मविश्वास के साथ स्वतंत्र रूप से अपने जीवन के हर पहलू में निर्णय ले सकें और अपने जीवन को बेहतर बना सकें।

3. डिजिटल युग में महिला शिक्षा

डिजिटल युग में महिला शिक्षा ने नए आयामों को छुआ है, जिससे महिलाओं के लिए शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में असंख्य अवसर पैदा हुए हैं। इंटरनेट, स्मार्टफोन और अन्य डिजिटल प्लेटफार्म्स ने महिलाओं को एक नया रास्ता

दिखाया है, जिससे वे शिक्षा प्राप्त कर सकती हैं, नए कौशल सीख सकती हैं और व्यक्तिगत और पेशेवर जीवन में आत्मनिर्भर बन सकती हैं। इस विषय पर विस्तार से चर्चा करते हैं:

❖ ऑनलाइन शिक्षा और लचीलेपन का लाभ

डिजिटल युग ने ऑनलाइन शिक्षा को प्रचलित किया है, जिससे महिलाएँ अपने घर बैठे शिक्षा प्राप्त कर सकती हैं। खासतौर पर, कार्यशील महिलाओं और घरेलू महिलाओं के लिए यह बहुत लाभकारी है, क्योंकि उन्हें शारीरिक रूप से कहीं जाने की आवश्यकता नहीं होती और वे अपने समय के अनुसार पढ़ाई कर सकती हैं। ऑनलाइन प्लेटफार्म्स जैसे Coursera, Udemy, edX, Khan Academy, और LinkedIn Learning जैसी वेबसाइट्स ने महिलाओं को विविध विषयों पर शिक्षा देने का अवसर दिया है।

❖ साक्षरता और शिक्षा तक पहुँच

डिजिटल शिक्षा के माध्यम से साक्षरता दर में वृद्धि हो रही है। खासकर ग्रामीण और पिछड़े इलाकों में रहने वाली महिलाएँ, जिन्हें पहले शिक्षा प्राप्त करने में कठिनाई होती थी, अब वे इंटरनेट और मोबाइल फोन के जरिए अपने शैक्षिक लक्ष्यों को पूरा कर सकती हैं। विभिन्न सरकारी योजनाओं और ऐप्स जैसे DIKSHA, SWAYAM, और Bharat Skill ने शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में महिलाओं को सशक्त किया है।

❖ नई तकनीकों में कौशल विकास

डिजिटल युग में महिलाओं को नए तकनीकी कौशल हासिल करने का अवसर मिला है। महिलाएँ अब डेटा साइंस, वेब डिज़ाइन, कोडिंग, डिजिटल मार्केटिंग, और आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस (AI) जैसे क्षेत्रों में भी शिक्षा प्राप्त कर रही हैं। इन कौशलों को प्राप्त करके महिलाएँ न केवल अपनी जीवनशैली को बेहतर बना सकती हैं, बल्कि उन्हें व्यवसायिक और उद्यमिता के क्षेत्र में भी सफलता मिल सकती है।

❖ स्मार्टफोन और मोबाइल ऐप्स का उपयोग

मोबाइल ऐप्स और स्मार्टफोन ने महिलाओं के लिए शिक्षा को और अधिक सुलभ और सहज बना दिया है। महिलाएँ अब YouTube, Podcasts, और eBooks जैसी डिजिटल सामग्री के जरिए अपनी शिक्षा को बेहतर बना सकती हैं। साथ ही, विशेष रूप से महिलाओं के लिए डिज़ाइन किए गए ऐप्स जैसे HerSecondInning, SheCan, और GirlScript ने उनकी शिक्षा को बढ़ावा दिया है।

❖ महिला सशक्तिकरण और नेतृत्व

डिजिटल शिक्षा ने महिलाओं के सशक्तिकरण में अहम भूमिका निभाई है। महिलाएँ अब न केवल अपनी शिक्षा पूरी कर रही हैं, बल्कि वे डिजिटल प्लेटफार्म्स के माध्यम से खुद का नेटवर्क बना रही हैं और नेतृत्व की भूमिकाओं में भी कदम रख रही हैं। सोशल मीडिया और ब्लॉगिंग प्लेटफार्म्स ने महिलाओं को अपनी आवाज़ उठाने का अवसर दिया है, और वे अब विभिन्न सामाजिक, राजनीतिक, और आर्थिक मुद्दों पर चर्चा कर रही हैं।

❖ सुरक्षा और गोपनीयता की चुनौती

हालांकि डिजिटल युग में महिला शिक्षा के अवसर बढ़े हैं, लेकिन इसके साथ ही महिलाओं को ऑनलाइन सुरक्षा और गोपनीयता की चुनौतियों का भी सामना करना पड़ता है। साइबर बुलिंग, ऑनलाइन उत्पीड़न और उनकी व्यक्तिगत जानकारी का दुरुपयोग एक गंभीर समस्या हो सकती है। इन समस्याओं को लेकर जागरूकता फैलाने और सुरक्षित ऑनलाइन शिक्षा के उपायों को अपनाने की आवश्यकता है।

❖ महिलाओं के लिए शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में डिजिटल डिवाइड

हालांकि डिजिटल शिक्षा ने महिलाओं के लिए कई अवसर प्रदान किए हैं, लेकिन यह अभी भी समाज के कुछ हिस्सों में सीमित है। ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में रहने वाली महिलाओं के पास इंटरनेट की सुविधा, स्मार्टफोन और कंप्यूटर जैसी तकनीकी सुविधाएँ नहीं होतीं, जिससे वे डिजिटल शिक्षा से वंचित रह जाती हैं। इसके अलावा, महिलाओं में तकनीकी शिक्षा के प्रति संकोच और पारंपरिक दृष्टिकोण भी एक चुनौती बनी हुई है।

❖ महिला शिक्षा की दिशा में सरकारी पहल

भारत सरकार और अन्य संगठनों ने महिला शिक्षा को बढ़ावा देने के लिए कई पहल की हैं। राष्ट्रीय महिला शिक्षा नीति, BetI Padhao BetI Bachao, SWAYAM, और NPTEL जैसी योजनाओं ने महिलाओं को डिजिटल शिक्षा की दिशा में सशक्त किया है। साथ ही, महिलाओं के लिए विशेष ऑनलाइन कोर्स और कार्यशालाएँ आयोजित की जा रही हैं ताकि उन्हें नए कौशल सीखने और आगे बढ़ने का अवसर मिले।

4. सोशल मीडिया और तकनीक ने महिलाओं को किस तरह सशक्त किया है, इसके उदाहरण

सोशल मीडिया और तकनीक ने महिलाओं को कई महत्वपूर्ण तरीकों से सशक्त किया है, और इसके कई वास्तविक उदाहरण दुनिया भर से सामने आए हैं। ये उदाहरण दिखाते हैं कि कैसे डिजिटल प्लेटफार्मों ने महिलाओं को अपनी आवाज़ उठाने, नए कौशल सीखने, अपना व्यवसाय शुरू करने, और समाज में अपनी पहचान बनाने के साधन दिए हैं। यहां कुछ प्रमुख उदाहरण और केस स्टडी प्रस्तुत हैं:

❖ #MeToo आंदोलन (Me Too Movement)

सशक्तिकरण का उदाहरण: सोशल मीडिया पर #MeToo अभियान ने महिलाओं को अपने खिलाफ हुए यौन उत्पीड़न और दुर्व्यवहार के अनुभवों को साझा करने का मौका दिया। इस अभियान की शुरुआत 2006 में तराना बर्क ने की थी, लेकिन यह 2017 में तब वैश्विक स्तर पर प्रसिद्ध हुआ जब हॉलीवुड अभिनेत्री एलिजा मिलानो ने इसका इस्तेमाल किया।

प्रभाव: इस आंदोलन ने यौन उत्पीड़न के मुद्दे को वैश्विक स्तर पर चर्चा का केंद्र बना दिया। इसके परिणामस्वरूप कई प्रमुख हस्तियों को सार्वजनिक जीवन से हटना पड़ा और महिलाओं को न्याय दिलाने के लिए कानून में भी बदलाव हुए। इसने महिलाओं को साहस और सामूहिक

शक्ति दी कि वे अपने खिलाफ हुए अन्याय को बिना डर के साझा कर सकें।

❖ मलाला यूसुफजई (Malala Yousafzai) और शिक्षा अधिकार

सशक्तिकरण का उदाहरण: मलाला यूसुफजई, जो पाकिस्तान की एक युवा महिला हैं, ने सोशल मीडिया और ब्लॉगिंग के माध्यम से लड़कियों की शिक्षा के अधिकार के लिए अपनी आवाज़ उठाई। तालिबान द्वारा गोली मारे जाने के बाद,

❖ मलाला ने अपनी शिक्षा अभियान को वैश्विक मंच पर पहुँचाया।

प्रभाव: मलाला ने इंटरनेट और सोशल मीडिया का उपयोग करते हुए शिक्षा के अधिकार के लिए एक वैश्विक आंदोलन खड़ा किया, और वे महिलाओं के लिए प्रेरणा का प्रतीक बन गईं। उनकी आवाज़ ने दुनिया भर में महिलाओं की शिक्षा के अधिकार को और अधिक मान्यता दिलाई।

❖ बिजनेस के क्षेत्र में महिला उद्यमिता का उदय

सशक्तिकरण का उदाहरण: आज दुनियाभर में महिलाएँ सोशल मीडिया प्लेटफार्मों का उपयोग करके छोटे-छोटे व्यापारों की शुरुआत कर रही हैं। उदाहरण के लिए, अंकिता सोंघल ने भारत में अपने हस्तनिर्मित गहनों के व्यवसाय को इंस्टाग्राम और फेसबुक के माध्यम से लॉन्च किया। इन प्लेटफार्मों ने उन्हें अपने ब्रांड को वैश्विक स्तर पर प्रमोट करने और ग्राहकों से जुड़ने का मौका दिया।

प्रभाव: अंकिता जैसी उद्यमियों ने डिजिटल माध्यमों का इस्तेमाल करते हुए अपने व्यवसाय को तेजी से बढ़ाया। इंस्टाग्राम और फेसबुक जैसी सोशल मीडिया साइट्स ने छोटे व्यवसायों को बढ़ावा देने के लिए उनके लिए एक समतल खेल का मैदान बनाया है, जहां वे बिना बड़ी पूंजी के अपने उत्पादों को वैश्विक बाजार में बेच सकती हैं।

❖ ग्लोबल शिफ्टिंग मोमेंट्स जैसे #HeForShe अभियान

सशक्तिकरण का उदाहरण: संयुक्त राष्ट्र द्वारा शुरू किया गया #HeForShe अभियान एक वैश्विक आंदोलन है जो लिंग समानता को बढ़ावा देता है। यह अभियान महिलाओं और पुरुषों को समान अधिकारों के लिए काम करने के लिए प्रेरित करता है।

प्रभाव: सोशल मीडिया ने इस अभियान को वैश्विक स्तर पर फैलाने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई। लाखों लोग इस अभियान से जुड़े, और कई देशों में महिलाओं के अधिकारों और समानता के मुद्दों पर खुली चर्चा हुई। इसने महिलाओं के सशक्तिकरण के लिए वैश्विक एकजुटता बनाई और कई पुरुष भी इस अभियान के समर्थक बने।

❖ फ्रीलांसिंग और रिमोट वर्क से आर्थिक सशक्तिकरण

सशक्तिकरण का उदाहरण: तकनीकी प्रगति के साथ, फ्रीलांसिंग और रिमोट वर्क की दुनिया में महिलाओं के लिए नए अवसर खुले हैं। उदाहरण के लिए, संगीता कुमार, जो एक भारतीय गृहिणी हैं, ने Upwork और Fiverr जैसी फ्रीलांसिंग साइटों का उपयोग करके अपने घर से ही ग्राफिक डिजाइन का काम शुरू किया। इंटरनेट की मदद से, उन्होंने वैश्विक ग्राहकों से प्रोजेक्ट्स लेना शुरू किया।

प्रभाव: ऐसे प्लेटफार्मों ने महिलाओं को अपने घर से काम करने और आर्थिक रूप से स्वतंत्र बनने का मौका दिया। वे अब केवल पारंपरिक नौकरियों पर निर्भर नहीं हैं, और घर पर रहकर भी वे सफल करियर बना सकती हैं। रिमोट वर्क ने कई महिलाओं को अपने घरेलू कर्तव्यों के साथ-साथ अपने करियर को जारी रखने का विकल्प दिया है।

❖ ब्लॉगिंग और व्लॉगिंग के जरिए आत्म-सशक्तिकरण

सशक्तिकरण का उदाहरण: कई महिलाएँ ब्लॉगिंग और व्लॉगिंग के जरिए अपने अनुभवों, विचारों और कहानियों को साझा करके समाज में बदलाव ला रही हैं। उदाहरण के लिए, लीना सिद्दीकी ने मातृत्व और पेरेंटिंग पर ब्लॉग शुरू किया और सोशल मीडिया पर तेजी से लोकप्रिय

हो गई। वह अपने ब्लॉग के जरिए अन्य महिलाओं को मातृत्व से जुड़ी चुनौतियों और खुशियों के बारे में सलाह देती हैं।

प्रभाव: ब्लॉगिंग और व्लॉगिंग ने महिलाओं को अपनी आवाज़ साझा करने का मंच दिया। अब वे अपनी राय को न केवल स्थानीय समुदायों में बल्कि वैश्विक दर्शकों तक पहुँचाने में सक्षम हैं। इससे वे एक सामाजिक नेतृत्व की भूमिका निभा रही हैं, और कई बार उनका कंटेंट व्यावसायिक रूप से सफल भी हो रहा है।

❖ ऑनलाइन कैपेन और फंडरेजिंग

सशक्तिकरण का उदाहरण: तकनीकी प्लेटफार्मों पर क्राउडफंडिंग और ऑनलाइन अभियान चलाकर महिलाएँ अपने उद्देश्यों को साकार कर रही हैं। उदाहरण के लिए, कृतिका शर्मा ने भारत में गरीब लड़कियों की शिक्षा के लिए क्राउडफंडिंग प्लेटफार्मों का उपयोग करके फंड इकट्ठा किया। उन्होंने सोशल मीडिया का उपयोग कर अपने अभियान को प्रमोट किया और बहुत से लोगों से योगदान प्राप्त किया।

प्रभाव: क्राउडफंडिंग और ऑनलाइन अभियानों के जरिए महिलाएँ अब वित्तीय बाधाओं को पार करते हुए अपने सपनों और उद्देश्यों को पूरा कर सकती हैं। इससे उन्हें सामाजिक उद्देश्यों के लिए समर्थन जुटाने का एक नया और प्रभावी तरीका मिला है।

❖ स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं और मेंस्ट्रुअल हाइजीन पर जागरूकता

सशक्तिकरण का उदाहरण: मेंस्ट्रुअल हाइजीन और स्वास्थ्य सेवाओं से संबंधित कई अभियानों ने सोशल मीडिया के माध्यम से महिलाओं को जागरूक किया है। उदाहरण के लिए, अंकिता परमार ने मेंस्ट्रुअल हाइजीन पर जागरूकता फैलाने के लिए इंस्टाग्राम पर एक अभियान शुरू किया, जिसमें महिलाओं को पैड, मेंस्ट्रुअल कप, और हाइजीन के बारे में जानकारी दी गई।

प्रभाव: इस तरह के अभियानों ने ग्रामीण और शहरी दोनों क्षेत्रों में महिलाओं को अपने स्वास्थ्य के प्रति सजग किया है। ये अभियान महिलाओं को शर्म या संकोच के बिना अपने स्वास्थ्य से जुड़ी समस्याओं पर चर्चा करने के लिए प्रोत्साहित कर रहे हैं।

❖ ऑनलाइन प्रोग्रामिंग और कोडिंग प्लेटफार्म

सशक्तिकरण का उदाहरण: तकनीकी शिक्षा ने महिलाओं को कोडिंग, डेटा साइंस और आर्टिफिशियल इंटेलिजेंस जैसे क्षेत्रों में प्रवेश करने का मौका दिया है। SheCodes, Girls Who Code जैसी पहलें महिलाओं को तकनीकी शिक्षा देकर उन्हें आत्मनिर्भर बना रही हैं।

प्रभाव: इस प्रकार की तकनीकी शिक्षा महिलाओं को भविष्य की नौकरियों के लिए तैयार करती है और उन्हें STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) क्षेत्रों में भागीदारी बढ़ाने का अवसर देती है, जो पहले पुरुष-प्रधान माने जाते थे।

5. निष्कर्ष

डिजिटल युग में सोशल मीडिया और तकनीक ने महिला सशक्तिकरण में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई है। उन्होंने महिलाओं को अपनी आवाज़ उठाने, सामाजिक और आर्थिक बाधाओं को तोड़ने, और वैश्विक मंच पर अपने अनुभव साझा करने का अवसर दिया है। सोशल मीडिया अभियानों (#MeToo, #HeForShe), ऑनलाइन उद्यमिता, फ्रीलांसिंग, और तकनीकी शिक्षा के माध्यम से महिलाएँ अधिक आत्मनिर्भर, जागरूक, और सशक्त हो रही हैं। डिजिटल प्लेटफार्मों ने महिलाओं को समानता, न्याय और स्वतंत्रता के लिए एक नया मार्ग प्रदान किया है, जिससे वे व्यक्तिगत और सामाजिक रूप से प्रगति कर रही हैं।

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भारतीय शिक्षा परम्परा में स्त्रियों की स्थिति का विहंगावलोकन

अनिता मिश्रा

दरिया की कसम, मौजों की कसम
ये ताना-बाना बदलेगा
तू खुद को बदल, तू खुद को बदल
तब ही तो जमाना बदलेगा...

तू चुप रहकर जो सहती रही
तो क्या ये जमाना बदलेगा!
तू बोलेंगी, मुख खोलेगी
तब ही तो जमाना बदलेगा...

दस्तूर पुराने सदियों के
ये आये कहाँ से, क्यों आये?
कुछ तो सोचो, कुछ तो समझो
तब ही तो जमाना बदलेगा...

भारतीय शिक्षा परम्परा को दो प्रमुख श्रेणियों में बाँटा जा सकता है, जो जीवन के विभिन्न पहलुओं को समझने और कर्तव्य-पालन करने के लिए आवश्यक माने जाते हैं। पहले प्रकार में वह शिक्षा सम्मिलित है, जो कि रोज़मर्रा की ज़िंदगी से जुड़ी है। यह वह ज्ञान है, जो व्यक्ति को समाज में सभ्य, नैतिक और गरिमापूर्ण जीवन जीने के लिए तैयार करता है। इस विद्या में व्यवहार, संस्कार, आचार-व्यवहार, और कर्तव्यों की समझ शामिल होती है; इसके अन्तर्गत कुछ विशेष अर्थात् उपयुक्त पात्र को युद्ध-शिक्षा भी दी जाती थी। यह शिक्षा व्यक्ति को एक अच्छे नागरिक, पिता, माँ, भाई, बहन इत्यादि संबंधों का निर्वाह करने और मित्र बनाने में मदद करती है। इस विद्या के माध्यम से व्यक्ति अपने जीवन को अनुशासित, सुसंगत और सामूहिक हित में व्यवस्थित करने की क्षमता प्राप्त करता है।

दूसरे प्रकार की वह शिक्षा है, जो आध्यात्मिक और ईश्वरीय बोध से जुड़ी होती है। यह ज्ञान व्यक्ति को ईश्वर के अस्तित्व और उसके साथ अपने संबंधों को समझने में मदद करता है। यह आत्म-ज्ञान और ब्रह्मज्ञान की ओर मार्गदर्शन करता है, जो व्यक्ति को आत्मा, परमात्मा और ब्रह्म के वास्तविक स्वरूप को समझने की प्रेरणा देता है। हिंदू धर्मग्रंथों का अध्ययन, जैसे भगवद गीता, उपनिषद और वेद, इस ज्ञान को प्राप्त करने के मुख्य साधन माने जाते हैं। इस ज्ञान के माध्यम से व्यक्ति को मोक्ष की प्राप्ति का मार्ग मिल सकता है, जिससे वह संसार के बंधनों से मुक्त होकर दिव्य शांति और आनन्द की स्थिति में पहुँच सकता है।

इस प्रकार, भारतीय शिक्षा परम्परा में दोनों ही अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण मानी जाती हैं। जहाँ लौकिक शिक्षा व्यक्ति को समाज में सही मार्ग पर चलने के लिए प्रेरित करती है, वहीं अलौकिक ज्ञान उसे आत्मिक उन्नति और ईश्वर के साथ एकत्व का बोध कराता है। दोनों का संतुलन जीवन को पूर्ण और सार्थक बनाता है।

भारतीय शिक्षा परंपरा में स्त्री की स्थिति का विश्लेषण करने पर यह स्पष्ट होता है कि भारत में प्राचीन काल से ही प्रत्येक स्त्री को लौकिक शिक्षा तो अनिवार्य तौर पर दी जाती थी, परन्तु विशेष प्रतिभा वाली स्त्रियाँ

अलौकिक ज्ञान की भी अधिकारी होती थीं और वे इन दोनों शिक्षाओं में निपुण होती थीं। इस प्रकार प्राचीन काल में महिलाओं को शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में सम्मानजनक स्थान प्राप्त था। भारतीय संस्कृति में स्त्रियों को देवियों के रूप में पूजा गया, और वे शिक्षा के विभिन्न पहलुओं में भागीदारी करती थीं। प्राचीन भारतीय ग्रंथों में गार्गी, मैत्रेयी, बृहस्पति की पत्नी तारा, और ऐतिहासिक रूप से कुछ अन्य विदुषियों का उल्लेख मिलता है जिन्होंने दार्शनिक चर्चाओं में भाग लिया और समाज के विभिन्न पहलुओं पर अपने विचार व्यक्त किए। ये महिलाएँ न केवल वेदों और उपनिषदों में निहित ज्ञान की संरक्षिका थीं, बल्कि विज्ञान, चिकित्सा, कला, और साहित्य के क्षेत्र में भी उनका योगदान महत्वपूर्ण था। प्राचीन भारतीय समाज में, विशेष रूप से उपनिषदों और महाकाव्यों में, शिक्षा को एक सार्वभौमिक कर्तव्य माना जाता था, जिसे सभी वर्गों और लिंगों के लोग प्राप्त कर सकते थे। नालंदा और तक्षशिला जैसे विश्वविद्यालयों में स्त्रियों के शिक्षा ग्रहण करने के प्रमाण भी मिलते हैं, जहाँ वे ज्ञान प्राप्त करने के लिए समर्पित थीं। यहाँ तक कि वेदों के अध्ययन और उनके व्याख्यान में स्त्रियों की भागीदारी इस बात को दर्शाती है कि उस समय महिला शिक्षा को एक आवश्यक तत्व माना जाता था।

लेकिन, जैसे-जैसे समय बीतता गया और समाज में राजनीतिक और धार्मिक बदलाव हुए, विशेषकर मध्यकाल और मुस्लिम आक्रमणों के दौरान, स्त्रियों की शिक्षा में कई रुकावटें आईं। इस समय के दौरान समाज में एक पितृसत्तात्मक संरचना विकसित हुई, जिसने महिलाओं को शिक्षा और सामाजिक गतिविधियों से बाहर रखने की कोशिश की। धार्मिक और सांस्कृतिक कारणों के चलते, स्त्रियों को घर के कार्यों तक ही सीमित कर दिया गया, और उनके लिए शिक्षा को अनावश्यक और अनुपयुक्त मान लिया गया। परन्तु इसके समानांतर ही रानी सेम्बियान महादेवी, अक्का महादेवी, इन्दुमति, कलमाशी देवी, सहजोबाई, दयाबाई, मीराबाई, बावरी साहिबा इत्यादि स्त्रियों ने ज्ञान की ज्योति जलाए रखी।

काल-क्रमानुसार स्त्री शिक्षा की स्थिति पर दृष्टिपात करें तो ऋग्वैदिक काल में नारियों के लिए शिक्षा-दीक्षा एवं अध्ययन-अध्यापन की विशेष व्यवस्था मिलती हैं। ऋग्वेद में 24 ऐसी ऋषिकाओं का उल्लेख है, जिन्होंने वैदिक मंत्रों का सृजन किया था। यह जानकारी उनके उच्च शैक्षिक स्तर और समाज में उनकी प्रतिष्ठा को दर्शाती है। इन विदुषी महिलाओं ने कुल मिलाकर 422 मंत्रों का सृजन किया, जो गहरे अर्थ और महत्वपूर्ण विषयों से संबंधित हैं। इन मंत्रों का गाम्भीर्य और उनका विशिष्ट विषय चयन दर्शाता है कि महिलाओं को वेदों के ज्ञान में महत्वपूर्ण स्थान प्राप्त था। जो नारी के उच्च शिक्षा और विद्वता की पुष्टि करता है। ऋग्वेद में स्त्रियों के बौद्धिक और मानसिक सामर्थ्य का भी चित्रण है। इसमें उन्हें “मूर्धा” और “उग्रविवाचनी” जैसे शब्दों से संबोधित किया गया है, जो उनके उत्कृष्टता और सामर्थ्य को दर्शाते हैं। ‘मूर्धा’ का अर्थ है श्रेष्ठ, उत्कृष्ट या प्रखर। इसका तात्पर्य यह है कि नारी को समाज में एक सम्मानजनक और उच्च स्थान प्राप्त करना चाहिए। उसे हीनता की भावना से मुक्त रहकर ज्ञान-विज्ञान और अन्य क्षेत्रों में श्रेष्ठता हासिल करनी चाहिए, ताकि वह समाज में मूर्धन्य बनकर अपनी पहचान स्थापित कर सके। वहीं, “उग्रविवाचनी” का अर्थ है एक तीव्र और प्रभावशाली वक्ता, जो नारी के वक्तृत्व कौशल को महत्व देता है। वैदिक समाज में नारियों को उच्च शिक्षा देने की व्यवस्था उस समाज के पूर्ण विकसित मानसिकता को दर्शाता है।

ऋग्वेद के समय में महिलाओं की शैक्षिक स्थिति उच्च स्तरीय थी। उन्हें यज्ञ-याजन, उपनयन और वेदों के अध्ययन-अध्यापन से वंचित नहीं किया गया था। इस बात के प्रमाण विदुषी ऋषिकाओं जैसे रोमा, घोषा, विश्ववारा और लोपामुद्रा के उल्लेख से मिलते हैं। उस समय छात्राओं की दो कोटियाँ थी, ब्रह्मवादिनी और सद्योवधू। ब्रह्मवादिनी वह छात्रा होती थी जो जीवनभर धर्म और दर्शन में निष्ठापूर्वक अध्ययनरत रहती थी, जबकि सद्योवधू विवाह के बाद अपना अध्ययन बंद कर देती थी। ये छात्राएँ १५-१६ वर्ष की आयु तक अध्ययन करती थीं और इस अवधि में वे उन सभी वैदिक मंत्रों का अध्ययन कर लेती थीं, जो यज्ञ और गृहस्थ जीवन के लिए आवश्यक थे। ब्रह्मवादिनी ऋषिकाएँ प्राचीन भारत में विद्वता और ज्ञान के

क्षेत्र में अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण स्थान रखती थीं। वे न केवल वेदों का अध्ययन एवं धार्मिक और दार्शनिक विषयों पर गहन विचार-विमर्श भी करती थीं, बल्कि मंत्रों की रचना भी करती थीं। प्रथम मंडल के एक सौ छब्बीसवें सूत्र के सातवें श्लोक की रचयिता रोमशा ब्रह्मवादिनी हैं।

वास्तव में चौथी शताब्दी ईसा पूर्व के आसपास वेद और दर्शन ने समाज का विशेष ध्यान आकर्षित किया, जिससे तत्कालीन नारियों की रुचि भी इन गूढ़ विषयों की ओर बढ़ी। परिणामस्वरूप, वैदिक ऋषिकाओं ने पूर्वमीमांसा जैसे धार्मिक और आध्यात्मिक ज्ञान की शाखा में न केवल रुचि ली, बल्कि अपनी प्रखरता से महत्वपूर्ण स्थान भी प्राप्त किया। वे वैदिक यज्ञों में पारंगत बनीं और धर्ममीमांसा पर गहन अध्ययन किया। काशकृत्स्ना नामक ऋषिका ने 'काशकृत्नी' नामक ग्रंथ की रचना की, जो मीमांसा पर एक अद्भुत ग्रंथ माना जाता है। यद्यपि मीमांसा का ज्ञान गणित की तरह जटिल था, फिर भी कुछ नारियों की इसमें रुचि यह सिद्ध करती है कि नारी समाज शिक्षा में समान रूप से रुचि लेता था। जब वैदिक कर्मकांड के विरोध में दार्शनिक आंदोलन प्रारंभ हुआ, तब नारियों ने भी इसमें सक्रिय रूप से भाग लिया और वे नए विचारों को अपनाने में पीछे नहीं रहीं। इस संबंध में याज्ञवल्क्य की पत्नी मैत्रेयी जैसी विदुषी और दार्शनिक नारियों का उल्लेख मिलता है। विदेह के राजा जनक द्वारा आयोजित दार्शनिक वाद-विवाद में गार्गी द्वारा याज्ञवल्क्य से किए गए प्रश्न इस बात का प्रमाण हैं कि वे एक उच्च कोटि की नैयायिक और दार्शनिक थीं। इसी प्रकार, वाल्मीकि और अगस्त्य ऋषि के आश्रम में अध्ययन करने वाली आत्रेयी भी वेदांत की प्रसिद्ध ऋषिका मानी जाती हैं। उन्होंने वेदांत और आध्यात्मिक विद्या में निपुण होने के लिए आजीवन अविवाहित रहकर अध्ययन, अध्यापन और साधना में अपना जीवन समर्पित कर दिया। जबकि बड़ी संख्या में नारियाँ ब्रह्मचर्य व्रत का पालन करते हुए धर्म और दर्शन के क्षेत्र में निपुण हो रही थीं, तो निश्चित रूप से समाज में उनका सामान्य शैक्षिक स्तर अत्यंत उच्च रहा होगा।

वैदिक काल में "स्त्री ज्ञानदात्री (आचार शिक्षिका) के रूप में भी चित्रित की गयी है। अनेक स्त्रियाँ शिक्षा के प्रति आकर्षण या आवश्यकता

के कारण अध्यापन कार्य में संलग्न रही हैं, जिन्हें “उपाध्याया” कहा गया है। इनके विपरीत, उपाध्यायों (आचार्यों) की पत्नियों को “उपाध्यानी” कहा जाता था। इन दो भिन्न शब्दों का प्रयोग यह दर्शाता है कि समाज में नारी-शिक्षिकाओं (उपाध्याया) की संख्या महत्वपूर्ण रही होगी।

वैदिक काल के बाद महिलाओं के लिए वेदों के अध्ययन पर धीरे-धीरे प्रतिबंध लगने लगा। लगभग 500 ई. पू. तक वेदों का अध्ययन करने वाली ब्रह्मवादिनी महिलाओं की संख्या बहुत कम हो गई। कालांतर में मुस्लिम आक्रमणों के कारण भारतीय समाज और संस्कृति बहुत प्रभावित हुआ, जिसका सबसे अधिक प्रभाव स्त्रियों पर पड़ा। मुसलमान आक्रमणकारियों द्वारा हिन्दू कन्याओं के अपहरण और बलपूर्वक विवाह की घटनाओं ने समाज में भय और असुरक्षा का वातावरण पैदा कर दिया। इस वजह से माता-पिता अपनी कन्याओं की सुरक्षा को लेकर अत्यधिक सतर्क हो गए। कन्या जन्म को अभिशाप मानने की प्रवृत्ति बढ़ने लगी, और कुछ माता-पिता नवजात कन्याओं की हत्या को ही बेहतर विकल्प मानने लगे। इस भययुक्त सामाजिक स्थिति के कारण स्त्रियों को दुर्भाग्य, दुख, पाप और अपमान का प्रतीक मान लिया गया। जिससे उनके अधिकार और उनकी शिक्षा प्रभावित हुई। पूर्व मध्यकाल तक आते-आते स्त्रियों की शिक्षा का विकास रुक गया था, लेकिन उच्च वर्ग की महिलाएँ शिक्षित थीं और विभिन्न कलाओं में निपुण भी। उस समय के साहित्य में इस बात के कई प्रमाण मिलते हैं कि उस दौर की स्त्रियाँ प्राकृत और संस्कृत भाषाओं में दक्ष थीं। ‘काव्यमीमांसा’ में यह उल्लेख मिलता है कि वे संगीत, नृत्य, वाद्ययंत्र, काव्य और चित्रकला में माहिर थीं। वहीं, ‘गाथासप्तशती’ में भी कई विदुषी महिलाओं का उल्लेख हुआ है, जिनमें रेखा, माधवी, रोहा, अनुलक्ष्मी, शशिकला और पाहर्ई जैसी कवयित्रियाँ अपनी रचनात्मकता और कल्पनाशक्ति के लिए प्रसिद्ध थीं। इस दौर में कई ऐसी प्रतिभाशाली महिलाएँ हुईं, जिन्होंने अपनी उत्कृष्ट लेखन शैली और काव्य-कला से अपनी पहचान बनाई। मण्डन मिश्र और आदि शंकराचार्य के बीच हुए शास्त्रार्थ की निर्णायक मण्डन मिश्र की पत्नी थीं, जो तर्क, मीमांसा, वेदांत और साहित्य में पूरी तरह निपुण थीं। मध्यकाल में शिक्षित परिवारों की महिलाएँ कविता एवं

शास्त्रों का अध्ययन करती थीं। गाथासप्तशती में सात प्रसिद्ध कवयित्रियों का उल्लेख मिलता है, जो इस बात का प्रमाण है कि उस समय महिलाएँ साहित्य और काव्य-रचना में दक्ष थीं। राजशेखर की पत्नी अवंतीसुंदरी स्वयं एक विदुषी थीं, और विजयांका भी एक प्रतिष्ठित कवयित्री थीं। मध्यकालीन स्त्रियाँ न केवल प्रबुद्ध थीं, बल्कि विभिन्न कलाओं में भी निपुण थीं। वे शब्द-शास्त्र, काव्यशास्त्र के साथ-साथ नृत्य, संगीत, वाद्य, चित्रकला आदि में भी पारंगत होती थीं। इन कलाओं का ज्ञान उनके लिए आवश्यक माना जाता था। स्त्री शिक्षा को लेकर राजशेखर ने भी अपने विचार प्रकट किए हैं, जो यह दर्शाता है कि उस समय महिलाओं की बौद्धिक और कलात्मक क्षमताओं को मान्यता दी जाती थी। मध्यकालीन कलाकृतियों से भी यह स्पष्ट होता है कि स्त्रियाँ ललितकलाओं में अत्यंत कुशल थीं। हर्षचरित, प्रियदर्शिका, पृथ्वीराजविजय और राजशेखर की कर्पूरमंजरी जैसी रचनाओं में ऐसी स्त्रियों का उल्लेख मिलता है, जो कला-कौशल में निपुण थीं। श्रीहर्ष ने भी अपने ग्रंथों में कई विदुषी महिलाओं का उल्लेख किया है, जो साहित्य, संगीत, नृत्य और अन्य कलाओं में पारंगत थीं। यह दर्शाता है कि उस समय महिलाओं को न केवल शिक्षा प्राप्त करने का अवसर मिलता था, बल्कि वे विभिन्न कलाओं में भी उच्च स्तर की दक्षता हासिल करती थीं।

इसके अलावा, स्त्रियाँ चिकित्सा विज्ञान में भी निपुण थीं। 'रूसा' नामक एक महिला चिकित्सक ने प्रसव विज्ञान पर एक प्रामाणिक ग्रंथ लिखा था, जिसका अनुवाद आठवीं शताब्दी में खलीफा हारू ने अरबी भाषा में करवाया था। तमिलनाडु के मीनाक्षी मंदिर के मंडप में एक स्त्री चिकित्सक द्वारा एक स्त्री का प्रसव कराने का दृश्य अंकित है, जो स्त्री चिकित्सकों की भूमिका का प्रमाण है। भुवनेश्वर के एक द्वार पर भी प्रसूति कुर्सी पर बैठी स्त्री उकेरी गई है, जो यह दर्शाती है कि उस समय प्रसव वैज्ञानिक ढंग से कराया जाता था। इसके अलावा, गणित जैसे जटिल विषय में भी महिलाओं की रुचि थी। कुछ स्त्रियों ने इसे गंभीरता से अध्ययन किया था। प्रसिद्ध गणितज्ञ भास्कराचार्य ने अपनी पुत्री लीलावती को गणित सिखाने के लिए लीलावती नामक ग्रंथ की रचना की थी। इसके साथ ही राजकुमारियों को शस्त्र विद्या की अनिवार्य शिक्षा दी जाती थी। युद्ध के समय रानियाँ

अपने पतियों के साथ रणभूमि में जाती थीं। विजयमल्ल की रानी ने युद्ध क्षेत्र में अपने पति का साथ दिया था। कल्याणी के चालुक्य वंश की रानी अक्का देवी न केवल युद्ध में भाग लेती थीं, बल्कि उसका संचालन भी करती थीं। केवल राजकुमारियाँ ही नहीं, बल्कि अन्य स्त्रियाँ भी शस्त्र शिक्षा प्राप्त करती थीं। मौर्यकाल से ही सशस्त्र महिला अंगरक्षकों का उल्लेख मिलता है। पूर्व-मध्यकालीन अभिलेखों और मूर्तिकला में भी स्त्रियों की युद्धकला की शिक्षा के प्रमाण मिलते हैं। मिहिरभोज की 'ग्वालियर प्रशस्ति' में महिला सैनिकों के समुदाय का वर्णन है, जो युद्ध कला में निपुण थीं। ये सभी प्रमाण दर्शाते हैं कि उस समय स्त्रियों को युद्ध और शस्त्र संचालन की शिक्षा दी जाती थी।

उत्तर मध्यकाल में स्त्री शिक्षा की स्थिति कमोबेश पूर्व मध्यकाल की तरह ही रही। वास्तव में पूरे मध्यकाल में सामान्य स्त्रियों की शिक्षा दर भले ही अल्प रही हो, परन्तु विशेष वर्ग की स्त्रियों की शिक्षा दर संतोषजनक रही है। वस्तुतः सामान्य स्त्रियाँ भी जीवन जीने हेतु सामान्य शिक्षा एवं कला-कौशल अपने परिवार में रहकर ही प्राप्त कर लेती थीं, जो उनके गृहस्थ जीवन के लिए अत्यंत उपयोगी साबित होता था। इसके साथ ही मध्यकाल में अनेक महिला संतों एवं भक्तों का भी उल्लेख प्राप्त होता है, जो कवयित्रियाँ भी हैं। जिनमें उमा, पारवती, मुक्ताबाई, इन्द्रामती, सहजोबाई, दयाबाई इत्यादि संत कवयित्रियों के रूप में; मीराबाई, गंगाबाई, सोन कुँवरि, वृषभान कुँवरि, रसिक बिहारी बनोठनी जी, ब्रजदासी रानी बाँकावती, रानी बख्त कुँवरि प्रिया सखी, सुन्दर कुँवरि बाई, ताज, वीरां, छत्र कुँवरि बाई, पजन कुँवरि, स्वर्णलली, कृष्णावती, माधवी इत्यादि कृष्ण काव्य की लेखिकाओं के तौर पर; मधुर अली, प्रतापकुँवरि बाई, तुलछराय इत्यादि राम काव्य की लेखिकाओं के रूप में प्रसिद्ध हैं। यह तथ्य उस समय की स्त्री-शिक्षा का उदात्त स्वरूप प्रस्तुत करता है।

आधुनिक काल में अंग्रेजों के आगमन के पश्चात् भारतीय शिक्षा के स्वरूप में परिवर्तन के फलस्वरूप स्त्री शिक्षा के स्वरूप, शिक्षा में स्त्रियों की सहभागिता का स्तर एवं स्त्रियों के लिए शिक्षा के अवसर में भी परिवर्तन

आया। 1821 में, दक्षिण भारत के तिरुनेलवेली में पहला **ऑल-गर्ल्स बोर्डिंग स्कूल** स्थापित किया गया। यह उस समय का एक महत्वपूर्ण कदम था, जब भारत में लड़कियों की शिक्षा को बहुत कम महत्व दिया जाने लगा था। इसी तरह 1840 तक स्कॉटिश चर्च सोसाइटी ने दक्षिण भारत में छह विद्यालयों की स्थापना की थी, जिनमें कुल 200 लड़कियाँ शिक्षा प्राप्त कर रही थीं। इन विद्यालयों की स्थापना का उद्देश्य शिक्षा के माध्यम से समाज में सुधार लाना और विशेष रूप से महिलाओं को शिक्षित करना था। 1850 तक मद्रास में मिशनरियों द्वारा चलाए जा रहे स्कूलों में लड़कियों की शिक्षा को बढ़ावा देने के लिए विशेष प्रयास किए गए थे। उनके प्रयासों का परिणाम यह हुआ कि उस समय तक लगभग 8,000 से अधिक लड़कियों का नामांकन इन स्कूलों में हो चुका था। यह उस दौर में एक महत्वपूर्ण उपलब्धि थी।

पश्चिम भारत में महिला शिक्षा की नींव 1848 में रखी गई, जब समाज सुधारक ज्योतिबा फुले और उनकी पत्नी सावित्रीबाई फुले ने पुणे में पहला गर्ल्स स्कूल स्थापित किया। यह कदम उस समय के सामाजिक परिदृश्य में किसी भी भारतीय द्वारा एक क्रांतिकारी प्रयास था। ज्योतिबा फुले और सावित्रीबाई फुले ने समाज की रूढ़िवादी सोच को चुनौती देते हुए इस स्कूल की स्थापना की, ताकि महिलाओं को शिक्षा का अधिकार मिल सके और वे आत्मनिर्भर बन सकें। सावित्रीबाई फुले स्वयं इस विद्यालय की पहली शिक्षिका बनीं और उन्होंने अनेक कठिनाइयों के बावजूद लड़कियों को शिक्षा देने का कार्य जारी रखा। इस पहल के माध्यम से उन्होंने महिला शिक्षा का मार्ग प्रशस्त किया। इस विद्यालय की स्थापना ने भारतीय समाज में स्त्री-शिक्षा के प्रति जागरूकता फैलाने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई और आगे चलकर महिला शिक्षा आंदोलन को एक मजबूत आधार प्रदान किया। ज्योतिबा और सावित्रीबाई फुले का यह योगदान भारतीय शिक्षा परम्परा के इतिहास में एक मील का पत्थर साबित हुआ। धीरे-धीरे शिक्षा को लेकर स्त्रियों में जागरूकता बढ़ने लगी और कादंबिनी गांगुली और चंद्रमुखी बसु भारत की पहली दो महिला स्नातक बनीं। इसी गति के परिणामस्वरूप भारत में अंग्रेजी शासन के दौरान कस्तूरबा गांधी, मीरा बहन, भीखाजी कामा जैसी कई विदुषी महिलाओं ने अपने साहस, त्याग और देशभक्ति से

न केवल स्वतंत्रता संग्राम में महत्वपूर्ण योगदान दिया, बल्कि महिलाओं की उन्नति का मार्ग भी प्रशस्त किया। उस काल में स्त्रियों के साथ ही अनेक महापुरुषों ने भी स्त्री शिक्षा के लिए महत्वपूर्ण कदम उठाए।

वस्तुतः वुड्स डिस्पैच (1854) ईस्ट इंडिया कंपनी द्वारा जारी एक महत्वपूर्ण शिक्षा नीति थी, जिसने पहली बार महिलाओं की शिक्षा और उनके लिए रोजगार की आवश्यकता को औपचारिक रूप से स्वीकार किया। इसमें कहा गया कि समाज के समुचित विकास के लिए महिलाओं को शिक्षा प्रदान करना आवश्यक है और उनके लिए व्यवसायिक शिक्षा के अवसर उपलब्ध कराए जाने चाहिए। इस नीति के तहत महिलाओं को शिक्षा में समान अवसर देने, उनके लिए विशेष विद्यालय स्थापित करने पर जोर दिया गया। वुड्स डिस्पैच ने भारतीय समाज में महिलाओं की शिक्षा को बढ़ावा देने की दिशा में एक महत्वपूर्ण कदम रखा, जिससे आगे चलकर महिला सशक्तिकरण की प्रक्रिया तेज हुई। वास्तव में स्त्री शिक्षा के क्षेत्र में इस नीति का महत्वपूर्ण योगदान रहा है। इसी तरह स्वतंत्रता के पश्चात विश्वविद्यालय शिक्षा आयोग, माध्यमिक शिक्षा आयोग (1952), दुर्गाबाई देशमुख समिति (1958), हंसा मेहता समिति, भक्त वत्सलम् कमेटी रिपोर्ट (1963), कोठारी कमीशन (1964-66), राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति (1996) इत्यादि ने स्त्री शिक्षा को एक नई गति और नया आयाम प्रदान किया। इसी तरह राष्ट्रीय शिक्षा नीति (एनईपी) 2020 में स्त्रियों के लिए विशेष सुविधाओं के प्रावधान के साथ ही इस नीति के तहत, जेंडर इंकलूजन फंड (Gender Inclusion Fund – GIF) की स्थापना का प्रावधान किया गया है। इस फंड का मुख्य उद्देश्य लड़कियों के लिए समान अवसर प्रदान करना और गुणवत्तापूर्ण शिक्षा उपलब्ध कराना है।

आज स्त्रियाँ शिक्षा प्राप्त कर शासन एवं प्रशासन में विभिन्न पदों के साथ ही कॉर्पोरेट सेक्टर के विभिन्न पदों पर प्रतिष्ठित हैं, वे पुरुषों से किसी भी क्षेत्र में कमतर नहीं हैं। उनका शिक्षा के लिए नामांकन दर निरंतर बढ़ ही रहा है, जो स्त्री जाति के साथ ही समूचे मानवजाति के लिए शुभ संकेत है। आज स्त्रियाँ भारत के उच्चतम पदों पर विराजमान हैं। माननीय

द्रौपदी मुर्मू जैसी आदिवासी महिला का राष्ट्रपति होना स्त्री शिक्षा एवं स्त्री सशक्तिकरण के क्षेत्र में युग परिवर्तन का बोध कराता है।

स्त्री शिक्षा की दिशा में इस आधुनिक परिवर्तन के साथ ही यह भी जरूरी है कि हमारे पारम्परिक स्त्री ज्ञान को सँजोये रखा जाये, जोकि आने वाली पीढ़ियों में धीरे-धीरे विलुप्त हो रहा है। यथा, भारत में प्रसूति ज्ञान अपने उच्च स्तर पर था, एक सामान्य दायी भी प्रसव को वैज्ञानिक तरीके से कराने में सक्षम थी, परन्तु आज उस ज्ञान के धीरे-धीरे विलुप्त होने के कारण प्रसव के नाम पर कुछ चिकित्सक व्यवसाय करने में लगे हैं, वे पैसों के लिए सिजेरियन प्रसव को अनिवार्य बताकर लोगों को ठग रहे हैं, जिसका प्रमाण सिजेरियन प्रसव के बढ़ते आंकड़े हैं। इसी तरह परम्परा के रूप में हमारे समाज की स्त्रियाँ पाक-कला में अनायास ही निपुण होती थीं, परन्तु आज की पीढ़ी की कुछ स्त्रियाँ जीवन के लिए आवश्यक मूलभूत कलाओं को भी नहीं सीख पातीं। जो कालांतर में उनके जीवन में अनेक समस्याओं को जन्म देती है। आधुनिक युग की धारा में तैरकर तर्कशील, शिक्षित एवं वैज्ञानिक बनना उचित है, परन्तु उस धारा में बहकर अपने पारम्परिक ज्ञान को भूल जाना, यह मनुष्य जाति के लिए बिल्कुल भी हितकर नहीं है। इसलिए स्त्री शिक्षा की दिशा ऐसी होनी चाहिए जिसमें आवश्यक पारम्परिक ज्ञान एवं आधुनिक शिक्षा दोनों का यथोचित समावेश हो।

सहायक पुस्तकें एवं वेबसाइट्स

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5. राजीव अहीर, आधुनिक भारत का इतिहास
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स्त्रियों के प्रश्न और मीडिया का नज़रिया

पार्वती गोसाई

सारांश

स्त्री का जीवन अनेक प्रश्नों से घिरा रहता है। परिवार, समाज में रहते हुए अनगिनत प्रश्नों से जुझती हुई स्त्री कभी-कभी अनुत्तरीत भी हो जाती है। कभी-कभी दबंग बनकर प्रश्नों का सामना भी करती है। वर्तमान युग मीडिया का है, जो 'स्त्री' के अंतरंग से अंतरंग पहलुओं को भी उजागर करने में हिचकता नहीं। स्त्रियों के मुद्दे, प्रश्नों को मीडिया में किस तरह कवर किया जाता है, यह एक जटिल और बहुआयामी विषय है। मीडिया महिलाओं के मुद्दों को विभिन्न तरीके से कवर करता है, जिन में सकारात्मक और नकारात्मक दोनों शामिल हैं।

सकारात्मक पहलुओं में महिलाओं की उपलब्धियों और सफलताओं को प्रदर्शित करना, महिलाओं के अधिकारों और समानता के लिए लड़ाई को कवर करना, और महिलाओं के मुद्दों पर जागरूकता पैदा करना शामिल है। मीडिया महिलाओं की आवाज़ को उठाकर और उनके संघर्षों को उजागर करके उन्हें मंच प्रदान करता है।

कभी-कभी मीडिया में महिलाओं के चित्रण में कई नकारात्मक पहलू भी हैं। उन्हें अक्सर सेक्सी ओब्जेक्ट के रूप में चित्रित किया जाता है, उनकी उपलब्धियों को कम करके आंका जाता है, और उन्हें घरेलू हिंसा, यौन उत्पीड़न और अन्य प्रकार के भेदभाव का शिकार दिखाया जाता है। त्यौहारों, उत्सवों में स्त्री केवल पुरुषाधिन ही रहती है। इन सबके पीछे मीडिया संघटन की नीतियां, पत्रकारों का व्यक्तिगत पूर्वाग्रह, सरकार, प्रशासन, संगठनों के दबाव भी शामिल हैं। मीडिया को स्त्री के प्रश्नों को अधिक सकारात्मक और संवेदनशील तरीके से कवर करना चाहिए, ताकि महिलाओं को समाज में सम्मान और समानता मिल सके।

“मैं स्त्री हूँ मैं नारी हूँ
मैं दर्शन हूँ मैं दर्पण हूँ
मैं नाद हूँ मैं गर्जन हूँ
मैं बलिदानों की गाथा हूँ

कल युग हो या सतयुग इल्जाम मुझी पर आता है
क्यों घनी अंधेरी सडकों पर चलने से मन घबराता है” ।

‘स्त्री’ इस पृथ्वी की अद्भूत रचना है । हवा, पानी, नदी, पहाड़, आग, फूल अर्थात् दृश्य और अदृश्य जगत में सर्वत्र स्त्री को देखा जाता है, उसे ही लिखा जाता है, उसे ही पढ़ा जाता है । वह सर्वमान है लेकिन सर्वनाम नहीं । सारे सर्वनाम पुरुषवाचक होते हैं, क्रिया के बल से इन्हें ‘स्त्री’ बनाया जाता है । स्त्री कविता है पर उसका राज पुरुष है । वह पुरुष-निर्भर है, अतः यह जीवन और समाज में दिखाई तो देती है, पर रहती हाशिए पर है । यह इस संस्कृति की विस्मयकारी विशेषता है कि जहाँ आज भी एक ओर स्त्री भले ही हाशिए पर है, घूँघट, परंपराओं के पीछे दबी, ढकी स्त्री विवशताओं में जकड़ी है, वहाँ दूसरी ओर वही अवगुंठनवती मताधिकारिणी भी है, अँगूठा छाप होकर भी अपनी मताधिकार शक्ति जानती है । वह पढ़ी भले ही कम हो, मगर कढ़ी जरूर होती है । वह बड़ी शांति और सलीके से इस ‘वसुधैवकुटुम्बकम्’ परंपरा के विरोधियों को नकार देती है । कभी हर मुश्किल से लड़ लेने के लिए सक्षम है, कभी अपनों से ही हार कर मर भी जाती है । उसके प्रश्न अनगिनत हैं, उसकी व्यथाएँ अनबुझी सी रहती हैं । उनके जीवन से जुड़े प्रश्नों को समझना बहुत आवश्यक है । मीडिया स्त्री के इन सभी प्रश्नों को अपनी नज़र से देखता है, दिखाता है । उसका यह नज़रिया सकारात्मक और नकारात्मक दोनों है । यह नज़रिया विभिन्न मुद्दों पर अलग-अलग रिएक्ट होता है ।

स्त्रियों के प्रश्नों को मीडिया आर-पार होकर उठाता है । कभी यह नज़रिया विशिष्ट दृष्टिकोण से दिखाया जाता है । रीति-रिवाजों के बाजारीकरण में स्त्री के प्रश्नों को लेकर मीडिया का नज़रिया देखें तो-

रीति-रिवाजों का बाज़ारीकरण और मीडिया

रीति-रिवाजों से सम्बन्धित खबरें, लेखों, उनसे जुड़े चित्रों की अधिकता हमें इलक्ट्रानिक तथा प्रिंट मीडिया दोनों में स्पष्ट रूप से दिखाई देती है। कौन सा वर्त कब होगा, उसे कब मनाना ज्यादा उचित होगा, पूजा-विधि, उसका सबसे अच्छा मुहूर्त आदि की जानकारी हमें मीडिया द्वारा दी जाती है। 'वट-सावित्री' व्रत आज, बहुला चौथ आज, करवा चौथ कल, मनायी गयी तीज, 7.45 पर दिखेगा चाँद, सूर्य उपासना का व्रत छठ, पुत्रदा एकादशी आदि की सूचना निश्चित रूप से आम मध्यमवर्गीय परिवार की स्त्री की अखबार की पठनीयता को बढ़ाता है। प्रातः उठकर स्त्री इन सूचनाओं के माध्यम से तिथि/व्रत का पुख्ता प्रमाण पाती है तथा इन खबरों पर निर्भर करती है।

व्रतत्योहार छोटा हो या बड़ा हमें कोई न कोई सूचना अवश्य अखबार में दिखाई देती है। राखी, करवा चौथ से लेकर सकठ चतुर्थी, हरछठ, बहुला चौथ तक की जानकारी इनमें मिलती है। यही नहीं पथवारी माता, पुत्रदा एकादशी, जो कि बहुत सीमित क्षेत्र का त्योहार है, की सूचना भी दी जाती है।

अखबारों में रीति-रिवाज के धार्मिक पहलू को बहुत बढ़ावा दिया जाता है। सूचना देने का काम तो मीडिया करता ही है व्रत करने की विधि व कारण बताता है कि यह व्रत कैसे तथा क्यों किया जाता है। पूजन विधि दी जाती है करवा की पूरी कथा बतायी जाती है। विवरण सहित इन व्रतों को दिया जाता है। वट-सावित्री व्रत के बारे में मीडिया लिखता है कि स्त्रियों ने पूड़ी-पकवान बनाकर जहाँ वृक्ष की परिक्रमा की वहीं पति की दीर्घायु की कामना की। व्रत विधान में यह भी कहा गया है कि यदि वृक्ष न हो तो पर्व की अल्पना का भूमि अथवा दीवार पर अंकन करके पूजन हो सकता है।

इन व्रतों का केन्द्र महलायें होती हैं। करवा, बहुला चौथ, हरछठ, तीज, गुड़िया, वट सावित्री व्रत में महिलाओं को बताया जाता है कि वे क्या तथा कैसे करें। इन खबरों में मीडिया की भाषा जेण्डर भेद-भाव पूर्ण होती है। पूजावट की कामना सौभाग्य की, पति की दीर्घायु के लिए रखा व्रत, करवा व्रत रखकर की पति की दीर्घायु की कामना, ढलते सूर्य को अर्ध दे पुत्रों की दीर्घायु की कामना

की, पुत्रवती महिलाओं ने हरछठ मनायी, अचल सौभाग्य देता है करवा चौथ, हर सुहारिगन बाट जोहती है करवाचौथी की, सिन्दूर खेलती सुहागिनें ।’

पति/पुत्र की उम्र का सारा दायित्व औरतों का है । औरतें ये सारे व्रत रखें तबही पति/पुत्र की उम्र बढ़ेगी अन्यथा नहीं । किसी ऐसे व्रत की सूचना हमें नहीं मिलती जो औरतों की उम्र बढ़ाता हो क्योंकि ऐसा व्रत धार्मिक परम्पराओं में प्रचलित ही नहीं है लेकिन मीडिया कभी इस पर सवाल भी नहीं उठाता ।

स्त्री को उम्र की नहीं सौभाग्य की जरूरत होती है इसी मानसिकता को मीडिया भी बढ़ावा देता है । सौभाग्य यानी पति की उम्र । ‘सौभाग्य’ अर्थ यहाँ मात्र पति का जिन्दा रहना होता है । अच्छे या सुखमय, प्रेमपूर्ण जीवन का सौभाग्य से कोई लेना-देना नहीं होता है । ‘सौभाग्य’ तथा ‘सुहागिन’ दोनों शब्दों को मीडिया लगभग समानार्थी अर्थ में ही प्रयोग करता है ।

‘सुहागिन’ शब्द से मीडिया को इतना ज्यादा प्रेम है कि मीडिया व्रतों के बारे में बिना गहरी छानबीन किये गलत जानकारी भी देता है । सभी व्रतों/त्योहारों का एक ही रूप, एक ही भाव, तथा एक ही तरीका हर जगह नहीं पाया जाता । लेकिन मीडिया इनका सार्वभौमीकरण कर देता है । ‘कजली, तीज का व्रत उत्तर प्रदेश के ज्यादातर हिस्सों में कुंवारी तथा विवाहित स्त्रियाँ, चाहे पति जिन्दा हो या नहीं, रखती हैं । वैवाहिक स्थिति से इस व्रत पर कम से कम कुछ हिस्सों में कोई फर्क नहीं पड़ता लेकिन मीडिया ‘सुहागिनों’ ने रखा कजली, तीज जैसी भाषा का प्रयोग तथा गलत जानकारी देकर इसे सीमित ही नहीं करता बल्कि औरतों के बीच वैवाहिक स्थिति का स्पष्ट विभाजन करते हुए अन्य औरतों को वंचित की श्रेणी में डाल देता है ।

इस प्रकार गोरखपुर, बस्ती, जिलों में औरतें सिर्फ माँ बनने पर, चाहे वह पुत्री की माँ या पुत्र की, डाला छठ का व्रत रखती हैं लेकिन यहाँ भी मीडिया ‘पुत्रवतियों’ शब्द पर ही जोर देता है । यह न सिर्फ जानकारी का अभाव है बल्कि जेण्डर भेदभाव के साथ बहुलतावादी संस्कृति को खत्म करने तथा समान बनाने का प्रयास भी है ।

रीति-रिवाज से सम्बन्धित खबरों में वैज्ञानिकता का प्रायः अभाव रहता है । सूर्यषष्ठी की महिमा का गुणगान सिर्फ 'पुत्रवतियों', 'सुहागिनो' के सन्दर्भ में किया जाता है । इससे जुड़ी खबरों में पूजा करने वाली औरतों के माथे से बहता सिन्दूर चित्रों में दर्शाया जाता है । पुत्रवती स्त्रियाँ अनिवार्यतः आजन्म सुहागिन रहें ऐसा किस वैज्ञानिक नियम के अन्तर्गत आता है ? सूर्य षष्ठी की पूजा स्त्रियाँ ही नहीं पुरुष भी करते हैं । ढलते सूर्य को अर्ध/जल देना दार्शनिक/वैज्ञानिक अवधारणा हो सकती है इसका मीडिया से कोई लेना-देना नहीं दिखता ।

रीति-रिवाजों के तहत जेवर से जुड़ी चीजों को वैज्ञानिक साबित करते प्रयास अवश्य मीडिया के लेखों में दिखाई देते हैं । बिन्दी लगाने से क्या होता है, बिछिया पहनने से कौन सी नस दबती है, उससे क्या लाभ है, ऐसे लेख अक्सर देखने को मिल जाते हैं । पर ये सुहाग चिह्न सिर्फ हिन्दू स्त्री के लिए ही क्यों है ? अन्य धर्म की स्त्रियाँ इसे धारण क्यों नहीं करतीं ? क्यों सिर्फ 'सुहागिन' स्त्री ही इन सुहाग चिह्नों पर कब्जा किये बैठी हैं ? क्यों नहीं इसके अन्य धर्मों/वैवाहिक स्थित कि औरतों तक बढ़ावा दिया जाता ? इसका कोई उत्तर ऐसे लेख कभी नहीं देते । न ही ये लेख कोई प्रत्यक्ष वैज्ञानिक सम्बन्ध जोड़कर दिखा पाते हैं । वे सिर्फ इतना ही बताते हैं कि ऐसा करने पर ऐसा होता है और निष्कर्ष, में यह कह दिया जाता है कि ये वैज्ञानिक हैं । इसके बीच के कार्य-कारण सम्बन्ध/वैज्ञानिकता हमें नहीं बताई जाती है ।

रीति-रिवाजों का पूरी तरह बाजारीकरण मीडिया द्वारा किया जाता है । दुर्गा-पूजा के अवसर पर सजना-सँवरना तथा आभूषण खरीदने के तरीके बताये जाते हैं । प्रथम दिन से लेकर नवमी तक अलग-अलग कपड़े पहनाने के लिए रिवाज का बहाना लिया गया है । पर इस सजने-संवरने में भी सुहागिन व अन्य औरतों के बीच वभाजन किया गया है । पायल पहनने व जीन्स का घालमेल किया गया है यानी साड़ी ही नहीं, जीन्स पर भी पायल । दोहरी मार । साड़ी को ग्लैमरस बताया गया है । साड़ी के बारे में पूरा ब्योरा एक तरह से मीडिया द्वारा किया गया विज्ञापन है ।

मीडिया द्वारा हर त्योहार-व्रत पर उससे जुड़ी चीजों/वस्तुओं की उपलब्धता की जानकारी दी जाती है। करवा चौथ पर कैसे-कैसे करवे मिलते हैं। दीवाली पर झालरें, दीये, उनके प्रकार, बाजार के अन्य सामान्य कपड़े, जेवर की पूरी जानकारी आम व्यक्ति को मिलती है। राखी के मौके पर चाँदी-सोने की राखी तथा उनके मूल्य भी बताये जाते हैं। नौलखा हार तर्ज पर अब नौ रत्नों वाली राखी भाई-बहन के स्नेह के त्योहार रक्षाबन्धन के मौके पर सराफा बाजार में उपलब्ध है। कीमत है सिर्फ साढ़े छह हजार रुपये। तनिष्क शोरूम में नौ रत्नों वाली राखी में तराशे गये पुखराज, पन्ना, मोती, मूंगा, हीरा, लहसुनिया व गारनेट जड़े हुए हैं। करवा चौथ पर पीतल का करवा सौ रुपये से लेकर एक सौ बीस रुपये तक, फूल का करवा एक सौ पचास रुपये से लेकर तीन सौ रुपये तक जबकि स्टील का करवा साठ रुपये से लेकर नब्बे रुपये तक है। इसी तरह अन्य त्योहारों पर भी व्यक्ति को बाजार की तरफ आकर्षित किया जाता है।

प्रेम को भुनाने का प्रयास किया जाता है। यह प्रेम प्रमुख रूप से करवा-चौथ व राखी में भुनाया जाता है। यदि आप अपनी पत्नी से प्रेम करते हैं तो करवा चौथ पर उसे गिफ्ट दीजिये और यदि बहन को प्यार करते हैं तो राखी पर गिफ्ट दीजिए। इसमें दाता पुरुष है जो ताकतवर है जिसकी खरीदने की सामर्थ्य है जो बाजार तक पहुँच सकता है। उसे मीडिया द्वारा बार-बार सलाह दी जाती है उकसाया जाता है। प्रेरित किया जाता है कि वह अपने प्रेम को 'गिफ्ट' द्वारा प्रदर्शित करें यानी जहाँ प्रदर्शन नहीं वहाँ प्रेम नहीं। क्या यह भी मान लिया जाय कि जहाँ राखी या करवा चौथ नहीं होती वहाँ प्रेम नहीं होता? शायद इसीलिए इन त्योहारों को राष्ट्रीय त्योहार जैसे हो जाने का दावा किया जाता है। (बाध्य किया जाता है) - अबी गत करवा चौथ के व्रत पर पति द्वारा भेट न दिए जाने पर महिला पत्नीने आत्महत्या कर ली यह खबर चौकाने वाली थी।

जिन औरतों के पति उनके पास नहीं होते या जो पति पत्नी से किसी तरह का रिश्ता नहीं रखते या जो हिंसा का शिकार होती हैं, उनकी कोई जानकारी करवा चौथ के संदर्भ में मीडिया द्वारा नहीं दी जाती। यह बात अलग है कि ये औरतें फिर भी व्रत रखती हैं। बाजार ने अंधविश्वास का सबसे ज्यादा फायदा उठाया है। एक शहर में अफवाह फैली कि इस वर्ष, गौरी माता कुपित होने वाली हैं इसलिए उन्हें फूल अगरबत्ती के साथ बिछिया, चूड़ी, पायल आदि चीजें

भी चढ़ाई जाँय । कुछ घन्टों में ये सारी चीजें बीक गयीं । हमारे रीति-रिवाजों त्योहारों और परम्पराओं का बाजार से गहरा रिश्ता है । वह इनका इस्तेमाल करते हैं । मीडिया में रीति-रिवाजों के नाम पर सचित्र आने वाली खबरें सबसे ज्यादा प्रतियोगिताओं की होती हैं जो कभी तीज के नाम पर होती हैं तो कभी करवाचौथ के नाम पर । इस तरह महिलाओं को केन्द्र में या 'टार्गेट' करके बाजारीकरण को भी सिद्ध किया जाता है । मीडिया स्त्रियों की मानसिकता को एक जाल की तरह उपयोग करते हैं ।

इसी तरह अमित-वनिशा मित्तल की शादी के सारे रीति-रिवाज मीडिया ने री-इन्वेन्ट किये । मुख्य रूप से रीति-रिवाज के संदर्भ में हिन्दू रीति-रिवाज को मीडिया द्वारा काफी स्पेस दिया जाता है और इसका बाजारीकरण भी किया जाता है । लेकिन ईद के मौके पर काफी अखबारों ने विस्तार से इसकी जानकारी दी धार्मिक दृष्टि से और बाजार की दृष्टि से भी । खाने की कौन-कौन सी चीजें तथा कपड़ों में कहाँ क्या उपलब्ध है इसकी सम्पूर्ण जानकारी मीडिया ने दी ।

विज्ञापनों के माध्यम से बाजार पूरा फायदा उठाता है जिस त्योहार का समय होता है उस कैप्शन के साथ मुबारकबाद दी जाती है और सामान खरीदने की सलाह । गिफ्ट करने की सलाह भी चाहे बहन को हो या पत्नी को ।

इलक्ट्रानिक मीडिया त्योहारों पर 'लाइव' टेलीकास्ट करता है पर उसका भी उद्देश्य फायदा उठाना ही होता है जो कि बाजार से संचालित होता है । कार्यक्रम के बीच विज्ञापन की भाषा भी उसी तरह की होती है ।

मीडिया की नजर में स्त्री-हिंसा

हिंसा सम्बंधी खबरों का विश्लेषण करने पर यह कह पाना कठिन पाते हैं कि मीडिया द्वारा स्त्री हिंसा पर जो भी खबरें दी जा रही हैं उनमें कितनी खबरें सकारात्मक हैं और कितनी नकारात्मक । दोनों तरह की स्थिति हमें मीडिया में देखने को मिलती हैं । ऐसी खबरों के बारे में प्रतिशत निकाल पाना तो नितान्त मुश्किल है पर इतना निश्चित है कि मीडिया स्त्री हिंसा की खबरें कवर करने में अपना दायरा काफी बढ़ा चुका है ।

स्त्री हिंसा की खबरें स्थानीय पत्रों पर ज्यादा होती हैं। पाँच-छः पत्रों की स्थानीय खबरों में हमें दहेज, बलात्कार, चैन छीनने, यौन उत्पीड़न, आत्महत्या, हत्या या अन्य कई प्रकार की खबरें देखने को मिलती हैं। दहेज उत्पीड़न और हत्या की खबरें लगभग रोज होती हैं। दहेज उत्पीड़न और हत्या की खबरें लगभग रोज होती हैं। संक्षिप्त खबर के रूप में 'दहेज हत्या', दहेज उत्पीड़न, दहेज के लिए जलाया, दहेज के लिए मारा, आदि सामान्य भाषा में ही सूचनात्मक शैली में होती हैं।

मीडिया की विवरणात्मक शैली हमें कई बार तब मिलती है जब मीडिया की नजर में ये खबर थोड़ी 'वजनदार' हो अर्थात् यदि मामला ज्यादा पढ़े-लिखे या पैसे वालों से जुड़ा हो। मीडिया की सकारात्मक दृष्टि भी इसमें दिखाई देती है जो यह दर्शाता है कि समाज में किस तरह का विरोधाभास व्याप्त है। लड़की चाहे जितनी पढ़-लिख जाये समाज का उसके प्रति नजरिया इतनी आसानी से नहीं बदलने वाला।

बलात्कार, यौन उत्पीड़न, छेड़-छाड़ आदि की खबरों के बारे में यह कहा जा सकता है कि मीडिया यहाँ कोई गम्भीर भूमिका नहीं निभाता लेकिन जब रिश्तों की सामाजिक मर्यादा का प्रश्न होता है तो मीडिया अपराधी के प्रति काफी कटु होता है तथा इसे समाज के लिए गम्भीर खतरा मानता है। यूँ तो मीडिया प्रायः दहेज, बलात्कार सम्बन्धी खबरों का फालोअप न के बराबर करता है लेकिन कोई प्रोफाइल मामलों जैसे मधुर भण्डारकर रेप केस, हन्ना कोहली रेप केस, जेनी केस का फालोअप काफी ज्यादा किया गया। मीडिया लगातार सचित्र इन खबरों को जगह देता है। अक्कू यादव केस में मीडिया पूरे तरह महिलाओं के समर्थन में रहा। कलका की ओर जे कर अस्पताल का 'डॉक्टर बिटियाँ' बलात्कार केश मीडिया में सत्तापक्ष एवं विपक्ष की पार्टियों। ग्रेट रोमन सर्कस की अबोध बच्चियों के यौन उत्पीड़न को मीडिया ने लगातार केन्द्र में रखा तथा उत्पीड़न के विरोध में अपने नजरिये को व्यक्त किया।

कई बार मीडिया द्वारा नियमों-कानूनों का उल्लंघन किया जाता है जैसे किसी कालगर्ल या अन्य दुर्घटनाओं की शिकार महिलाओं का चेहरा दिखाना तथा उसकी पहचान बताना गैर कानूनी है लेकिन मीडिया कई बार ऐसा करता

है तथा खबर को इस तरह गाँव-नाम आदि के वर्णन सहित देता है कि उससे पहचान छुप नहीं पाती ।

भाषा की दृष्टि से मीडिया कुछ स्थितियों, खबरों में काफी नकारात्मक दिखाई देता है । चेन छिनने की घटनाओं में स्त्री की पहचान मात्र पुरुष से होती है । उसका अपना नाम भी प्रायः नहीं होता । उदाहरणार्थ इंजीनियर की पत्नी की चेन छिनी गयी, व्यापारी की पत्नी की चेन, दरोगा की पत्नी... । यहाँ 'दरोगा' बड़े-बड़े शब्दों में होता है जो कहना चाहता है कि जिस पर समाज की सुरक्षा की जिम्मेदारी है उसकी पत्नी भी सुरक्षित नहीं है ।

विधवा शब्द मानवाधिकार तथा विभिन्न राज्य सरकारों द्वारा प्रतिबन्धित होने के बावजूद मीडिया द्वारा बेझिजक परिचय की तरह मुख्य हेडिंग बनाते हुए इस्तेमाल किया जाता है । 'जिन्दा रहते ही विधवा को मार डाला', 'शहीद की बेवा अभिभूत', 'विधवा के संरक्षण को लेकर तनाव' । मीडिया 'अबला' शब्द का इस्तेमाल भी निरर्थक रूप से करता है । 'अबला से छिनी जमीन' यहाँ जमीन किसी पुरुष से भी छिनी जा सकती है जो कमजोर हो पर तब मीडिया की भाषा व नजर होती है 'दबंगो ने छिनी जमीन' । तब मीडिया पुरुष के लिए ऐसे किसी विश्लेषण का इस्तेमाल नहीं करता । 'लड़की भागी/लड़की भगाई, जहाँ लड़की ही ऐसी वस्तु है जो भगायी जा सकती है या भाग जाती है, मीडिया की प्रिय हेडिंग है । देह व्यापार की काफी खबरें आती हैं । ये खबरें ज्यादातर सूचनात्मक ही होती हैं । ज्यादातर ई-मेल इंटरनेट आदि आधुनिक तकनीकी का महिलाओं के खिलाफ हिंसा में काफी इस्तेमाल हो रहा है । यह हिंसा प्रायः अश्लीलता के रूप में सामने आती है । यहाँ किसी की निजता को आधार बनाया जाता है । प्रत्यक्ष और अप्रत्यक्ष दोनों तरीकों से आपराधिक प्रवृत्ति व मनःस्थिति को बढ़ावा दिया जाता है ।

अन्य प्रकार की हिंसा की खबरें भी हमें देखने को मिलती हैं । जिसमें शराब पीकर पति द्वारा पीटने, हत्या करने, मायके चले जाने पर उसके घर में घुसकर मारने या अवैध सम्बन्धों पर प्रताड़ित करने की खबरें होती हैं । दूसरी शादी करने के लिए उसे सताने, बच्चे न होने पर या बेटा न होने पर तंग करने यानी कि हिंसा के अनेक रूप मीडिया के पृष्ठों पर प्रायः सूचनात्मक, कभी-कभी विवरणात्मक तथा कई बार आलोचनात्मक शैली में मिलते हैं ।

औरतों पर घरेलू हिंसा होती है, जैसे-जैसे उनका दायरा बढ़ा है वैसे-वैसे उनपर बस-टैम्पो स्टैण्ड, औफिस, स्कूल, सड़क पर भी हिंसा है। शारीरिक तथा मानसिक दोनों तरह की हिंसा की खबरें हमें दिखाई देती हैं। तलाक-तलाक-तलाक कहकर उसे हमेशा के लिए बेघर कर देना बहुत बड़ी हिंसा है। मीडिया ऐसी खबरों पर सिर्फ सूचना नहीं देता बल्कि वाद-विवाद की जंग भी चलाता है, विचार भी देता है और बड़े-बड़े सम्पादकीय भी लिखता है।

स्त्री गर्भ से लेकर बुढ़ापे तक, गैरों से लेकर अपनों तक के बीच कहीं भी सुरक्षित नहीं है। कई बार मीडिया स्वयं स्त्रियों के लिए मानसिक हिंसा की स्थिति में आ जाता है 'मायके जाने की जिद से पति ने आत्महत्या की'। यहाँ मीडिया की सोच मायके जाने की स्वाभाविकता को जिद समझने की है। कई लेखों में मीडिया स्त्री की जागरूकता, शिक्षा, आर्थिक स्वावलम्बन को हिंसा का करण मानता है। विवाह की बढ़ती उम्र या विवाह न करने की प्रवृत्ति के लिये स्त्री को ही दोषी ठहराता है बजाय इसके सामाजिक विश्लेषण के। घर की जिम्मेदारियों को एकतरफा स्त्री का उत्तरदायित्व मानता है या घर के उपेक्षित होने की शिकायत बाहर काम करने वाली स्त्री से करता है। मीडिया स्त्री पर सीधे-सीधे हिंसा तब भी करता है जब दहेज की एक-आध झूठी खबर या बेजा इस्तेमाल पर अत्यन्त चिन्तित होकर लेख सम्पादकीय और आँकड़े एक साथ देने लगता है।

इन सभी उदाहरणों से संक्षेप में इतना कहा जा सकता है कि स्त्रियों को समाज से तो प्रताड़ित किया जाता है, उत्पीड़न दिया जाता है, पर मीडिया का नज़रिया उसके बारबार चिर हरण जैसा रहता है।

यहाँ प्रसिद्ध पत्रकार मृणाल पाण्डे का यह कथन सार्थक लगता है- "कुछ अफसोस के साथ कहना पड़ता है, कि हमारे तकरीबन सभी हिंदी दैनिकों, पत्रिकाओं, चैनलों में अभी भी 'महिला मंगल' या 'बहनों के लिए'- जैसे साप्ताहिक खंडों से अपने कर्तव्य की इतिश्री मान ली है... जिसमें सिवाय फुर्सती किस्म की जानकारी, चुटकुले और बतकहियोंके, स्त्रियों के बारे में कोई ठोस विचारपूर्ण और ज्ञानवर्धक सामग्री नहीं होती।"²

स्त्रियों के मुद्दे प्रश्नों को मीडिया किस तरह कवर करता है, यह एक जटिल और बहुआयामी विषय है। मीडिया स्त्रियों के मुद्दों को विभिन्न तरीके से कवर करता है। मीडिया महिलाओं की आवाज को उठाकर उनके संघर्षों को उजागर करके उन्हें न्याय दिलाता है, पर कभी-कभी उसे ही कटघरे में भी खड़ा कर देता है। कभी-कभी मीडिया में महिलाओं के चित्रण में कई नकारात्मक पहलू भी हैं। उन्हें अक्सर सेक्सी ओब्जेक्ट के रूप में चित्रित किया जाता है, उनकी उपलब्धियों को कमतर आँका जाता है। इन सबके पीछे मीडिया संगठन की नीतियाँ, पत्रकारों का व्यक्तिगत पूर्वाग्रह, सरकार-विपक्ष प्रशासन, संगठनों के दबाव भी शामिल हैं। पर इन सबसे ऊपर उठकर मैं कहना चाहूँगी कि आज के समय में मीडिया सबसे सशक्त माध्यम होने से, मीडिया से स्त्री की बदनामी न हो इसका ध्यान रखना चाहिए। समाज में स्त्री की भूमिका पूजनीय, वंदनीय, शक्तिस्वरूपा, मातारूप में आदर्श रही है, यदि इन भूमिकाओं को कुछ बुरी घटनाओं के तहत समग्र स्त्री वर्ग को टारगेट करना ठीक नहीं है। यह नैतिकता का गुण भी है। मीडिया को स्त्री के प्रश्नों को अधिक सकारात्मक और संवेदनशील तरीके से कवर करना चाहिए, ताकि स्त्री को समाज में सम्मान और समानता मिल सके। सस्ती लोकप्रियता या टी.आर.पी. रैंकिंग के लिए एक बड़े स्त्री वर्ग को टारगेट नहीं करना चाहिए।

बाज़ारवार से उपजी नयी आशा-आकांक्षा, नई तरह की महत्वाकांक्षा के साथ मीडिया को स्त्रियों के प्रश्नों के प्रति अधिक सचेत रहना होगा।

सन्दर्भ

1. <https://www.amarujala.com>>kavya (सूर्य प्रकाश द्वारा रचित कविताएँ).
2. स्त्री-देह की राजनीति से देश की राजनीति तक, मृणाल पाण्डे, राधाकृष्ण प्रकाशन, नई दिल्ली, पृ.- 126-127.

ભારતના આર્થિક વિકાસમાં ગુજરાતની મહિલાઓ નો ફાળો: એક અભ્યાસ

રીના વોહરા

સારાંશ

આજના ભારતમાં ભાગ્યે જ એવું કોઈ ક્ષેત્ર મળશે જે હજુ સુધી કોઈ મહિલાએ શોધ્યું ન હોય. આપણને એક એવું ભારત યાદ આવે છે જ્યાં સ્ત્રીઓ પોતાનું આખું જીવન ઘરની સીમામાં કે રસોડામાં જ વિતાવતી હતી. વર્ષોથી મહિલાઓએ જુલમનો સામનો કર્યો અને પુરતી ઓળખ મેળવી ન હતી. પરંતુ જેમ જેમ સમય બદલાયો છે તેમ દરેક ક્ષેત્રમાં મહિલાઓને ઓળખ મળી રહી છે; તે આર્મી હોય કે પછી પોતાના ઘરોમાં. તેઓને હવે 'ગૃહિણીઓ'ને બદલે 'હોમમેકર્સ' તરીકે બોલાવવામાં આવે છે. અહીં એવી પ્રભાવશાળી મહિલાઓની વાત કરીશું જેમને ભારતના આર્થિક વિકાસમાં પોતાનો ફાળો આપ્યો છે. છેલ્લાં કેટલાંક વર્ષોથી ભારતમાં મહિલાઓ ની સ્થિતિમાં મોટા ફેરફારો આવ્યા છે. પ્રાચીન સમયમાં પુરુષોને સમકક્ષ થી લઈને મધ્યકાલીન યુગમાં નીચેના દરજ્જા સુધીનો ફેરફાર આવ્યા છે છે. અનેક સુધારાવાદીઓ દ્વારા સમાન હક્કને પ્રોત્સાહન આપવામાં આવ્યું છે, ભારતમાં મહિલાઓની સ્થિતિનો ઇતિહાસ ઘણાં મહત્વપૂર્ણ બનાવોથી ભરેલો છે. આધુનિક ભારતમાં, મહિલાઓએ ભારતમાં ઉચ્ચપદોને શોભાવ્યા છે, જેમાં રાષ્ટ્રપતિ, વડાપ્રધાન, લોકસભાના અધ્યક્ષ, વિરોધ પક્ષના અધ્યક્ષ, તદ્દુપરાંત લશ્કર, વિજ્ઞાન, એજિન્યરીંગ,

ઉચ્ચતર અભ્યાસ વગેરે ક્ષેત્રો પણ સામેલ છે. તેવીજ રીતે આર્થિક ક્ષેત્રે પણ જોઈએ તો આજે ઘણી મહિલાઓએ પોતાનું આગવું સ્થાન, માન અને વ્યક્તિત્વ પ્રસ્થાપિત કર્યું છે. આ થઈ ભારતની મહિલાઓની વાત! પ્રસ્તુત લેખમાં આપણે ગુજરાતની મહિલાઓના ભારતના આર્થિક વિકાસમાં યોગદાન વિશે વિશેષ ચર્ચા કરીશું.

ચાવીરૂપ શબ્દો: મહિલાઓ, આર્થિક વિકાસ, કુનેહ, સાહસ, જ્ઞાન, સ્વાવલંબન, ઓળખ, પ્રભાવ.

પ્રસ્તાવના

ગુજરાતના ઔદ્યોગિક વિકાસ અને આર્થિક વિકાસની જે ઝાકઝમાળ આપણે આજે જોઈએ છીએ તે કાંઈ આજકાલની ઘટના નથી. એનો એક લાંબો ઇતિહાસ છે. ખૂબ લાંબો દરિયાકાંઠો ધરાવતું ગુજરાત રાજ્ય અને એની સાગરખેડુ સાહસિક પ્રજા દેશ-વિદેશ સાથે વેપાર કરીને અઢળક સંપત્તિ રળતી થઈ એટલે શરૂઆતના ગુજરાતનો વિકાસ કયવિકય એટલે કે વેપાર-વાણિજ્યને કારણે થયો. આ વિકાસ પાછળ ગુજરાતી સાહસિકોની બજારોને સમજવાની શક્તિ અને ઊભી થતી તકોને ઝડપવાની ક્ષમતાની સાથોસાથ ગુજરાતીના વિશિષ્ટ ગુણો, સુલેહ અને સમાધાન, સહકાર અને સહિષ્ણુતા પણ કારણભૂત છે. વેપારવણજ અને સાહસિકવૃત્તિ એ ગુજરાતીઓને રાજ્યની બહાર પણ સાહસ કરવા માટે પ્રેર્યા અને અન્ય દેશોનાં બંદરોમાં પોતાનાં થાણાં નાખી વેપાર વિકસાવી ગુજરાતના વહાણવટીઓ અને વેપારીઓ દ્વારા આગવી વ્યાપારિક સંસ્કૃતિનું સર્જન થયું.^૯ આગળ જતા આ જ વ્યાપારી સંસ્કૃતિના વારસદારો વિદેશોમાંથી યંત્રો અને ટેકનોલોજી લઈ આવતા થયા અને વૈશ્વિક ઔદ્યોગિક ક્રાંતિની સાથોસાથ ગુજરાતમાં પણ ઔદ્યોગિક વિકાસની દિશાઓ ખૂલવા માંડી. ગતિશીલતા અને નવું અપનાવવાની આવડત, દરિયાપાર પહોંચીને વિશ્વના વિવિધ ભાગોમાં

પથરાવું અને એ રીતે અનેક સંસ્કૃતિને પોતાનામાં સમાવી ગુણગ્રાહી બનવું પણ પોતાનું ગુજરાતીપણું ન છોડવું, એ ગુજરાતી સંસ્કૃતિની વિશિષ્ટતા છે. ગુજરાતનું શાંત અને વેપાર માટે અનુકૂળ એવું સલામત જનજીવન જેવાં અનેક પરિબળોએ આ વિકાસને પ્રેર્યો અને પોષ્યો. ગુજરાતના વિકાસની આ યાત્રા એના પ્રથમ ત્રણ દાયકામાં રાજ્યને દેશમાં ઔદ્યોગિક રાજ્યોમાં અગ્રિમસ્થાને લઈ આવી. ગુજરાત રાજ્ય અસ્તિત્વમાં આવ્યું ત્યારે લગભગ બે-તૃતીયાંશ જેટલું ઔદ્યોગિક ઉત્પાદન કાપડ અને સંલગ્ન ઉદ્યોગોમાંથી આવતું હતું. આજે એ ઘટીને લગભગ ૨૫ ટકા જેટલું થયું છે.^૧

ઉદારીકરણ પહેલાં પણ ગુજરાતે ઔદ્યોગિક વિકાસ ક્ષેત્રે ઘણું મોટું કાફું કાઢ્યું હતું. રાજ્યમાં થયેલા ઔદ્યોગિક વિકાસને પરિણામે રાજ્યના વિકાસની તરાહ બદલાઈને રાસાયણિક તથા એને સંલગ્ન દવાઓ જેવા ઉદ્યોગો તરફી થઈ છે. એક અંદાજ મુજબ ગુજરાતમાં આવેલા મુખ્ય ઉદ્યોગોનો દેશમાં ફાળો જોઈએ તો કાપડ ઉદ્યોગ (૨૫ ટકા), સોડાએશ (૯૧ ટકા), હીરા ઉદ્યોગ (૮૦ ટકા), મીઠું (૬૬ ટકા), પ્લાસ્ટિક (૬૫ ટકા), પેટ્રોકેમિકલ્સ (૬૨ ટકા), ફ્લુઓઈલ (૫૩ ટકા), રસાયણ (૩૫ ટકા), દવાઓ (૩૫ ટકા) અને નેચરલ ગેસ (૩૦ ટકા) ગણી શકાય. આ ઉપરાંત શ્વેતકાંતિને કારણે દેશમાં જાણીતું બનેલું ગુજરાત અમૂલ ડેરી અને મહેસાણાની દૂધસાગર, સાબર, બનાસ તેમજ અન્ય ડેરી થકી સહકારી ક્ષેત્રે દૂધઉત્પાદનમાં અગ્રસ્થાને છે.^{૧૧} મહેસાણા તેમજ અંકલેશ્વર અને ગાંધારનાં તેલક્ષેત્રોને પરિણામે ફ્લુઓઈલ તેમજ ગેસના ઉત્પાદનમાં પણ આ રાજ્ય મોખરાનું સ્થાન ધરાવે છે. ગુજરાતી રિફાઇનરી ઉપરાંત સૌરાષ્ટ્રમાં રિલાયન્સ જૂથની રિફાઇનરી કાર્યરત છે. તે ઉપરાંત અન્ય રોકાણોને જોઈએ તો સિમેન્ટ, લિઝાઇટ અને ફ્લોરસ્પાર તથા બોક્સાઇટ, આરસ, ગ્રેનાઇટ, બેન્ટોનાઇટ વગેરેનું ઉત્પાદન પણ રાજ્યમાં થાય છે. હીરા ઉદ્યોગ રાજ્યમાં એક મુખ્ય ઉદ્યોગ તરીકે વિકસ્યો છે જેનાં મુખ્ય કેન્દ્રોમાં સુરત, અમદાવાદ તેમજ ઉત્તર ગુજરાતમાં કલોલ, સિદ્ધપુર, પાલનપુર, ડીસા જ્યારે સૌરાષ્ટ્રમાં ગારિયાધાર, અમરેલીનો સમાવેશ થાય છે. જર-ઝવેરાત અને આભૂષણોના ઉત્પાદન અને નિકાસક્ષેત્રે

રાજકોટ આજે દેશમાં અગ્રસ્થાને છે. આમ, ગુજરાત ઔદ્યોગિક વિકાસ છેલ્લા પાંચ દાયકામાં બહુ મોટું કાઠું કાઢ્યું છે અને વૈવિધ્યકરણની દિશા પકડી છે એમ કહીએ તો અતિશયોક્તિ નથી. ઉપરોક્ત મુખ્ય ઉદ્યોગો ઉપરાંત રાજકોટ ખાતે ડીઝલ એન્જિન, જામનગર ખાતે બ્રાસ પાર્ટસ, અમદાવાદ, વડોદરા અને સુરત ખાતે ટેક્સ્ટાઇલ લૂમ્સ અને ટેક્સચ્યુરાઇઝિંગ અને અન્ય ટેક્સ્ટાઇલ મશીનરી બનાવતા ઉદ્યોગો, છત્રાલ, અમદાવાદ વડોદરા, સુરત તેમજ વાપી ખાતે પ્લાસ્ટિક તેમજ કાગળ ઉદ્યોગને લગતી મશીનરી બનાવતા ઉદ્યોગો અને દક્ષિણ ગુજરાતમાં કાફ્ટ અને રાઇટિંગ પેપર બનાવતા ઉદ્યોગો આ ભાતીગળ ચિત્રમાં જુદા-જુદા રંગ પૂરે છે. અલંગ ખાતે વહાણ ભાંગવાનો ઉદ્યોગ વિકસ્યો જેણે અલંગને વિશ્વના અગ્રણી શિપબ્રેકિંગ યાર્ડનો દરજ્જો અપાવ્યો છે.^૨

તેવીજ રીતે જ્યારે સ્ત્રીઓ સમૃદ્ધ થાય છે, ત્યારે વિશ્વ સમૃદ્ધ થાય છે. તેમનું આર્થિક સશક્તિકરણ વિકાસને ઇંધણ પૂરું પાડે છે. શિક્ષણની તેમની સુલભતા વૈશ્વિક પ્રગતિને વેગ આપે છે. તેમનું નેતૃત્વ સર્વસમાવેશકતાને પ્રોત્સાહન આપે છે. અને, તેમનો અવાજ હકારાત્મક પરિવર્તનની પ્રેરણા આપે છે. મહિલા સશક્તિકરણનો સૌથી અસરકારક માર્ગ મહિલાઓની આગેવાની હેઠળનો વિકાસ અભિગમ છે. ભારત આ દિશામાં હરણફાળ ભરી રહ્યું છે. મહિલા ઉદ્યમીઓ વૈશ્વિક અર્થવ્યવસ્થામાં નોંધપાત્ર ફાળો આપનાર છે. ભારતમાં મહિલા ઉદ્યમીઓની ભૂમિકા નવી નથી. દાયકાઓ પહેલાં, ૧૯૫૯માં, મુંબઈમાં સાત ગુજરાતી મહિલાઓએ સાથે મળીને એક ઐતિહાસિક સહકારી ચળવળ શરૂ કરી હતી - શ્રી મહિલા ગૃહ ઉદ્યોગ. ત્યારથી લઈને અત્યાર સુધીમાં તેણે લાખો મહિલાઓ અને તેમના પરિવારોના જીવનમાં પરિવર્તન આણ્યું છે. તેમની સૌથી પ્રખ્યાત પ્રોડક્ટ, લિજ્જત પાપડ, કદાચ ગુજરાતમાં તમારા મેનૂમાં હશે! આપણા સહકારી આંદોલનની અન્ય એક સફળતાની ગાથા ડેરી ક્ષેત્ર છે. આ પણ મહિલાઓ દ્વારા સંચાલિત છે. માત્ર ગુજરાત રાજ્યમાં જ ડેરી ક્ષેત્રે ૩૬ લાખ મહિલાઓ સંકળાયેલી છે. અને, સમગ્ર ભારતમાં આવી અનેક, બીજી ઘણી પ્રેરણાદાયી વાતો છે. ભારતમાં યુનિકોર્નના લગભગ ૧૫ ટકા સ્ટાર્ટ-અપ્સમાં

ઓછામાં ઓછી એક મહિલા સ્થાપક હોય છે. મહિલાઓની આગેવાની હેઠળની આ યુનિકોર્નની સંયુક્ત કિંમત ૪૦ અબજ ડોલરથી વધારે છે. જો કે, આપણું લક્ષ્ય એક એવું સ્તરનું પ્લેટફોર્મ ઊભું કરવાનું હોવું જોઈએ કે જ્યાં મહિલા સિદ્ધિ હાંસલ કરનાર સામાન્ય બની જાય. આપણે એ અવરોધોને દૂર કરવા માટે કામ કરવું જોઈએ, જે બજારો, વૈશ્વિક મૂલ્ય-શ્રુંખલાઓ અને વાજબી ધિરાણ સુધી તેમની પહોંચને મર્યાદિત કરે છે. તે જ સમયે, આપણે એ સુનિશ્ચિત કરવાની જરૂર છે કે સંભાળ અને ધરેલું કાર્યના ભારને યોગ્ય રીતે દૂર કરવામાં આવે.^{૧૭}

ગુજરાતની મહિલાઓ

ભારતીય બંધારણ સાર્વભૌમત્વ, સમાજવાદ અને બિનસાંપ્રદાયિક સિદ્ધાંતોને વરેલું છે. આ બંધારણે દેશના દરેક નાગરિકને સમાન હક્ક આપ્યા છે. જાતિય સમાનતાનો સિદ્ધાંત મહિલાઓને સમાન હક્ક આપવાની તરફેણ કરે છે. બંધારણે મહિલાઓને સમાન હક્કો મળી રહે તે માટે મહિલાઓની તરફેણમાં સકારાત્મક ભેદભાવ કરવાની સત્તા રાજ્યને આપી છે. ગુજરાત રાજ્ય સરકારનો મહિલા અને બાળવિકાસ વિભાગ મહિલા અને બાળકોના કલ્યાણ, સશક્તિકરણ અને ઉદ્ધાર માટે વિવિધ યોજનાઓ ચલાવે છે. આ યોજનાઓ સંકલિત બાળ વિકાસ સેવા અને સંકલિત મહિલા વિકાસ સેવાના નેજા હેઠળ ચાલે છે. ૧૯૭૫માં ભારત સરકારે સંકલિત બાળ વિકાસ સેવા અને સંકલિત મહિલા વિકાસ સેવાનો પ્રારંભ કર્યો હતો. આજે આ સેવાનો વ્યાપ સમગ્ર દેશમાં છે. આ યોજનાનો લાભ ૩૫ રાજ્યોમાં સાડા ત્રણ કરોડ બાળકોને મળી રહ્યો છે. આ યોજનાનો લાભ દેશની છાસઠ લાખ સગર્ભા મહિલાઓને મળી રહ્યો છે. મહિલા અને બાળકોના કલ્યાણ માટે કુટુંબ કલ્યાણ, શિક્ષણ, આરોગ્ય, પોષણ, આરોગ્ય શિક્ષણ, ન્યાય અને સમાનતા જેવા મુદ્દાઓ પર ધ્યાન કેન્દ્રિત કરવું આવશ્યક છે. ધરેલું હિંસા, મહિલાને મિલકતનો અધિકાર, દહેજ પ્રતિબંધ, જાતિય સતામણી સામે રક્ષણ અને મહિલાઓનું અશ્લિલ ચિત્રણ જેવી મહિલાઓને સ્પર્શતી સમસ્યાઓના ઉકેલ

માટે વિભાગ સક્રિય છે. મહિલા અને બાળવિકાસ વિભાગ નવજાત શિશુઓને પોષણ અને બાળકોના આરોગ્યની સંભાળ જેવી બાબતોનું નિરીક્ષણ કરે છે, જરૂર જણાય ત્યાં પગલાં લે છે. આ વિભાગ મહિલાઓ સામે રાખવામાં આવતાં ભેદભાવ દૂર કરવાનું અને તે મુદ્દે સંવેદનશીલતા કેળવવાનું કાર્ય કરે છે. તે મહિલાઓને વિવિધ યોજનાઓમાં જોડવાનું કામ કરી સમાજના મુખ્ય પ્રવાહમાં ભેળવવાનું કામ કરે છે. મહિલાઓ માટે જાતીય સમાનતા ઉભી કરવાની મહત્વની જવાબદારી આ વિભાગ નીભાવે છે. મહિલા અને બાળકોના સામાજિક, આર્થિક અને શૈક્ષણિક વિકાસમાં વિભાગની ચાવીરૂપ ભૂમિકા છે. વિભાગ તેમના સશક્તિકરણ માટેની માર્ગદર્શિકા તૈયાર કરવાનું અને જાગૃત્તિ ઉભી કરે છે. આ છે સરકારશ્રી તરફથી ગુજરાત રાજ્યની મહિલાઓને આર્થિક સ્વતંત્રતા યોજનાઓ. ગુજરાતના વિવિધ ક્ષેત્રે આગવું સ્થાન ધરાવતી મહિલાઓ વિશે આપણે ટૂંકમાં માહિતી મેળવીએ:

સાહિત્ય

જ્યોતિ થાનકી

સમગ્ર જીવન શિક્ષણ સાધનામાં વિતાવનારાં જ્યોતિબહેનનાં સંખ્યાબંધ પુસ્તકો, લેખો પ્રસિદ્ધ થઈ ચૂક્યાં છે. તેઓ ટૂંકી વાર્તાઓ, આધ્યાત્મ, શિક્ષણ, સ્ત્રી સશક્તીકરણ પર લેખનકાર્ય કરી રહ્યાં છે.

હિમાંશી શેલત

જન્મથી જ ગાંધીવાદી સંસ્કારો મેળવનારાં હિમાંશીબહેન અધ્યાપક પદેથી સ્વૈરિછક નિવૃત્તિ લીધા બાદ લેખન અને વાંચનમાં પ્રવૃત્ત છે. તેઓ અધિકારોથી વંચિત બાળકો માટે પણ કામ કરે છે.

કુંદનિકા કાપડિયા

કુંદનિકાબહેનની અગણિત ટૂંકી વાર્તાઓ, નવલકથા અને નિબંધો પ્રકાશિત થઈ ચૂક્યાં છે. અંગ્રેજી, હિન્દી અને બંગાળી ભાષાનાં પુસ્તકોનું ભાષાંતર પણ કર્યું છે. તેઓ નંદીગ્રામ સંસ્થાના મેનેજિંગ ટ્રસ્ટી છે.

ડૉ. શરીફા વીજળીવાલા

અત્યંત સામાન્ય કુટુંબમાં જન્મેલાં શરીફાબહેનની ભાષા પ્રત્યેની રુચિ તેમને ફાર્મસીના અભ્યાસ બાદ સાહિત્ય વિશ્વમાં લઈ આવી. ગુજરાતી ભાષાના શિક્ષણ ઉપરાંત સાહિત્યના વિવેચન અને ભાષાંતર ક્ષેત્રે પણ તેઓ કાર્યરત છે.

કલા

આરતી મુન્શી

સંગીત પ્રત્યે અનહદ લાગણી ધરાવતા આરતીબહેને સંગીત શિક્ષિકા તરીકે કારકિર્દીનો પ્રારંભ કર્યો. ગુજરાતી ગીતો, ગરબા અને લગ્નગીતો માટે તેઓ ખૂબ જ વિખ્યાત છે. તેઓએ ધો. ૮થી ૧૨ના સંગીતનાં પુસ્તકો પણ લખ્યાં છે.

દમયંતી બરડાઈ

દમયંતીબહેન એટલે ગુજરાતી સંગીત ક્ષેત્રે ખૂબ જ જાણીતું નામ. તેઓ ૫૦થી વધુ ગુજરાતી ફિલ્મોમાં પોતાનો કંઠ આપી ચૂક્યાં છે, તેમની આશરે ૨૫૦ કેસેટ્સ અને રેકર્ડ્સ આજે પણ ધૂમ મચાવે છે. દમયંતીબહેને વિશ્વના ખૂણેખૂણામાં સ્ટેજ શો દ્વારા પોતાના કંઠનાં કામણ પાથર્યાં છે. એસ્થર ડેવિડ

જગવિખ્યાત પ્રાણીવિદ રુબિન ડેવિડનાં સુપુત્રી એસ્થર ડેવિડ સાહિત્ય અને કલાક્ષેત્રે વ્યાપક ખેડાણ કરી ચૂક્યાં છે. તેઓ સંખ્યાબંધ પુસ્તક,

નવલકથાનાં લેખિકા છે. આ ઉપરાંત એસ્થર સુવિખ્યાત કલાકાર, શિલ્પી અને કલા વિવેચક પણ છે.

ઈશિરા પરીખ

કુમળી વયથી જ નૃત્યને પોતાની જાત સમર્પિત કરનાર ઈશિરાબહેન વિખ્યાત નૃત્ય કલાકાર છે. તેઓ નૃત્યના ત્રણ ક્ષેત્ર - પરફોર્મન્સ, તાલીમ અને કોરિયોગ્રાફીમાં પોતાની શ્રેષ્ઠતા સાબિત કરી ચૂક્યાં છે. કથક નૃત્યનાં નવાં સ્વરૂપોનો આવિષ્કાર કરવા માટે ઈશિરાબહેન સદાય પ્રયાસશીલ રહે છે. જશુ શિલ્પી

સમગ્ર વિશ્વમાં બ્રોન્ઝ વુમન તરીકે ઓળખાતાં જશુબહેન અત્યાર સુધીમાં અસંખ્ય શિલ્પ બનાવી ચૂક્યાં છે. તેઓનું નામ ગિનિઝ બુક ઓફ વર્લ્ડ રેકોર્ડ્સમાં પણ નોંધાયું છે. તેમનાં શિલ્પ ફક્ત ભારત જ નહીં, બલકે સમગ્ર વિશ્વના દેશોમાં જોવા મળે છે.

સ્મિતા શાસ્ત્રી

સ્મિતાબહેન કુચિપુડી અને ભરતનાટ્યમ નૃત્યના પારંગત છે. તેઓ એક કલાસિકલ ડાન્સની સંસ્થાનાં ડિરેક્ટર પણ છે. તેઓ ગુજરાત રાજ્ય સંગીત નાટક અકાદમીનાં ચેરપર્સન પણ રહી ચૂક્યાં છે. તેઓ વધુને વધુ ગુજરાતી કન્યાઓ કલાસિકલ ડાન્સ તરફ વળે તેવા પ્રયત્નો પણ કરી રહ્યાં છે. જયશ્રી પરીખ

ગુજરાતી નાટ્યજગતમાં જયશ્રીબહેનનું નામ કોઈનાથી અજાણ્યું નથી. અત્યાર સુધીમાં તેઓ ૧૦૦થી વધુ નાટકો અને ૯૦ જેટલી ગુજરાતી ફિલ્મોમાં અભિનય કરી ચૂક્યાં છે. તેમણે અસંખ્ય સિરિયલોમાં પણ કામ કર્યું છે. તેમને રાજ્ય સરકારે ગુજરાત ગૌરવ પુરસ્કારથી નવાજ્યાં છે.

સામાજિક કાર્યકરો

ડો. મહેરુન્નિસા દેસાઈ

મુસ્લિમ મહિલાઓના ઉત્થાન માટે કામ કરતા લોકોની યાદીમાં મહેરુન્નિસાબહેનનું નામ સૌથી પહેલું મૂકવું પડે. તેમના પ્રયાસોને લીધે મુસ્લિમ મહિલાઓના ઉત્થાન, શિક્ષણ અને સામાજિક સ્થાનમાં સકારાત્મક ફેરફાર થયા છે. તેમણે અહમદાબાદ મુસ્લિમ વૂમન એસોસિયેશન (એએમડબલ્યુએ)ની પણ સ્થાપના કરી છે.

આયેશા પટેલ

અત્યંત ગરીબ મુસ્લિમ કુટુંબમાં જન્મ્યા હોવા છતાં આયેશાબહેન ભારે સંઘર્ષ કરીને શિક્ષક બન્યાં. મહેસાણાને પોતાની કર્મભૂમિ બનાવી. તેઓ લઘુમતી કોમમાં પ્રવર્તતા શિક્ષણ અને રોજગારી જેવા પ્રશ્નોના ઉકેલ માટે કામ કરે છે. તેઓ ‘સેતુ’ એનજીઓનાં ચેરમેન પણ છે.

જાનકી વસંત

જાનકીબહેનને માનવીયતા અને સમાજસેવાના સંસ્કાર ગળથૂંથીમાંથી જ મળ્યા. ૨૦૦૧ના ભૂકંપ બાદ જાનકીબહેને પોતાની જાતને સંપૂર્ણપણે સમાજસેવામાં સમર્પિત કરી દીધી. તેમણે ‘સંવેદના’ ચેરિટેબલ ટ્રસ્ટની પણ સ્થાપના કરી.

અભિલાષા સિંઘવી

છેલ્લાં ૨૦ વર્ષથી અભિલાષા સિંઘવી શારીરિક રીતે અસક્ષમ લોકોના સવાઠંગી ઉત્થાન માટે કામ કરી રહ્યાં છે. પોતાની સંસ્થા ‘માનવ સેવા સન્નિધી’ના નેજા હેઠળ તેઓ લોકોને વિનામૂલ્યે ૨૫,૦૦૦થી વધુ કૃત્રિમ અંગો આપી ચૂક્યાં છે.

ડો. તૃપ્તિ શાહ

નાનપણથી જ સમાજસેવાના સંસ્કાર પામનારાં તૃપ્તિબહેને સમાજ સેવા, મહિલાઓના અધિકારો, માનવ અધિકારો અને પર્યાવરણના પ્રશ્નોના ક્ષેત્રે યોગદાન આપ્યું છે. મહિલાઓની સ્વાયત્ત સંસ્થા ‘સહિયર’નાં તેઓ સ્થાપક સભ્ય છે. તેઓ એમ.એસ. યુનિવર્સિટીમાં અર્થશાસ્ત્રનાં વ્યાખ્યાતા પણ છે.

નફીસા બારોટ

નફીસાબહેન નામાંકિત સામાજિક કાર્યકર અને ‘ઉત્થાન’ એનજીઓનાં સ્થાપક છે. તેમને સમાજસેવાના સંસ્કાર તેમના માતા પાસેથી મળ્યાં. ભણતર પૂરું કર્યા બાદ તેમણે સંપૂર્ણપણે સમાજસેવામાં ઝંપલાવ્યું.

નર્મિલા રાવલ

જીવનમાં અનેક તડકા-છાંયડા જોઈ ચૂકેલાં નર્મિલાબહેનને અનુભવોએ સમાજસેવામાં આવવા પ્રેરિત કર્યાઠ. તેઓ શારીરિક રીતે અસક્ષમ કન્યાઓ, નિરાધાર મહિલાઓના ઉત્થાન માટે કામ કરે છે તથા મંથન અપંગ કન્યા સેવા સંકુલના મેનેજિંગ ટ્રસ્ટી છે.

નિકેતા ધીયા

ફક્ત ૧૦ વર્ષની ઉંમરે પિતાની છત્રછાયા અને ૧૫ વર્ષની ઉંમરે બન્ને કિડની ગુમાવનાર નિકેતાબહેન કારમા સંઘર્ષના પર્યાયસમાન છે. ૧૯૯૬થી સતત ડાયાલિસિસ પર જીવવા છતાં તેમણે ચેરિટી શોમાં નત્યની આરાધના કરીને કિડનીના દર્દીઓ માટે ભંડોળ ઊભું કરવાનું શરૂ કર્યું. હાલમાં તેઓ ‘મેક-અ વિશ ફાઉન્ડેશન’ના સ્વયંસેવક છે તથા કિડનીની સંસ્થાઓ સાથે સંકળાયેલા છે.

પાડલ શેઠ

તમામ બાળકોના વિકાસને કેન્દ્રસ્થાને રાખતાં પાડલબહેન બાળ અધિકાર કાર્યકર્તા છે. દરિદ્રનારાયણને પોતાની જાત સમર્પિત કરનારાં પાડલબહેને ‘શૈશવ’

સંસ્થાની સ્થાપના કરી. તેમણે પોતાનું જીવન બાળમજૂરીની વિરુદ્ધ જાગતિ, બાળકન્યાઓ તેમજ ગરીબ વિસ્તારોમાં રહેતાં અને સડકો પર મજૂરી કરતાં બાળકોના ઉદ્ધાર માટે સમર્પિત કર્યું છે.

સેજલ દંડ

એક સત્ય ઘટનાથી પ્રેરિત થઈને સેજલબહેને ગ્રામીણ વિસ્તારો અને ખાસ કરીને મહિલાઓના ઉદ્ધારીકરણ માટે પોતાની મોભાદાર નોકરી અને સફળ કારકિર્દીનો ત્યાગ કર્યો. તેમણે ૧૯૯૫માં ‘આનંદી’ નામની એનજીઓની સ્થાપના કરી. તેમની સંસ્થા ગરીબ, આદિવાસીઓના વિકાસ માટે કામ કરે છે. તેઓ અમેરિકાની એક યુનિવર્સિટીમાં બે વર્ષ સુધી શિક્ષક તરીકે કામ કરી ચૂક્યાં છે. સુજાતા શાહ

ગાંધી સંસ્કારો વરચે ઊછરેલાં સુજાતાબહેનમાં સમાજસેવાનાં મૂલ્યો આપોઆપ જ આવ્યાં. અભ્યાસ બાદ સરકારી નોકરી સ્વીકારી, પરંતુ સ્વભાવે સામાજિક કાર્યકર એવાં સુજાતાબહેનને ગ્રામીણ ઉદ્ધાર માટે કામ કરવું હતું. છેલ્લાં ૧૫ વર્ષથી તેઓ ધરમપુર તાલુકાના પર્વતીય આદિવાસી વિસ્તારોમાં સામાજિક કાર્ય કરે છે. તેઓ અહીંના ૨૦ ગામોમાં શિક્ષણ, સ્વાસ્થ્ય અને વિકાસને લગતા કામો પણ કરે છે.

શ્રુતિ શ્રોફ

ગ્રામીણ વિસ્તારના લોકો તેમની ઉત્પાદકતા, કાર્યક્ષમતા અને સર્જનાત્મકતા વધારી શકે તે હેતુથી શ્રુતિબહેને ‘શ્રોફ ફાઉન્ડેશન ટ્રસ્ટ’ની સ્થાપના કરી. આ કામમાં તેમને વિવિધ ઉદ્યોગો, શૈક્ષણિક સંસ્થાઓ અને સ્વૈરિછક તથા સરકારી સંસ્થાઓનો પણ સહયોગ મળ્યો. તેમનું ફાઉન્ડેશન ફક્ત એક જ ગામથી શરૂ થયું, આજે તે ૫૦૦થી વધુ ગામોમાં કાર્યરત છે.

મધુ ચૌધરી

મધુબહેન મહિલા સાક્ષરતા, બચતને પ્રોત્સાહન, સ્વાસ્થ્ય કાર્યક્રમોનું આયોજન, કાનૂની સલાહ, પંચાયતી અધિકારો વિશે જાગૃતિ ગ્રામ સભા અને ગ્રામ-સ્વરાજની કામગીરીઓ જેવાં વિકાસકાર્યોમાં સક્રિય છે. લોકોને દારૂની બદીમાંથી છોડાવવા, સજીવ ખેતીને લગતી ચર્ચા-સભા, શેરી નાટકોનું આયોજન, વક્ષ ઉછેર કાર્યક્રમ, વનસ્પતિમાંથી ઔષધિ બનાવવા જેવી કામગીરી સાથે પણ જોડાયેલાં છે.

શાંતાતાઈ દેસાઈ

શાંતાતાઈ છેલ્લાં ૪૫ વર્ષથી સમાજસેવા સાથે સંકળાયેલાં છે. તેઓ ડો. એલ. એમ. ધ્રુવ બાલાશ્રમ અનાથાલયનાં ડિરેક્ટર તરીકે કાર્યરત્ છે. આ સંસ્થાને ગુજરાત સરકાર દ્વારા શ્રેષ્ઠ સામાજિક કલ્યાણ સંસ્થાનો પુરસ્કાર એનાયત થઈ ચૂક્યો છે. તેઓ સુરેન્દ્રનગર જિલ્લાની બાળ કલ્યાણ સમિતિ અને મહિલા સામખ્યા કમિટીનાં સદસ્ય પણ છે.

ડો. અરુણા વણીકર

અત્યંત સુશિક્ષિત કુટુંબમાં જન્મેલા અરુણાબહેન રીનલ એન્ડ ટ્રાન્સપ્લાન્ટ પેથોલોજી કોર્સનો અભ્યાસ કરનાર સૌપ્રથમ અમદાવાદી છે. તેમણે પોતાનું જીવન તબીબી વિશ્વને સમર્પિત કરેલું છે. ઇન્સ્ટિટ્યૂટ ઓફ કિડની ડિસીઝીસ એન્ડ રિસર્ચ સેન્ટરમાં જુનિયર લેકચરર તરીકે જોડાયા બાદ અરુણાબહેને પાછું વળીને જોયું નથી. તબીબી વિશ્વમાં તેઓ વ્યાપક સંશોધન કરી ચૂક્યાં છે.

આ ઉપરાંત ગુજરાતની ખમીરવંતી મહિલાઓ કે જેઓ આપબળે આગળ વધી છે તેવી ગુજરાતની આર્થિક અગ્રેસર મહિલાઓ વિશે ચર્ચા કરવા અત્રે થોડા ઉદાહરણ પ્રસ્તુત કરેલ છે:

શ્રી મહિલા ગૃહ ઉદ્યોગ (લિજ્જત પાપડ)

'શ્રી મહિલા ગૃહ ઉદ્યોગ લિજ્જત પાપડ' એ મહિલાઓનું, મહિલાઓ દ્વારા અને મહિલાઓ માટેનું મહિલા સંગઠન છે. તેની શરૂઆત ૧૫મી માર્ચ ૧૯૫૯ના રોજ ૭ મહિલા સભ્યો દ્વારા રૂ.૮૦ની ઉધાર રકમ સાથે મુંબઈમાં ગિરગામ ખાતે કરવામાં આવી હતી. આ સંસ્થાનો વિકાસ ૧૯૬૬માં વધુ થયો જ્યારે તેની નોંધણી બોમ્બે પબ્લિક ટ્રસ્ટ્સ એક્ટ ૧૯૫૦ હેઠળ અને સોસાયટી નોંધણી અધિનિયમ, ૧૮૬૦ હેઠળ થઈ અને ખાદી અને ગ્રામોદ્યોગ કમિશન દ્વારા ગ્રામોદ્યોગ તરીકે તેને માન્યતા પ્રાપ્ત થઈ. સંસ્થાનો ઉદ્દેશ્ય મહિલાઓને સ્વ-રોજગાર પ્રદાન કરવાનો રહ્યો છે જેથી તેઓ યોગ્ય અને પ્રતિષ્ઠિત આજીવિકા મેળવી શકે. કોઈપણ મહિલા આ સંસ્થામાં જાતિ, સંપ્રદાય અને રંગના ભેદભાવ વિના શારીરિક કાર્ય કરી શકે છે અને જે મહિલા આ સંસ્થાના ઉદ્દેશ્યને અનુસરવા માટે સંમત થાય છે તે જે-તે તારીખે કામ શરૂ કરે છે અને તે તારીખથી જ સંસ્થાની સભ્ય બની શકે છે. સંસ્થાનું ઉત્પાદન જોવા માટે દરેક શાખાનું નેતૃત્વ મહિલા સંચાલીકા કરે છે. હાલમાં દેશના ૧૬ રાજ્યોમાં તેની ૮૩ શાખાઓ અને ૨૭ વિભાગો છે અને તે સમગ્ર ભારતમાં લગભગ ૪૫,૦૦૦ બહેન સભ્યોને સ્વ-રોજગાર આપે છે. 'લિજ્જત' દર વર્ષે ૧૦મા અને ૧૨મા ધોરણની પરીક્ષામાં પાસ આઉટ થનાર બહેન સભ્યોના બાળકોને શિષ્યવૃત્તિ આપે છે જેથી મહિલા સભ્યો તેમના બાળકોને શિક્ષણ માટે પ્રોત્સાહિત કરી શકે. સંસ્થાએ ક્યારેય કોઈ ક્વાર્ટરમાંથી કોઈ ચેરિટી, દાન, ભેટ અથવા અનુદાન સ્વીકાર્યું નથી. તેનાથી વિપરિત સભ્યો સમયાંતરે સારા હેતુઓ માટે સામૂહિક રીતે દાન કરે છે, તેમની શક્તિમાં જે કંઈ પણ છે જેમ કે દેશમાં ચિંચોલી-જોગન (લાતુર) અને ભુજપુર, કચ્છ વગેરેના ભૂકંપ અસરગ્રસ્ત પરિવારો માટે મકાનો બાંધવા અને પૂર અસરગ્રસ્ત લોકોને આર્થિક સહાય પૂરી પાડવી.^૩

પ્રીતિ અદાણી

પ્રીતિ ગૌતમ અદાણી (જન્મ: ૧૯૬૫) એક ભારતીય દાનવીર અને અદાણી ફાઉન્ડેશનના અધ્યક્ષા છે. તેઓ ગુજરાત રાજ્યના અગ્રણી મહિલા શિક્ષણશાસ્ત્રીઓમાંના એક છે. પ્રીતિ અદાણીનો જન્મ ૧૯૬૫માં મુંબઈમાં એક ગુજરાતી કુટુંબમાં થયો હતો. તેમણે ગવર્નમેંટ ડેન્ટલ કોલેજ, અમદાવાદમાંથી ડેન્ટલ સર્જરીમાં (દંત ચિકિત્સા) સ્નાતકની પદવી મેળવી. તેમણે અદાણી ગ્રુપના ચેરમેન ગૌતમ અદાણી સાથે લગ્ન કર્યા છે. કારકિર્દીના પ્રારંભિક દિવસો દરમિયાન, તેમણે દંત ચિકિત્સક તરીકે વ્યવસાયની શરૂઆત કરી હતી. વર્ષ ૧૯૯૬માં, તેમને અદાણી ફાઉન્ડેશનના અધ્યક્ષ તરીકે નિયુક્ત કરવામાં આવ્યા હતા. ઈ. સ. ૨૦૦૧ માં, ભુજ ભૂકંપ પછી, તેમણે મુન્દ્રામાં અદાણી ડી.એ.વી. શાળા શરૂ કરી. પછીથી શાળાનું નામ બદલીને અદાણી પબ્લિક સ્કૂલ રાખવામાં આવ્યું. જૂન ૨૦૦૯ માં, તેમણે અને તેમના પતિએ ભદ્રેસર (મુંદ્રા નજીક) અને અમદાવાદમાં અદાણી વિદ્યા મંદિરની સ્થાપના કરી. અદાણી વિદ્યા મંદિર વંચિત બાળકોને મફત ઉચ્ચતર માધ્યમિક શિક્ષણ આપે છે. તેમના નેતૃત્વમાં, અદાણી જૂથનું ૨૦૧૮-૧૯નું સી.એસ.આર. બજેટ એક વર્ષમાં રૂ. ૯૫ કરોડથી વધીને ૧૨૮ કરોડ રૂપિયા થયું. તેઓને એફ. આઈ. સી. સી. આઈ. - ફ્લો મહિલા દાનવીર એવોર્ડ (૨૦૧૦-૧૧) તથા ગુજરાત લો સોસાયટી યુનિવર્સિટી દ્વારા માનદ ડોક્ટરેટ પદવી જેવા પુરસ્કારો પ્રાપ્ત થયેલ છે.*

ઈલા રમેશ ભટ્ટ

ઈલા રમેશ ભટ્ટ (૭ સપ્ટેમ્બર ૧૯૩૩ - ૨ નવેમ્બર ૨૦૨૨) એક સહકારી ચળવળના માર્ગદર્શક, સામાજિક કાર્યકર, ગાંધીવાદી વ્યક્તિ હતા. તેમણે ૧૯૭૨માં સ્વાશ્રયી મહિલા સેવા સંઘ (સેવા) નામની સંસ્થા સ્થાપી અને ૧૯૭૨થી ૧૯૯૬ સુધી તેના જનરલ સેક્રેટરી પદે રહ્યા. તેઓ કાયદાના સ્નાતક છે અને આંતરરાષ્ટ્રીય મજૂર તથા સ્ત્રીઓને લાગતા વિષયો, લઘુ ધિરાણ અને સહકારી મંડળ સંલગ્ન ચળવળો સાથે જોડાયાં હતાં. તેમને રેમન મેગ્સેસે એવોર્ડ

(૧૯૭૭), રાઈટ લાઈવલીહુડ પુરસ્કાર અને પદ્મભૂષણ (૧૯૮૬) જેવા પુરસ્કારો મળ્યા હતા. તેમનો જન્મ અમદાવાદ થયો હતો. તેમના પિતા સુમંતરાય ભટ્ટ સફળ વકીલ હતા અને તેમની માતા વનલીલા વ્યાસ સ્ત્રીઓની ચળવળમાં સક્રિય હતા. અને તેઓ કમલાદેવી ચટ્ટોપાધ્યાય દ્વારા સંસ્થાપિત ઓલ ઇન્ડિયા વુમન્સ કોન્ફરેન્સના સેક્રેટરી હતાં. તેઓ ત્રણ પુત્રીમાં બીજા ક્રમે હતાં. તેમનું બાળપણ સુરતમાં વીત્યું. અહીં ૧૯૪૦ થી ૧૯૪૮ દરમિયાન તેમણે સાર્વજનિક ગર્લ્સ હાઈસ્કૂલમાં અભ્યાસ કર્યો. ૧૯૫૨માં તેમણે દક્ષિણ ગુજરાત યુનિવર્સિટી સંલગ્ન એમ. ટી. બી. કોલેજમાંથી અંગ્રેજી વિષયમાં બી. એ. (વિનયન સ્નાતક)ની પદવી મેળવી. સ્નાતક થયા બાદ તેમણે અમદાવાદની સર એલ. એ. શાહ લો કોલેજમાં પ્રવેશ મેળવ્યો. ૧૯૫૪માં હિંદુ કાયદા પર તેમના કાર્ય માટે સુવર્ણ ચંદ્રક સાથે તેમણે કાયદામાં સ્નાતકની પદવી મેળવી. તેમણે તેમની કારકીર્દીની શરૂઆતમાં મુંબઈની એસ. એન. ડી. ટી. વુમન્સ યુનિવર્સિટીમાં અંગ્રેજી શીખવવાથી કરી. ૧૯૫૫માં તેઓ અમદાવાદની મિલ મજૂર સંઘ (ટેક્સટાઈલ લેબર એસોશિએશન - TLA)માં જોડાયાં.^{૧૨} વિશ્વના અમુક કપરા પ્રશ્નોને હલ કરવા પોતાના જ્ઞાન તથા અનુભવનો લાભ વિશ્વને મળે એવા આશયથી ૧૮ જુલાઈ ૨૦૦૭ના દિવસે નેલ્સન મંડેલા, વાર્કા માકેલ અને ડેસમન્ડ ટુટુએ એક સભા ગોઠવી. નેલ્સન મેન્ડેલાએ તેને નવું જૂથ તરીકે સ્થાપવાની ઘોષણા કરી જે ધ એલર્સ તરીકે ઓળખાઈ. આ સંસ્થા સ્ત્રી સમાનતા અને બાળવિવાહ અંગે જાગૃતિ ફેલાવવાનું કાર્ય કરે છે જેમાં ઈલા ભટ્ટ ભાગ ભજવતાં હતાં. ૨૦૧૨ના ફેબ્રુઆરી માસમાં તેમણે ધ એલર્સના સભ્યો ડેસમન્ડ ટુટુ, ગ્રોહાર્લેમ બુટાલેન્ડ અને મેરી રોબીન્સન સાથે બિહારનો પ્રવાસ કર્યો. અહીં તેમણે જાગૃતિ નામની બાળવિવાહને લગતી કાર્ય કરતી સંસ્થાની સમીક્ષા કરી. જૂન ૨૦૦૧માં તેમન હાવર્ડ યુનિવર્સિટી દ્વારા માનવતા માટેની ડોક્ટરેટની પદવી આપવામાં આવી. તેજ પદવી તેમને ૨૦૧૨માં જ્યોર્જટાઉન યુનિવર્સિટીએ પણ આપી. યુનિવર્સિટી લીબ્રેરી બ્રક્સેલ્સ - બેલ્જિયમએ તેમને પણ ડોક્ટરેટની પદવી આપી. તેઓ ચેલ અને નાતાલ યુનિવર્સિટીની ડોક્ટરેટની પદવીઓ ધરાવે

છે. ૧૯૮૫માં તેમને ભારત સરકારે પદ્મશ્રી એનાયત કર્યો અને ૧૯૮૬માં તેમને પદ્મભૂષણથી સન્માનિત કરવામાં આવ્યા. ૧૯૭૭માં સમુદાય નેતૃત્વ માટે તેમને રેમોન મેઝેસે પુરસ્કાર મળ્યો અને ૧૯૮૪માં રાઈટ લાઈવલીહુડ એવોર્ડ મળ્યો. ભારતમાં ગરીબ સ્ત્રીઓના સશક્તિકરણ માટે તેમને ઈ.સ. ૨૦૧૦માં નીવાનો શાંતિ પુરસ્કાર મળ્યો. નવેમ્બર ૨૦૧૦માં યુ. એસ.ના સેક્રેટરી ઓફ સ્ટેટ હિલેરી ક્લિંટન દ્વારા, ૧૦ લાખ જેટલી ગરીબ ભારતીય મહિલાઓના જીવનસ્તરને સુધારવા અને સ્વાતંત્ર્ય લાવવા બદલ તેમને ઝોબલ ફેરનેસ એવોર્ડ આપવામાં આવ્યો.^{૧૩} સમાજની સ્ત્રીઓના ઉત્થાન માટે તેમણે કરેલા કાર્યો બદલ તેમને ૨૭ મે ૨૦૧૧ના દિવસે (રેડ ક્લિક ડે) પ્રતિષ્ઠિત રેડક્લિક પદક આપવામાં આવ્યું. સ્ત્રીઓના સશક્તિકરણ અને સ્વાઅતંત્ર્ય માટે તેમણે જીવનભર કરેલા કાર્યો બદલ તેમને ૨૦૧૧માં ઈંદિરા ગાંધી શાંતિ પુરસ્કાર આપવામાં આવ્યો. જૂન ૨૦૧૨માં યુ. એસ.ના સેક્રેટરી ઓફ સ્ટેટ હિલેરી ક્લિંટને તેમને પોતાના આદર્શ ગણાવ્યા. તેમણે કહ્યું, "વિશ્વમાં ઘણાં વીરો અને વીરાંગનાઓ છે અને ઈલા ભટ્ટ તેમાંના એક છે જેમણે ભારતમાં ઘણાં વર્ષો પૂર્વે સ્વાશ્રયી મહિલા સેવા સંઘ (સેવા) ચાલુ કર્યું. તેમના દ્વારા લખેલ અંગ્રેજી પુસ્તકો ગુજરાતી, ઉર્દૂ તથા હિન્દીમાં અનુવાદિત થયેલ છે, હાલમાં તે તમિળ અને ફ્રેંચમાં પણ અનુવાદિત થઈ રહેલ છે."^{૧૪}

ફાતમા બેગમ

ફાતમા બેગમ (૧૯૯૨-૧૯૯૩) એક ભારતીય અભિનેત્રી, દિગ્દર્શિકા અને પટકથા લેખિકા હતા. તેમને પ્રાયઃ ભારતીય સિનેમાની પ્રથમ મહિલા ફિલ્મ નિર્દેશિકા ગણવામાં આવે છે. ચાર વર્ષના સમય ગાળામાં, તેમણે ઘણી ફિલ્મો લખી, નિર્માણ કરી અને નિર્દેશન કર્યું. તેમણે પોતાનું પ્રોડક્શન હાઉસ ફાતમા ફિલ્મ્સ શરૂ કર્યું, જે પાછળથી વિક્ટોરિયા-ફાતમા ફિલ્મ્સ બની અને ૧૯૨૬માં તેમણે તેમની પ્રથમ ફિલ્મ બુલબુલ-એ-પરિસ્તાનનું નિર્દેશન કર્યું. તેઓ ૧૯૯૨-૧૯૯૩ સુધી જીવ્યા અને તેમને ત્રણ બાળકો હતા. તેમણે પોતાની કારકિર્દીની શરૂઆત ઉર્દૂ મંચ પરથી કરી હતી. બાદમાં તેઓ ફિલ્મો તરફ વળ્યા અને અર્દેશિર ઈરાનીની મૂંગી ફિલ્મ વીર અભિમન્યુ (૧૯૨૨) થી ફિલ્મી કારકિર્દી

આરંભી. તે સમયે પુરુષો જ નાટકો અને ફિલ્મોમાં મહિલાઓની ભૂમિકા ભજવતા, તેથી તેઓ એક જાણીતા મહિલા સુપરસ્ટાર બન્યા. ફાતમા બેગમ ગોરી ત્વચા ધરાવતા હતા અને સ્કીન પરની સેપિયા / બ્લેક એન્ડ વ્હાઇટ ઇમેજને અનુરૂપ ડાર્ક મેક-અપ લગાવતા હતા. તે સમયે મોટાભાગની ભૂમિકાઓ માટે નાયકો તેમજ નાયિકાઓ માટે વિગની જરૂર રહેતી. ઈ. સ. ૧૯૨૬માં, તેમણે ફાતમા ફિલ્મ્સની સ્થાપના કરી જે પાછળથી ૧૯૨૮માં વિક્ટોરિયા-ફાતમા ફિલ્મ્સ તરીકે જાણીતી બની.^{૧૬} તેઓ કાલ્પનિક સિનેમાના નિર્માણમાં અગ્રણી બન્યા. જ્યાં તેમણે પ્રારંભિક ટ્રીક ફોટોગ્રાફી વાપરી વિશેષ અસરો ઉપજાવી હતી. તેઓ કોહિનૂર સ્ટુડિયો અને શાહી સ્ટુડિયોના અભિનેત્રી હતા, જ્યારે ફાતમા ફિલ્મ્સ હેઠળ તેઓ પોતાની ફિલ્મોમાં લેખન, દિગ્દર્શન, નિર્માણ સાથે અભિનય પણ કરતા હતા. બેગમ તેમની ૧૯૨૬ ની ફિલ્મ બુલબુલ-એ-પરિસ્તાનથી ભારતીય સિનેમાની પ્રથમ મહિલા નિર્દેશક બન્યા.^{૧૭} હાલમાં આ ફિલ્મની કોઈ પ્રિન્ટ અસ્તિત્વમાં નથી, વધારે બજેટ ધરાવતી આ ફિલ્મને ઘણી ખાસ અસરો દર્શાવતી કાલ્પનિક ફિલ્મ તરીકે વર્ણવવામાં આવી છે. જો આ સાચું હોય તો, આ ફિલ્મ બેગમને જ્યોર્જ મેલીઝ જેવા કાલ્પનિક સિનેમાના પ્રારંભિક અગ્રણીઓમાં સ્થાન આપે છે. પોતાની ફિલ્મોના નિર્માણ અને અભિનયનું કાર્ય ચાલુ રાખવા સાથે તેમણે કોહિનૂર સ્ટુડિયો અને શાહી સ્ટુડિયો માટે, ૧૯૩૮ સુધી, તેમની છેલ્લી ફિલ્મ, દુનિયા ક્યા હૈ માં કામ કર્યું. તેમણે બીજી ઘણી ફિલ્મોનું નિર્દેશન કર્યું, ૧૯૨૯ ની ગોડેસ ઓફ લક એ તેમની અંતિમ દિગ્દર્શીત ફિલ્મ હતી.^{૧૮}

અમૃતા એચ. પટેલ

અમૃતા પટેલ સહકારી ડેરી ક્ષેત્ર સાથે સંકળાયેલા ભારતીય ઉદ્યોગપતિ અને પર્યાવરણવાદી છે. તેમણે ૧૯૯૮ થી ૨૦૧૪ સુધી નેશનલ ડેરી ડેવલપમેન્ટ બોર્ડ (એનડીડીબી)નું નેતૃત્વ કર્યું હતું, ઉપરાંત ફાઉન્ડેશન ફોર ઇકોલોજીકલ સિક્યુરિટીના અધ્યક્ષપદે પણ રહ્યા હતા. તેણીને ૨૦૦૧ના વર્ષમાં પદ્મભૂષણ પુરસ્કાર એનાયત કરવામાં આવ્યો હતો. તેણીનો જન્મ ૧૩ નવેમ્બર ૧૯૪૩ના દિવસે દિલ્હી ખાતે થયો હતો. તેમના પિતા એચ. એમ.

પટેલ (હિરુભાઈ) ભારતના ભૂતપૂર્વ નાણામંત્રી હતા. તેમની માતાનું નામ સવિતાબેન હતું. પિતાની નિવૃત્તિ બાદ તેઓ પરિવાર સાથે આણંદ સ્થાયી થયા. તેમણે ઉચ્ચ શિક્ષણ મુંબઈથી લીધું. તથા બેચલર ઓફ વેટરનરી સાયન્સ એન્ડ એનિમલ હસબન્ડરીની પદવી મેળવી. ઈ.સ. ૧૯૬૫માં આણંદ ખાતે 'અમૂલ'માં પશુ આહાર વિભાગમાં જોડાયાં. વર્ષ ૧૯૬૫થી અમૂલ સાથે જોડાયા બાદ ઉત્તરોત્તર પ્રગતિ મેળવી વર્ષ ૨૦૦૫માં નેશનલ ડેરી ડેવલપમેન્ટ બોર્ડના ચેરપર્સન બન્યાં.^{૧૦} આ ઉપરાંત પણ રાષ્ટ્રીય તેમજ આંતરરાષ્ટ્રીય ફલક પર પોતાની જવાબદારીઓ નિભાવી છે. તેઓ દિલ્હીની મધર ડેરીના સંચાલકમંડળના ચેરપર્સન, ઈન્ડિયન નેશનલ કમિટી ઓફ ધ ઈન્ટરનેશનલ ડેરી ફેડરેશનના પ્રમુખ, મુંબઈના સોરાબજી ટાટા ટ્રસ્ટના ટ્રસ્ટી, હિમાચલ પ્રદેશ સરકારના આયોજનપંચના સભ્ય રહી ચૂક્યાં છે. ડેરી ક્ષેત્રના વ્યવસ્થાપન, સંચાલન અને વિકાસમાં તેણીના યોગદાન બદલ તેમને ઈન્ટરનેશનલ ડેરી પર્સન, ઈન્ડિયન ડેરી એસોસિયેશનની ફેલોશીપ, કૃષિમિત્ર એવોર્ડ, ફાઉન્ડેશન નેશનલ એવોર્ડ, સહકારિતા બંધુ એવોર્ડ, ડૉ. નોર્મન બોરલાંગ એવોર્ડ, અમેરિકા દ્વારા ઈન્ટરનેશનલ પર્સન ઓફ ધ ઈયર એવોર્ડ, વિમેન્સ એચિવમેન્ટ એવોર્ડ, તથા ભારત સરકાર દ્વારા પદ્મભૂષણ પુરસ્કાર પુરસ્કાર પ્રાપ્ત થયેલ છે.^{૧૧} આ ઉપરાંત દેશની ચાર યુનિવર્સિટી દ્વારા માનદ ડૉક્ટરેટની પદવી અને દિલ્હી વીમેન્સ લીગ દ્વારા લાઈફટાઈમ એચિવમેન્ટ એવોર્ડ પણ આપવામાં આવ્યો છે.^{૧૨}

આ ઉપરાંત ભૈરવી દેસાઈ, હિના શાહ, કલ્પના શાહ, ઇન્દુમતિ શેઠ, પ્રીતિ પટેલ, તૃપ્તિ જૈન, ગીતા સોલંકી, પુનમ કૌશિક, જશુબેન, વગેરે... આ સૂચિ ખૂબ જ લાંબી છે.^{૧૩}

સમાપન

ગુજરાતને હંમેશા ઉદ્યોગસાહસિક રાજ્ય તરીકે ઓળખવામાં આવે છે જ્યાં લોકોમાં વ્યાપાર કરવાની જન્મજાત કુશળતા હોય છે. રાજ્યની મહિલાઓ પણ

સફળ ઉદ્યોગસાહસિક તરીકે પોતાને પ્રસ્થાપિત કરવામાં ઘણી આગળ છે. મહિલાઓ જ્યારે વ્યવસાયની દુનિયામાં સાહસ કરે છે ત્યારે સામાન્ય રીતે તેઓને ઘણી મુશ્કેલીઓનો સામનો કરવો પડે છે પરંતુ તેવા અવરોધો હોવા છતાં ગુજરાતની મહિલાઓએ સદીઓથી પોતાનું આગવું સ્થાન સમાજમાં સ્થાપિત કર્યું છે. મહિલાઓને લગતા મુદ્દાઓને સમજીને, ગુજરાત રાજ્ય, અનુકૂળ નીતિઓ, સહાયક સંસ્થાઓ અને બિઝનેસ ઇન્ક્યુબેટર્સના એકીકરણ સાથે સક્ષમ મહિલા સહાયક પ્રણાલીને પણ વિસ્તારી રહ્યું છે. ગુજરાત મહિલા આર્થિક વિકાસ નિગમ લિ., સરકાર ગુજરાત મહિલાઓમાં ઉદ્યોગસાહસિક ક્ષમતા અને વ્યવસાયિક સંસાધનોનો વિકાસ કરીને મહિલા ઉદ્યોગસાહસિકતાને પ્રોત્સાહિત કરવાના એજન્ડાને એન્ટરપ્રાઇઝ સર્જન દ્વારા આવક પેદા કરવા માટે ખંતપૂર્વક અનુસરી રહ્યું છે.

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સ્ત્રી સશક્તિકરણ - એક વિહંગાલોકન

જિજ્ઞેશકુમાર એમ. મકવાણા

પ્રાસ્તાવિક

સ્ત્રી એ સમાજનું એક અનિવાર્ય વિશિષ્ટ અંગ છે, સ્ત્રી વિના સમાજ અધૂરો છે, સાથે સાથે સ્ત્રી અને પુરુષ એકબીજાના પુરક છે. બંનેના સંયોગથી કુટુંબની રચના થાય છે. સ્ત્રી એ સમગ્ર સમષ્ટિનાં વિકાસનો આધાર છે. અહીં વાત મહિલા સશક્તિકરણની છે. પણ, આ માર્ગમાં અવરોધો ઘણા છે. પ્રાચીનકાળમાં સતી પ્રથા, દેવદાસી પ્રથા, બાળલગ્ન, વિધવા પુનર્લગ્નનો વિરોધ, દીકરીને દૂધ પીતી કરવાનો રીવાજ, દીકરીને દીકરા કરતા ઉછેરમાં ભેદભાવ. પરદા પ્રથા, જ્ઞાતિના ભેદભાવ ભર્યા ચુસ્ત નિયમો જેવા વાતાવરણમાં સ્ત્રીઓના પગમાં બેડીઓ બંધાયેલી હતી.

આજના સામાજિક વાતાવરણમાં સ્ત્રીને પુરુષથી તો ઉતરતી ગણવામાં આવે છે સાથે સાથે સ્ત્રી સાસુ, જેઠાણી, દેરાણી કે નણંદ આ બધા પાત્રોથી સમાજમાં આજે પણ સ્ત્રી માનસિક કે શારીરિક અત્યાચારનો ભોગ બનતી હોય છે. સમાજમાં સ્ત્રીઓની માનસિકતાનાં કારણે ઘણીવાર સ્ત્રી જ સ્ત્રીની દુશ્મન બનતી હોય છે.

સામાજિક રીવાજો, રૂઢિઓ અને પરંપરાઓએ નારીના વિકાસની દિશામાં મુશ્કેલી ઉભી કરી છે. આજના સમયમાં ચારેય દિશાઓમાંથી મહિલા સશક્તિકરણની માંગ ઉઠી છે, ત્યારે સમાજે પણ નારી પ્રત્યેનો પોતાનો સદ્ભાવ અને મહિલા વિકાસના પ્રયત્નોને વધારે ઉજાગર કરવાની જરૂરીયાત એટલા માટે છે કે ભૂતકાળમાં ક્યારેક ને ક્યારેક સ્ત્રીઓનું અસ્તિત્વ જોખમાયું હતું.

સાહિત્ય સમિક્ષા

નાયક અને મહંતા, ૨૦૦૮, આ અભ્યાસમાં મહિલા સશક્તિકરણનાં આ અભ્યાસમાં જણાવવામાં આવે છે કે મહિલા સશક્ત છે પણ તેમનો દરજ્જો પુરુષ કરતા નીચે આંકવામાં આવે છે. અડધાથી વધારે મહિલા માને છે કે એક યા બીજા વ્યાજબી કારણસર પત્નીની મારપીટ વ્યાજબી છે. મહિલા કમાતી હોય ત્યારે તેમની કમાણી કેવી રીતે ખર્ચવી તે અંગે મહિલાને પૂછવામાં આવતું નથી એટલે ખર્ચની અંતિમ માહિતી મહિલાને હોતી નથી. શહેરી મહિલા કરતા ગ્રામીણ મહિલાઓ ઘરેલું હિંસાનો શિકાર વધારે બનતી હોય છે. રાજકીય ભાગીદારીમાં પણ લિંગ તફાવત પ્રવર્તે છે. માટે શિક્ષા અને રોજગાર જ મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ માટેના સક્ષમ પરિબલો છે.

શ્રીવાસ્તવ, ૨૦૦૯, આ પેપરમાં જણાવવામાં આવ્યું છે કે લિંગ સમાનતા એ પ્રથમ અને અગ્રણી માનવ અધિકાર છે. મહિલાઓને ડર રાખ્યા વિના ગૌરવથી જીવવાનો અધિકાર છે. દેશનો વિકાસ કરવા મહિલાનું સશક્તિકરણ કરવું જરૂરી છે. સશક્ત મહિલાઓ પરિવારોમાં અને સમુદાયોમાં સ્વાસ્થ્ય અને ઉત્પાદકતામાં તથા નવી પેઢીના વિકાસ માટે ખુબજ અગત્યનો ફાળો આપે છે. છતાં મહિલાઓ સામે ભેદભાવ -લિંગ આધારિત હિંસા, આર્થિક ભેદભાવ તેમજ રૂઢીચુસ્ત અંધશ્રદ્ધાઓ અસમાનતાનું સૌથી મોટું વ્યાપક સ્વરૂપ છે.

સત્યબામા, ૨૦૧૦, તાજેતરમાં મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ એ એક મહત્વનો મુદ્દો બનીને ઉભરી રહ્યો છે. મહિલાઓનું સશક્તિકરણ દેશની પ્રગતિ સાથે જોડવામાં આવે છે. તેથી દેશમાં ચિંતકોનાં મતે સશક્તિકરણ અગત્યનું છે. ગ્રામીણ અને શહેરી મહિલાઓની આર્થિક અને ગ્રામીણ મહિલાઓની આર્થિક સ્વતંત્રતા માટે સ્વસહાય જૂથોએ માર્ગ મોકળો કર્યો છે. “મહિલાઓનું આર્થિક સશક્તિકરણ કુટુંબ

અને સમુદાયને વિકાસ તરફ દોરી ગયું” આ નિવેદન તમિલનાડુનાં એક સામુહિક માઈક્રો એન્ટરપ્રિન્યોરશીપ દ્વારા સાબિત થયું છે.

બબ્બર, ૨૦૨૨, આ અભ્યાસમાં લેખવામાં આવ્યું છે કે મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ એ નવો મુદો નથી આ એક વર્ષો જૂનો મુદો છે. દેશમાં મહિલાઓની સ્થિતિ બરાબર નથી, તેમને ઘણા પડકારોનો સામનો કરવો પડે છે અને તેમની આર્થિક સ્થિતિ વિષે પણ જાણવાનો પ્રયત્ન કરવામાં આવ્યો છે. મહિલા અત્યાચાર સામેના કાયદાઓનું જ્ઞાન જ વર્તમાન યુગમાં મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ માટે ખૂબ ઉપયોગી છે. સશક્તિકરણ આધુનિક વિશ્વની જરૂરિયાત છે, જાતિ સામેના અત્યાચાર, સ્ત્રી અને પુરુષ વચ્ચેની અસમાનતા, ઘરેલું હિંસા, જાતીય સતામણી અને નિરક્ષરતા મુખ્ય સમસ્યા છે જેને દૂર કરવી આવશ્યક છે. સરકાર અને સમાજ સુધારકો દ્વારા અનેક પ્રયાસો હાથ ધરવામાં આવ્યા હોવા છતાં, સમાજમાં મહિલાઓની સ્થિતિ સંતોષકારક નથી. તેવો નિષ્કર્ષ આ અભ્યાસમાં નીકળે છે.

પ્રિયદર્શની, ૨૦૧૬, આ લેખમાં મહિલાઓ તેમના રાજિંદા જીવનમાં જે સમસ્યાઓનો સામનો કરી રહી છે, તથા સરકારે દેશને સુવિકસિત રાષ્ટ્ર બનાવવા માટે સ્ટાર્ટ-અપ ઇન્ડિયા, મેઇક ઇન ઇન્ડિયાની શરૂઆત કરી તેના અવલોકન ઉપર આધારિત છે, તથા ભારતમાં મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ માટે ઉપલબ્ધ યોજનાઓ અને તમિલનાડુ રાજ્યમાં સફળતાપૂર્વક ચાલી રહેલ સ્વસહાય જૂથોની વૃદ્ધિ નો અભ્યાસ કરવામાં આવ્યો છે.

મોહંતી, ૨૦૦૬, આ લેખમાં સ્વસહાય જૂથો દ્વારા મહિલાઓની જરૂરિયાતોને પોતાની બચત દ્વારા પૂરી કરવાનો પ્રયત્ન કરવામાં આવે છે મહિલા વિકાસમાં સામાજિક, આર્થિક પરિસ્થિતિ તથા પૂર્વગ્રહો ખૂબ જ અગત્યની ભૂમિકા ભજવે છે. સ્વસહાય જૂથોની રચના થઈ જાય પણ જો ક્ષમતા વર્ધન અને યોગ્ય દિશા સૂચન મળી રહે તો જ તેનો વિકાસ શક્ય છે તેવા તારણ આ અભ્યાસમાંથી તારવી શકાય છે.

શોભારાણી, ૨૦૨૧, મહિલા સશક્તિકરણએ મહિલાની આર્થિક, સામાજિક અને રાજકીય સ્થિતિના ઉત્થાનની પ્રક્રિયા છે, તમામ પ્રકારે થતી હિંસા સામે રક્ષણ આપવાની પ્રક્રિયા છે, માટે સમાજમાં મહિલાઓ ભય વિના શ્વાસ લઈ શકે તેવું વાતાવરણ સર્જવાનું કામ કરવાનું છે, આપના દેશ કરતા પશ્ચિમી દેશોમાં મહિલાઓને વધારે સારા અધિકારો મળેલા છે. ભારતમાં આજે પણ જાતીય વિકલાંગતા અને અસમાનતા જોવા મળે છે.

સ્ત્રી સશક્તિકરણનાં હેતુઓ

- આજના પુરુષપ્રધાન સમાજમાં મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ પ્રત્યે જાગૃકતા ફેલાવવી.
- મહિલાઓમાં પોતાનામાં રહેલી સુષુપ્ત શક્તિઓથી અવગત કરાવી, તે શક્તિઓને બહાર લાવવા પ્રેરણા પૂરી પાડવી.
- મહિલાઓને સમાનતાનાં હક્કો વિષે શિક્ષિત કરી પરિવાર અને સમાજમાં સકારાત્મક વિકાસમાં ભાગીદાર બનવા પ્રોત્સાહિત કરવી.

સ્ત્રી સશક્તિકરણ ઉપર વિદ્વાનોના અવતરણો

“હું સ્ત્રીઓના હક્કોની બાબતમાં હઠધર્મી છું. મારા અભિપ્રાયમાં તેણીને એવી કોઈપણ કાનૂની અયોગ્યતા ન અવરોધે જે પુરુષોને ન નડતી હોય. સંપૂર્ણ સમાનતાના આધારે જ મારે દિકરાઓ તથા દિકરીઓ સાથે વ્યવહાર કરવો જોઈએ. એક દિકરીઓનાં ભાગ એક દિકરાના ભાગ જેટલો જ સમાન હોવો જોઈએ.” – મહાત્મા ગાંધીજી

“સારા રાષ્ટ્ર માટે મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ એ પૂર્વ શરત છે” -ભારતના પૂર્વ રાષ્ટ્રપતિ ડૉ એ.પી.જે .અબ્દુલ કલામ

“સ્રી તો જીવન આપવા વાળી શક્તિ છે, માત્ર આબાદી વધારવાનું ઉપકરણ નથી, સ્રી તો સ્વયં પ્રકૃતિ છે” – સ્વતંત્ર ભારતના પ્રથમ વડાપ્રધાન પંડિત જવાહરલાલ નહેરુ

સારી ઉન્નતિની પૂંજી જ સ્રીની ઉન્નતિમાં છે, સ્રી જો આ સમજી લે તો સ્વયમને અબલા નાં કહે, એ જ તો શક્તિરૂપ છે, માતા વિના કયો પુરુષ પૃથ્વી પર પેદા થયો” - લોખંડી પુરુષ સરદાર વલ્લભભાઈ પટેલ

પ્રધાનમંત્રી શ્રી નરેન્દ્ર મોદીએ એક સ્વતંત્રતા દિવસ પર લાલ કિલ્લાની પ્રાચીર પરથી રાષ્ટ્રજોગ સંદેશ આપતા જણાવ્યું હતું કે “ જ્યારે મહિલાઓ આર્થિક રીતે સશક્ત બને છે ત્યારે તે સામાજિક પરિવર્તનની બાંધધરી આપનાર અને કસ્ટોડીયન બને છે.”

“અવાજ ઉઠાવતી સ્રી, વ્યાખ્યા દ્વારા, એક મજબૂત સ્રી છે.” - મેલિન્ડા ગેટ્સ, સમાજ સેવિકા

“ત્યાં કોઈ દરવાજો નથી, કોઈ તાળું નથી, કોઈ બોલ્ટ નથી કે જેનાથી તમે મારા મનની સ્વતંત્રતા પર સેટ કરી શકો.” - વર્જિનિયા વુલ્ફ, લેખક

“મહિલાઓ હંમેશા કહેતી હોય છે કે, ‘પુરુષો જે કરી શકે તે અમે કરી શકીએ છીએ.’ પરંતુ પુરુષો કહેતા હોવા જોઈએ, ‘અમે કંઈ પણ કરી શકીએ છીએ જે સ્રીઓ કરી શકે છે” - ઝોરિયા સ્ટેનેમ, પત્રકાર

“એક સ્રી વિશે કંઈક વિશેષ છે, જે પુરુષની દુનિયામાં પ્રભુત્વ ધરાવે છે. આના જવાબ માટે ક્યારેય ના બોલવા માટે ચોક્કસ કૃપા, તાકાત, બુદ્ધિ, નિર્ભયતા અને ચેતાની જરૂર છે” - રીહાન્ના, ગાયિકા અને બિઝનેસવુમન

સ્રી વિશેની સમજણ

આજની યુવા મહિલાઓ કે જેમના ઉપર જૂના સંસ્કારોનો પ્રભાવ નથી તેમને એક પ્રશ્ન ચોક્કસ થતો હશે કે સ્રી મોટી કે પુરુષ મોટો? આ જગતમાં ચાલી

રહેલી ચર્ચા છે. પરિસ્થિતિજન્ય વાદવિવાદ ચાલે છે. પણ પૌરાણિક ચાલી આવતી સમજણ મુજબ ભગવાને આ આખી સૃષ્ટિનું નિર્માણ કર્યું તેમાં પશુસૃષ્ટિનું નિર્માણ કર્યું પછી માનવસૃષ્ટિનું નિર્માણ કર્યું, આ માનવસૃષ્ટિમાં પણ સર્વપ્રથમ પુરુષનું નિર્માણ પછી સ્ત્રીનું નિર્માણ કર્યું તેથી સ્ત્રી શ્રેષ્ઠ ગણાઈ. પશ્ચિમનાં દેશોમાં પણ આ બહુ મોટો વિવાદ છે કે પહેલા “આદમ” પછી “ઈવ” ની ઉત્પત્તિ થઈ “આદમ” પછી “ઈવ” થઈ તેથી “ઈવ” શ્રેષ્ઠ ગણાઈ. જે પછીનું મોડેલ હોય તે ઉત્કૃષ્ટ હોય છે, પહેલાનાં મોડેલની બધીજ ભૂલો તેમાં સુધારી લેવામાં આવે છે. આથી latest model એ સ્ત્રી છે માટે તેને up to date કહી શકાય.

વૈદીકોની ભાવના છે કે તદેતત અર્ધદ્વિદલં ભવતિ સ્ત્રી -પુરુષ અર્ધદ્વિદલ છે તેથી કોઈ મોટું અને કોઈ નાનું નહિ. અંગ્રેજીમાં પણ પત્નીને batter half કહેવાય છે એટલે કે સ્ત્રીને પુરુષથી શ્રેષ્ઠ દેખાડવાનો પ્રયત્ન દેખાય છે. આપણી સંસ્કૃતિમાં પત્નીને અર્ધાગિની કહે છે એટલે કે અડધું અંગ એટલે કે બંને ગુડ-સારા છે. ક્રિશ્ચિયન લગ્ન વિધિમાં પણ સ્ત્રીને પુરુષની પાંસળી લઈને તેનું સર્જન કર્યું છે તેવી માન્યતા માનવામાં આવે છે, હિંદુ ધર્મમાં ભગવાન શંકરનું એક અર્ધનારીશ્વર-શિવશક્તિ સ્વરૂપની આરાધના કરવામાં આવે છે. આમ, સ્ત્રી અને પુરુષ એકબીજાના પુરક છે. તારીખ: ૨૯/૧૨/૧૯૭૩ માં નાસિકમાં પ.પૂ.પાંડુરંગ શાસ્ત્રીજી આઠવલેજીએ પોતાના પ્રવચનમાં સ્ત્રીને ભગવાનની એક ઉત્કૃષ્ટ કલાકૃતિ ગણાવી છે.

ગુજરાતી કહેવતોમાં પણ નારીશક્તિની વાત ધબકે છે. જેમકે..

‘માં તે માં બીજા બધા વગડાના વા’

‘પોતે ભીનામાં સૂવે અને બાળકોને કોરામાં સુવડાવે’

‘એક માતા સો શિક્ષક સમાન છે.’

‘દિકરો ભણે તો એક ફૂળ તારે અને દિકરી ભણે તો બે ફૂળ તારે’

મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ

મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ શબ્દમાં સ્ત્રી અને સશક્તિકરણ એટલે કે સ્ત્રીને મજબૂત બનાવવી , સશક્તિકરણ શબ્દમાં સ એટલે સર્વ, શક્તિ એટલે ઉર્જા-શક્તિ અને કરણ એટલે કે પ્રદાન કરવું. આમ સ્ત્રી સશક્તિકરણ એટલે સ્ત્રીઓને રોજગાર - શિક્ષા - ન્યાય - સમાનતા - સારું સ્વાસ્થ્ય પ્રદાન કરવું. મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ એવી પ્રક્રિયા છે જેમાં મહિલાઓને આત્મસન્માન, આત્મનિર્ભર, અધિકાર, સ્વતંત્રતા, સમાનતા જેવા અનેક ક્ષેત્રોમાં વિકાસ કરવામાં આવે છે, જેમાંથી મહિલાઓનો બહિર્મુખી વિકાસ શક્ય બની શકે. એક જ વાક્યમાં કહેવું હોય તો મહિલાઓને બધાજ ક્ષેત્રોમાં મજબૂત બનાવવી જ મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ છે.

સશક્તિકરણની જરૂરીયાત

પ્રાચીન સમયથી જ મહિલાઓ સાથે અનેક ક્ષેત્રોમાં ભેદભાવ રાખવામાં આવી રહ્યો હતો જેમકે કામના ક્ષેત્રોમાં અમુક કામ મહિલાઓથી ના થાય તેવી માન્યતા સમાજમાં વણાઈ ગયેલી હતી., પરિવારમાં દીકરીને ખાનપાન માં પણ ભેદભાવ રાખવામાં આવતો, રહેણી કરણીમાં પણ દિકરી અને દિકરા વચ્ચે ભેદભાવ રાખવામાં આવતો સ્વતંત્રતા, સમાનતા ન હતી દિકરીના શિક્ષણ પ્રત્યે પણ ઉદાસિનતા જણાતી હતી. આમ આવા બધા ક્ષેત્રોમાં ભેદભાવ - શોષણ થવાથી મહિલાઓનો સર્વાંગી વિકાસ શક્ય જ ન હતો જેથી મહિલાઓમાં આત્મવિશ્વાસની ઉણપ દેખાતી, આત્મસન્માન ન જળવાતું, જાતે કોઈ નિર્ણય ન લઈ શકતી.

આવી બધી સમસ્યાઓ દૂર કરવા માટે સ્ત્રી સશક્તિકરણ કાર્યક્રમ શરૂ કરવામાં આવ્યો જેથી મહિલાનો સર્વાંગી વિકાસ થઈ શકે તથા પોતાની યોગ્યતા, ક્ષમતા અને પ્રતિભાથી અલગ અલગ ક્ષેત્રોમાં પોતાનો વિકાસ કરીને મહિલા અને પુરુષ ખભે ખભા મિલાવીને કામ કરી શકે.

સંવિધાનિક સુરક્ષા

મહિલાઓને સશક્ત બનાવવા માટે પગલા ભરવામાં દક્ષિણ એશિયામાં ભારત એક અગ્રણી દેશ રહ્યો છે. જુદા જુદા ભરેલા પગલાઓમાં સંવિધાનિક સુરક્ષા પણ સામેલ છે. આઝાદી પહેલા દેશમાં ક્રાંતિકારી વિચારકો તથા આઝાદી પછી ભારતમાં મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ માટે અનુકુળ વાતાવરણ બનાવવા આપના બંધારણના ઘડવૈયા ડો.ભીમરાવ આંબેડકર સાહેબનો પણ સિંહફાળો રહેલો છે.

✓ વિધવા પુનર્વિવાહ અધિનિયમ – ૧૮૫૬:

પહેલાના સમયમાં સ્ત્રી વિધવા બને તો તેના પુનઃલગ્ન પર પ્રતિબંધ હતો તે ગમે તેટલી નાની ઉંમરમાં વિધવા બને તો પણ તેને તની બાકી રહેલી જિંદગી એકલા રહીને જ વિતાવવી પડતી હતી. પરંતુ, ઈશ્વરચંદ્ર વિદ્યાસાગરનાં પ્રયત્નોથી વર્ષ ૧૮૫૬ માં વિધવા પુનર્વિવાહ અધિનિયમ બનાવવામાં આવ્યો. હવે કોઈ મહિલા વિધવા બને તો તેની ઈચ્છા હોય તો તે બીજા લગ્ન કરી પોતાનું બાકીનું સંસારિક જીવન શરૂ કરી ખુશીથી જિંદગી જીવી શકે છે.

✓ વિશેષ વિવાહ અધિનિયમ – ૧૯૫૪:

અલગ અલગ ધર્મનાં વ્યક્તિઓ એટલે કે એક હિંદુ હોય અને બીજી વ્યક્તિ મુસ્લિમ હોય તો પણ આ કાયદા હેઠળ લગ્ન કરી શકે છે જેનું એક ઉદાહરણ જોઈએ તો સૈફઅલી ખાન અને કરીના કપૂરનું કહી શકાય. આ કાયદા પ્રમાણે પણ પત્નીને એક પત્ની તરીકેના બધાજ હક્ક મળી જતા હોય છે.

✓ બાળ વિવાહ અધિનિયમ – ૧૯૨૯:

હર વિલાસ શારદાનાં અથાગ પ્રયત્નોથી ૧૯૨૯માં, તૈયાર કરવામાં આવ્યો તે પ્રમાણે લગ્ન માટે સૌ પ્રથમ દીકરીની ઉંમર ૧૪ વર્ષ અને દીકરાની ઉંમર ૧૮ વર્ષ રાખવામાં આવ્યા હતી. ત્યારબાદ, સુધારો કરી દીકરીની ઉંમર ૧૫ વર્ષ અને દીકરાની ઉંમર ૧૮ વર્ષ કરવામાં આવી, ત્યારબાદ સુધારો કરી દીકરીની ઉંમર ૧૮ વર્ષ અને દીકરાની ઉંમર ૨૧ વર્ષ કરવામાં આવી અને હવે વર્તમાનમાં દીકરીની ઉંમર અને દીકરાની ઉંમર ૨૧-૨૧ વર્ષ કરવાની વિચારણા ચાલી રહી છે.

અનુચ્છેદ - ૧૪ : ભારતના ન્યાયક્ષેત્રમાં કોઈપણ વ્યક્તિ (સ્ત્રી/પુરુષ)ને રાજ્યથી કાયદા સમક્ષ સમાનતા અથવા કાયદાના સમાન રક્ષણની ના પાડી શકાશે નહિ.

✓ અનુચ્છેદ - ૧૫ : કોઈ નાગરિકની સામે ફક્ત જાતી, ધર્મ, જ્ઞાન, લિંગ, જન્મસ્થળ અથવા એમાંના કોપણ કારણે ભેદભાવ કરી શકાશે નહિ.

✓ અનુચ્છેદ-૧૫(૩) : આ અનુચ્છેદથી રાજ્યને સ્ત્રીઓ અને બાળકોને રક્ષણ,સમાનતા તથા સર્વાંગી વિકાસ માટે ખાસ પ્રકારની જોગવાઈઓ કરવા ભારતના બંધારણ દ્વારા રાજ્યને સત્તા આપવામાં આવી છે.

✓ અનુચ્છેદ-૧૬ : સાર્વજનિક રોજગારની બાબતેમાં સ્ત્રી અને પુરુષ બંનેને સમાન અવસરની તક આપવામાં આવી છે.

✓ અનુચ્છેદ-૧૯: સર્વ નાગરિકો(સ્ત્રી-પુરુષ)ને (ક) વાણી અને અભિવ્યક્તિનો સ્વાતંત્રનો (ખ) શાંતિપુર્વક હથિયારો સિવાય એકઠાં થવાનો (ગ) મંડળો કે સંઘો રચવાનો (ઘ) ભારતના રાજ્યક્ષેત્ર સર્વત્ર મુક્તપણે ફરવાનો (ચ) ભારતના રાજ્યક્ષેત્રમાં ગમે તે ભાગમાં નિવાસ કરવાનો અને સ્થાયી થવાનો (જ) ગમે તે વ્યવસાય કરવાનો અથવા ગમેતે કામકાજ, વેપાર અથવા ધંધો કરવાનો હક્ક રહેશે.

✓ અનુચ્છેદ-૩૯ : પહેલાના સમયમાં કેટલીક જગ્યાએ સ્ત્રી અને પુરુષ એક સમાન કામ કરતા હોય ત્યારે પુરુષને વધારે અને સ્ત્રીને ઓછું વેતન આપવામાં આવતું હતું. આમ સ્ત્રીઓનું શોષણ થતું હતું પરંતુ આપના બંધારણની અનુચ્છેદ-૩૯ (ક) મુજબ સમાન આજીવિકા માટે તથા અનુચ્છેદ-૩૯ (ઘ) મુજબ સમાન સમાન વેતન મેળવવાનો અધિકાર સ્ત્રીઓને આપવામાં આવ્યો છે.

✓ અનુચ્છેદ-૪૨ રોજગાર અંગેની ન્યાયી અને માનવોચિત પરિસ્થિતિ સિદ્ધ કરવા માટે પ્રસૂતિ સહાયતા માટે રાજ્ય જોગવાઈ કરશે.

✓ હિંદુ વિવાહ અધિનિયમ - ૧૯૫૫ :

પ્રાચીન સમયમાં સમાજમાં લગ્ન પ્રથામાં પણ પુરુષને ઘણી છુટછાટ મળતી હતી, પુરુષ ગમે ત્યારે પત્નીને તરછોડી દેતો હતો, એક પત્ની હોવા છતાં

બીજા લગ્ન કરતો હતો, આમ સ્ત્રીઓને આવા સામાજિક રીવાજોને કારણે શોષણ તથા અત્યાચારનો ભોગ બનવું પડતું હતું, પરંતુ હિંદુ વિવાહ અધિનિયમ બનતાની સાથે જ લગ્ન સંબંધમાં બનતા આવા દુષણો ઉપર મહદઅંશે લગામ લાગી હોય તેમ જણાય છે. આ અધિનિયમ હિંદુ સમાજ ઉપરાંત જૈન, પાસરી તથા બૌદ્ધને પણ આવરી લેવામાં આવ્યાં છે.

✓ અનૈતિક વ્યવસાય નિવારણ અધિનિયમ -૧૯૫૬ :

સમાજમાં સ્ત્રી એક ઉપભોગનું સાધન બની ગઈ હતી એટલે કે સ્ત્રીનું ખરીદ વેચાણ થતું અને તેને રેડલાઈટ એરિયામાં કુટણખાના ચાલાવી આવકનું સાધન બનાવી દેવામાં આવી હતી. આ અધિનિયમ આવવાથી આવા ગેરકાયદેસરના કામ પર પ્રતિબંધ આવી જતાં આ વ્યવસાયમાં સપડાયેલી ઘણી સ્ત્રીઓની બગડી ગયેલી જિંદગીને પાટા પર લાવી દેવામાં મદદરૂપ બન્યો છે.

✓ હિંદુ ઉત્તરાધિકાર અધિનિયમ – ૧૯૫૬

પહેલાના સમયમાં ઘણા સમાજમાં સ્ત્રી પોતાની માલિકીની કોઈ મિલકત ના રાખી શકે તેવી પરંપરા હતી. આ કાયદા હેઠળ વારસાગત મિલકતની વહેંચણીમાં સ્ત્રીઓને હસ્તગત આવેલી તમામ મિલકતની સંપૂર્ણ માલિકી આપવામાં આવે છે, અગાઉના સ્ત્રીઓ માટેનાં “માર્યાદિત માલિક” નાં દરજ્જાને નાબુદ કરવામાં આવે છે. આમ સ્ત્રીઓને સ્ત્રીઓ પાસે રહેલી મિલકત ઉપર તેનાં સંપૂર્ણ અધિકારો આપે છે.

✓ દહેજ નિવારણ અધિનિયમ – ૧૯૫૬:

ઘણા સમાજની લગ્નપ્રથામાં દીકરીના પિતાને પોતાની દિકરીના લગ્ન કરવા માટે દીકરાના પિતાને દિકરીના કરિયાવર પેટે ઘણી મોટી રકમ આપવી પડતી હોય છે. જેમાં સોના ચાંદીના દાગીના, રોકડ, કે કોઈ કિંમતી સાધન પણ હોઈ શકે. ઘણીવાર જે પિતા પાસે દીકરીનાં લગ્નમાં દહેજ આપવાની સગવડ ન હોય તો તેની દિકરીના લગ્ન પણ થતા ન હતા, ઓછું દહેજ આપતા પિતાની દીકરીને લગ્નજીવન દોજખ બની જતી અને ઘણા કીસ્સામાં તો આવી ગરીબ

ઘરની દીકરીએ પોતાનું જીવન ટુંકાવવાનો વારો પણ આવતો. પરંતુ આ કાયદો બનતા સમાજમાં દહેજ વિરોધી ઘણી જાગૃતિ આવી છે

✓ માતૃત્વ લાભ અધિનિયમ - ૧૯૬૧:

મહિલા કર્મચારીઓનું માતૃત્વના સમયગાળા દરમિયાન સંરક્ષણ કરે છે અને તેઓને માતૃત્વનાં લાભો પ્રદાન કરે છે, જેમાં કામમાં પગાર સાથે ગેરહાજર રહેવાનો અહીકાર સામે છે. તેથી પોતાના નવજાત બાળકની સારસંભાળ રાખી શકે છે. આ અધિનિયમ ૧૦ કે તેથી વધારે કર્મચારી ધરાવતી તમામ કંપની કે સંસ્થાઓને લાગુ પડે છે. જેમાં વર્તમાન પ્રધાન મંત્રીની અધ્યક્ષતામાં મંત્રીમંડળે માતૃત્વ લાભ (સુધારા) બિલ - ૨૦૧૬ સંસદમાં રજૂ કરી મંજૂરી આપી છે.

✓ મુસ્લિમ મહિલા તલાક પર અધિકારોની સુરક્ષા અધિનિયમ - ૧૯૮૬ પરંતુ દેશમાં મુસ્લિમ સમાજમાં વિરોધ થતા તત્કાલીન વડાપ્રધાન રાજીવ ગાંધીએ આ અધિનિયમ પરત ખેંચવો પડ્યો.

✓ અનૈતિક દેહ વેપાર નિવારણ અધિનિયમ - ૧૯૮૬:

સ્ત્રી માટે શિક્ષણ પ્રત્યેની ઉદાશીનતા, નાની ઉંમરે લગ્ન, દહેજ, જેવી પ્રવર્તતી પરંપરામાં ઘણી વાર પુરુષ તરફથી તરછોડાયેલી સ્ત્રી અનૈતિક દેહ વ્યાપાર તરફ ધકેલાય છે. જે વ્યાપારમાં સ્ત્રીઓનું શોષણની સાથે સાથે અત્યાચાર કરવામાં આવતા અને આને કારણે સમાજમાં દુષણો ઉભા થતા હતા. જેને રોકવાનું કામ અનૈતિક દેહ વેપાર નિવારણ અધિનિયમ કરી રહ્યો છે.

✓ પ્રસવ પૂર્વ તકનીક અધિનિયમ - ૧૯૮૪ -

પહેલાના સમયમાં દિકરીઓ માટે ખુબજ અન્યાયકારી, શોષણકર્તા, તથા દીકરાને મહત્વ આપતી રૂઢીચુસ્ત ધાર્મિક માન્યતાઓ ધરાવતી વિચારસરણી ફેલાયેલી હતી જેથી લોકો પોતાના ઘેર દિકરી ના જન્મે તેમ ઈચ્છતા હતા માટે પત્ની સગર્ભા બનતા પોતાના ઘેર દીકરી જન્મવાની બીક લાગતી હતી જેને કારણે પત્નીના સગર્ભાવસ્થા માંજ ગર્ભ પરીક્ષણ કરાવતા અને જો ગર્ભમાં દીકરી

જણાય તો તેવા ગર્ભનો નાશ કરાવતા હતા અને આમજ સમાજમાં સ્ત્રીની જન્મદર ઘટવા લાગ્યો માટે ભુણ હત્યા અટકાવવા માટે આ અધિનિયમ ખૂબ જ અસરકારક બન્યો છે.

આ ઉપરાંત મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ પ્રત્યે જાગૃતિ લાવવા માટે..

✓ ૮ માર્ચ ૧૮૫૭ આંતરરાષ્ટ્રીય મહિલા દિન:

મહિલા દિવસ માટે સૌથી પહેલો કાર્યક્રમ ૨૮ ફેબ્રુઆરી, ૧૯૦૯ ના રોજ ન્યુયોર્ક સિટીમાં યોજાયો હતો. તે મહિલા કાર્યકર્તા થેરેસા મલ્કીએલના સૂચન પર અમેરિકાની સમાજવાદી પાર્ટી દ્વારા આયોજીત કરવામાં આવ્યો હતો. ઇતિહાસકારો દ્વારા એવા દાવા કરવામાં આવ્યા છે કે આ દિવસ ૮ માર્ચ, ૧૮૫૭ ના રોજ ન્યૂયોર્કમાં મહિલા કપડા કામદારો દ્વારા કરવામાં આવેલા વિરોધની યાદમાં હતો.

✓ ૧૫ ઓક્ટોબર – આંતરરાષ્ટ્રીય ગ્રામીણ મહિલા દિન:

વિશ્વમાં ખેત પેદાશોનું ઉત્પાદન મોટેભાગે ગામડામાં થતું હોય છે અને ખેતરના કામમાં મોટા પ્રમાણમાં મહિલાઓ સંકળાયેલી હોય છે તેમના સન્માન માટે જાગૃતિ લાવવા યુએન દ્વારા પ્રથમ વખત ૧૫ ઓક્ટોબર ૧૯૯૫ નાં દિવસે આંતરરાષ્ટ્રીય ગ્રામીણ મહિલા દિન ઉજવવામાં આવ્યો. તેમાં વિમેન વર્ડ સમિત ફાઉન્ડેશન દ્વારા આ દિવસનાં પ્રોત્સાહન માટે આયોજન કરવામાં આવ્યું. ત્યારબાદ ૧૮ ડિસેમ્બર ૨૦૦૭ના રોજ યુ.એન.એ પોતાની જનરલ એસેમ્બલીમાં આંતરરાષ્ટ્રીય ગ્રામીણ મહિલા દિન ઉજવવા માટેનો ઠરાવ પસાર કરી સત્તાવાર મંજૂરી આપી.

✓ ૨૪ જાન્યુઆરી રાષ્ટ્રીય બાલિકા દિવસ:

૨૪મી જાન્યુઆરી ૧૯૬૬ના રોજ શ્રીમતિ ઇન્દિરા ગાંધીએ ભારતના પ્રથમ મહિલા પ્રધાનમંત્રી તેરીકેના સમથ લીધા હતા. આમ એક સ્ત્રી પણ દેશના વડાપ્રધાન બની શકે છે તેવો આત્મવિશ્વાસ બાલીકાઓમાં જગાવવા માટે ૨૪ જાન્યુઆરીનાં રોજ ભારતમાં રાષ્ટ્રીય બાલિકા દિવસ મનાવવામાં આવે છે. આ દિવસ મનાવવાની શરૂઆત ૨૦૦૮ માં મહિલા કલ્યાણ તેમજ બાળ વિકાસ

મંત્રાલય તરફથી કરવામાં આવી હતી. આ દિવસનો ઉદ્દેશ દેશની દિકરીઓને પોતાના અધિકારો પ્રત્યે જાગૃત કરવાનો છે.

✓ કામના સ્થળે મહિલાઓની જાતીય સતામણી (પ્રતિબંધ અબને નિવારણ) ૨૦૧૩:

કામના સ્થળે મહિલાની જાતીય સતામણી એ મહિલાની રોજગારી સાથે સંકળાયેલી બાબત છે માટે આવી ઘટનાથી કામ કરતી મહિલા નોકરી છોડી દેવાની નોબત આવી શકે છે

પ્રસ્તુત અધિનિયમની કલમ-૨ માં નીચે મુજબના અનિચ્છનીય ઘટનાઓને જાતીય સતામણીમાં સમાવેશ કરવામાં આવે છે.

- (૧) શારીરિક સંપર્ક/સ્પર્શ કરવો કે તેમ કરવાની કોશિશ કરવી.
- (૨) જાતીય સંબંધ બાંધવાની માંગણી કરવી, તેમ કરવા દબાણ કરવું.
- (૩) જાતીય અર્થવાળી ટકોર કરવી (સેક્સુઅલ કલર્ડ રિમાર્ક્સ)
- (૪) અશ્લીલ ચિત્રો, ફિલ્મો બતાવવા.

(૫) ઉપરોક્ત તમામ વર્તણૂક ઉપરાંત શરીર દ્વારા, શબ્દો દ્વારા કે તે સિવાય ઇશારા વગેરે દ્વારા કરેલો કોઇપણ પ્રકારનો અનિચ્છનીય જાતીય વ્યવહાર ગણવામાં આવશે.

આ કાયદા અંતર્ગત મહિલાઓ માટે કાયદાકીય માર્ગદર્શન, સેમીનારમ મહિલા જાગૃતિ શિબિર, રેલી, એનીમિયા ટેસ્ટીંગ, થેલેસેમિયા ટેસ્ટીંગ, આરોગ્ય પોષણ અને જાગૃતિ જેવા કાર્યક્રમ કરવામાં આવે છે.

✓ વિશાખા ગાઈડલાઈન્સ:

વર્ષ ૧૯૯૪મા રાજસ્થાનમાં બાળલગ્ન વિરુદ્ધ તથા મહિલા વિકાસ માટે કાર્ય કરતી ભંવરીદેવી પ્રત્યે અણગમો દાખવી ગામના મુખી તેમજ બીજા વગદાર લોકો દ્વારા સામુહિક દુષ્કર્મ કરવામાં આવ્યું. આવી ઘટનાને કારણે વિશાખા નામના એનજીઓએ રાજસ્થાન સરકાર સામે સુપ્રીમ કોર્ટમાં લડાઈ ચલાવી તે કેસ અંતર્ગત સુપ્રીમ કોર્ટએ મહિલાઓનાં રક્ષણ માટે વિશાખા

ગાઈડલાઈન – ૧૯૯૭ બહાર પાડી અને તે મુજબ દરેકે મહિલાની હેરાનગતિ ન થાય તે માટે આ ગાઈડલાઈન મુજબ પગલા લેવાનું નક્કી કરવામાં આવ્યું છે.

✓ ઘરેલું હિંસા અધિનિયમ – ૨૦૦૫

ઘરેલું હિંસાથી મહિલાઓનું રક્ષણ અધિનિયમ-૨૦૦૫ ભારતની સંસદનો એક કાયદો છે. જે મહિલાઓને ઘરેલું હિંસાથી બચાવવા માટે ઘડવામાં આવ્યો છે પણ તેનો અમલ ૨૬ ઓક્ટોબર ૨૦૦૬થી આવ્યો. ભારતીય કાયદાના પ્રથમ વખત, કાયદો “ઘરેલું હિંસા ”ને વ્યાખ્યાયિત કરે છે, જેની વ્યાખ્યા વ્યાપક છે તેમાં માત્ર શારીરિક હિંસા જ નહીં પરંતુ હિંસાના અન્ય પ્રકારો જેવાકે શારીરિક, માનસિક, મૌખિક, આર્થિક અને ભાવનાત્મક ને સાંકળી લે છે આ એક નાગરિક કાયદો છે, જેનો હેતુ ફોજદારી અમલીકરણને બદલે મુખ્યત્વે રક્ષણના આદેશો માટે છે. આ કાયદો કોઈ દુર્વ્યવહાર થાય તેવા કિસ્સામાં રક્ષણ પૂરું પાડે છે.

રાષ્ટ્રીય મહિલા આયોગ

રાષ્ટ્રીય મહિલા આયોગની સ્થાપના જાન્યુઆરી ૧૯૯૨ માં રાષ્ટ્રીય મહિલા આયોગ અધિનિયમ, ૧૯૯૦ (ભારત સરકારના ૧૯૯૦ ના અધિનિયમ નં. ૨૦) હેઠળ વૈધાનિક સંસ્થા તરીકે કરવામાં આવી હતી, જેનો હેતુ મહિલાઓ માટે બંધારણીય અને કાનૂની સુરક્ષાની સમીક્ષા કરવી; ઉપચારાત્મક કાયદાકીય પગલાંની ભલામણ કરવી, ફરિયાદોના નિવારણને સરળ બનાવવું અને મહિલાઓને અસર કરતી તમામ નીતિગત બાબતો પર સરકારને સલાહ આપવી.

પહેલા કમિશનની રચના ૩૧ જાન્યુઆરી, ૧૯૯૨ના રોજ શ્રીમતી જયંતિ પટનાયકની અધ્યક્ષતામાં કરવામાં આવી. આયોગના વર્તમાન અધ્યક્ષ તરીકે શ્રીમતિ વિજયા રહાતકર પોતાની સેવા આપી રહ્યા છે.

જેન્ડર રિસોર્સ સેન્ટર

ગુજરાત સરકાર મહિલા બાળ વિકાસ દ્વારા જેન્ડર રિસોર્સ સેન્ટર (જી.આર.સી.) ની એક સ્વાયત્ત સંસ્થા તરીકે જુલાઈ-૨૦૦૪માં સ્થાપના કરવામાં આવી. જી.આર.સી. નો મુખ્ય હેતુ રાજ્યની તમામ વિકાસલક્ષી પ્રક્રિયાઓ અને આયોજનમાં જાતિગત સમાનતા તેમજ સમન્યાયતાનો સમાવેશ થાય તે માટે તકનીકી સહાયો આપવાનો છે. જેન્ડર રિસોર્સ સેન્ટર સરકારી તેમજ સ્વયંસેવી સંસ્થાઓને જાતિગત રીતે સંવેદનશીલ કાર્યક્રમો, નીતિઓ, કાયદાઓ અને યોજનાઓના આયોજન, અમલીકરણ અને મુલ્યાંકનમાં મદદ કરે છે. જી.આર.સી. દ્વારા જેન્ડર રીસ્પોન્સિંગ બજેટીંગ, નારી ગૌરવ નીતિ, મહિલાલક્ષી કાયદાઓ અને યોજનાઓના અસરકારક અમલીકરણ માટે સરકારને તકનીકી સહયોગ આપવાનું કાર્ય થઈ રહેલ છે. આ ઉપરાંત સરકાર તેમજ જાહેર ક્ષેત્રમાં કાર્ય કરતા લોકોને જાતિગત બાબતે વધુ સંવેદનશીલ બનાવવાની કામગીરી કરવામાં આવે છે.

‘બેટી બચાવો બેટી પઢાવો’:

વર્ષ ૨૦૧૧ની વસ્તી ગણતરીમાં ભારતમાં બાળ જાતિ ગુણોત્તર ૦ થી ૬ વર્ષની વયની દિકરીઓની સંખ્યા ૯૧૯ હતી માટે ૨૨ જાન્યુઆરી ૨૦૧૫ના રોજ વડાપ્રધાન દ્વારા “બેટી બચાવો બેટી પઢાવો” કાર્યક્રમ શરૂ કરવામાં આવ્યો હતો તેનો ઉદ્દેશ ઘટી રહેલી બાળ જાતિ ગુણોત્તરની છબી સુધારવાનો છે. આ કાર્યક્રમ ભારતમાં મહિલા અને બાળ વિકાસ મંત્રાલય, આરોગ્ય અને પરિવાર કલ્યાણ મંત્રાલય અને શિક્ષણ મંત્રાલય દ્વારા સંયુક્ત રીતે ચલાવવામાં આવતી રાષ્ટ્રીય પહેલ છે.

મિશન પોષણ:

બાળકો. કિશોર વયની છોકરીઓ, ગર્ભવતી મહિલાઓ અને સ્તનપાન કરાવતી મહિલાઓને પોષણ સામગ્રી અને ડીલીવરીમાં પરિવર્તન લાવીને તેમજ આરોગ્ય, સુખાકારી અને રોગ પ્રતિકારક શક્તિનું પોષણ કરે તેવા આચારણોનો વિકસાવવા કરવો અને તેને પ્રોત્સાહન આપવા તથા કુપોષણની સમસ્યાઓનો ઉકેલ લાવવા માટે આ યોજના લાવવામાં આવી છે.

મિશન શક્તિ:

મિશન શક્તિમાં એકીકૃત સંભાળ, સલામતી, સંરક્ષણની, પુનર્વસન અને સશક્તિકરણ દ્વારા મહિલાઓ માટે જન કેન્દ્રીય જીવનચક્ર સહાયતાની વિભાવના કરવામાં આવી છે, મિશન શક્તિમાં ‘સંબલ’ અને ‘સામર્થ્ય’ નામની બે પેટા યોજનાઓ સમાવવામાં આવી છે

સંબલ: મહિલાની સલામતી અને સુરક્ષા માટે છે તેમાં સખી વન સ્ટોપ સેન્ટર, મહિલા હેલ્પ લાઇન , બેટી બચાવો બેટી પઢાવો યોજના વગેરે જેવા કાર્યક્રમો કરવામાં આવે છે.

સામર્થ્ય: આ યોજના મહિલા સશક્તિકરણનો ઉદ્દેશ્ય ધરાવે છે જેમાં ઉજ્જવલા, સ્વધારા, ગૃહ, વર્કિંગ વુમન હોસ્ટેલ, માતૃવંદના જેવી યોજનાઓ કાર્યરત છે.

આ ઉપરાંત ગુજરાત સરકાર મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ માટે સરકારના ડબલ્યુ. સી.ડી. વિભાગ દ્વારા નીચે મુજબ યોજનાઓ ચલાવવામાં આવે છે.

પોષણ અભિયાન, ગં.સ્વરૂપ બહેનો માટે પુનઃવસવાટ માટે આર્થિક સહાય, ટેક હોમ રાશન, મુખ્યમંત્રી માતૃશક્તિ યોજના, દૂધ સંજીવની યોજના, બેટી બચાવો બેટી પઢાવો, પોલીસ સ્ટેશન બેઠઝડ સપોર્ટ સેન્ટર, અભયમ ૧૮૧ મહિલા હેલ્પ લાઇન, મહિલા વિકાસ એવોર્ડ, ગંગા સ્વરૂપા પુનઃલગ્ન આર્થિક સહાય યોજના, મહિલા સ્વાવલંબન યોજના, વ્હાલી દિકરી યોજના, પોષણ સુધા, પૂર્ણા (PURNA) - પ્રિવેન્સન ઓફ અન્ડરન્યુટ્રિશન એન્ડ રિડકસન ઇન ન્યુટ્રિશન એનીમિયા, પા પા પગલી, સંકટ સખી, સખી વન સ્ટોપ સેન્ટર, આંગણવાડી, નંદધર, માતા યશોદા પુરસ્કાર, વૃદ્ધિ માપન જેવી વિવિધ યોજના કાર્યરત છે

સશક્તિકરણની અસર:

મહિલાઓને શિક્ષા, સમાનતા અને માનવીય અધિકાર મળ્યા તેથી આજે મહિલા દરેક ક્ષેત્રોમાં મહિલાઓને પોતાના મનપસંદ કામ માટે સ્વતંત્રતા છે,

પૂરી આઝાદી છે, મહિલા આત્મ નિર્ભર બની છે. દરેક ક્ષેત્રોમાં પુરુષોના ખમેખભા મેળવીને ચાલી રહી છે, દેશના જુદા જુદા કાર્યક્ષેત્રોમાં મહિલાઓને પોતાની આગવી ઓળખાણ મળી છે. ઘણા ક્ષેત્રોમાં તો મહિલાઓ પુરુષો કરતા પણ ઘણી આગળ નીકળી ગઈ હોય છે. મહિલા સશક્તિકરણને કારણે જ આજે આપણને મિતાલી રાજ – પ્રથમ મહિલા ક્રિકેટર, કલ્પના ચાવલા – પ્રથમ અંતરીક્ષયાત્રી, ઇન્દિરા ગાંધી – દેશના પ્રથમ મહિલા વડાપ્રધાન, બચેન્દ્રી પાલ – માઉન્ટ એવરેસ્ટ સર કરનારી પ્રથમ મહિલા, પ્રતિભાદેવી પાટિલ – પ્રથમ મહિલા રાષ્ટ્રપતિ, ફાતિમા બીવી – સુપ્રીમ કોર્ટના પ્રથમમહિલા ન્યાયાધિશ, મધર ટેરેસા – દેશના પ્રથમ મહિલા નોબેલ શાંતિ એવોર્ડ વિજેતા, જેવા વિવિધ ક્ષેત્રોમાં અનેક મહિલાઓએ પોતાનો પરચમ લહેરાયો છે જે મહિલા સશક્તિકરણની જ અસર વર્તાય છે.

સાવધાની

મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ માટે તો વિશ્વ અને દેશમાં ખૂબ સારા સારા કાયદા, નિયમો, કાર્યક્રમો, યોજનાઓ થતા રહ્યા છે. પરંતુ આ બધાની સાથે સાથે આજે પણ મહિલાઓ સાથે થતા દુર્વ્યવહાર બંધ થવાના નામ દેતા નથી. સવારે ઉઠીને દૈનિક સમાચાર પત્રો, સમાચાર ચેનલો ઉપર કે સોસિયલ મિડીયા જોતાની સાથે ક્યાંક ને ક્યાં તો મહિલા સાથેના દુર્વ્યવહારનાં સમાચાર જોવા મળી જતા હોય છે. માટે હજુ પણ આ દિશામાં આપણે ઘણું કરવાનું બાકી રહે છે.

સાથે સાથે, એ વાતનું પણ ધ્યાન દોરવું ઘટે કે મહિલા સશક્તિકરણનાં કાયદાએ મહિલાઓને સમાનતા, રક્ષણ અને તેમના સર્વાંગી ઉત્કર્ષ માટેના ખૂબ ઉમદા કાર્ય થઈ રહ્યું છે પણ એક લાલબત્તી સમાન બાબત એ પણ છે કે ઘણીવાર મહિલાઓ પોતાના લાભદાયી કાયદાઓને ઢાલ તરીકે ઉપયોગ કરવાને બદલે તલવારની જેમ ઉપયોગ કરે છે. આ બાબતે પણ સમાજમાં જાગૃતિ લાવવી હાલના સમયની માંગ બની રહી હોય તેમ લાગે છે.

આજનાં સમયમાં સ્ત્રી માટે ઘણા મજબૂત કાયદો હોવાની વાતોને કારણે પુરુષ અને ઘણીવાર તો સ્ત્રી પણ લગ્ન પ્રથાથી દૂર ભાગતા થઈ રહ્યા છે. ઘણા કિસ્સામાં માત્ર સ્ત્રી જ નહિ પણ પુરુષે પણ જીવન ટૂંકાવવાનો વારો આવતો હોય છે.

સમાપન

મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ માટે અહીં દર્શાવેલ કાયદાઓ, કાર્યક્રમો, યોજનાઓ, નિયમો વગેરે સિવાય પણ ઘણા બધા આયોજનો થઈ રહ્યા છે, પરંતુ એક મર્યાદા ધ્યાને રાખી મહિલા સશક્તિકરણ અંગે લોક જાગૃતિ અને મહિલા જાગૃતિ માટે આ લેખન કરવાનો પ્રયત્ન કરવામાં આવેલ છે. કોઈપણ સમાજનાં લોકો માટે ધર્મગુરુઓનો ખૂબ મોટો પ્રભાવ હોય છે, અને એમાય ખાસ કરીને સ્ત્રીઓ ઉપર ધર્મગુરુઓનાં ઉપદેશની બહુ ઊંડી અસર પડતી હોય છે. ઘણા સંપ્રદાયોમાં તો સ્ત્રીનો ચહેરો જોવો પણ પ્રતિબંધિત હોય છે અને તેવા સંપ્રદાયોમાં જ સ્ત્રી ઉપર દુષ્કર્મની ઘટનાઓ બહાર આવતી હોય છે, માટે આજના લોકશાહી સમાજનાં દરેક નાગરિકો, સરકારની સાથે સાથે સમાજના ધર્મગુરુઓએ પણ પોતાની પુરુષ પ્રધાન માનસિકતા બદલીને સમાજમાં સ્ત્રીઓનું ઉત્થાન થાય તેવા પ્રયત્નો કરવા જોઈએ.

સશક્તિકરણ એટલે માત્ર ફીઝીકલ પાવરની વાતને જ ધ્યાને લેવાની જરૂર નથી, ફીજીકલ પાવરથી યુદ્ધ જીતી શકાય પણ સશક્તિકરણ એક ચરિત્રની શક્તિ પણ છે, ચરિત્રથી યુદ્ધ ના જીતાય પણ વિશ્વ પરિવર્તન કરી શકાય છે, નરકને પણ સ્વર્ગ બનાવી શકાય છે.

આજે ભારતની મહિલાઓ વેસ્ટર્ન બનવા મથી રહી છે. આજની માનસિકતા પ્રમાણે દીકરી ભણીગણીને કમાતી હોય એટલે પરિવારના અન્ય સભ્યોની પણ તે કમાતી દીકરી પ્રત્યેની અપેક્ષા વધતી હોય એ સ્વાભાવિક હોય પરંતુ ઘણીવાર આવી અપેક્ષા અને લાગણી એટલી બધી વધારે હોય છે કે આવી દીકરી

પરિવારની લાગણીનાં આવેગમાં આવીને પોતાનો લઙ્ગસંસારમાં પણ સારી રીતે ધ્યાન આપી સકતી નથી. અને ઘણીવાર તો આવા વાતાવરણમાં લઙ્ગવિચ્છેદ થઈ જાય છે. આવી વાસ્તવિક પરિસ્થિતિ આપણને આપણી આજુબાજુ જ જોવા મળતી હોય છે. ઘણા સંજોગોમાં મહિલા કમાતી હોવાના કારણે ઘરના પુરુષ સાથે સ્પર્ધા કરે છે કે હું પણ કમાઉ છું એટલે ઘરના કામ હું કરું એટલું કામ પુરુષે પણ કરવું તેવી અપેક્ષાઓ રાખી પુરુષ સમોવડી થઈ હોવાની માનસિકતા વધતી જાય છે અને તેમાંથી સ્ત્રી અને પુરુષ વચ્ચે વર્ગ-વિગ્રહ વધતો જતો હોય છે. આમ, કપડા, ડીગ્રી, આવકના સ્ત્રોત મેળવી લેવાથી સ્ત્રી, પુરુષથી પણ આગળ નીકળી શકે છે, પણ સ્ત્રી પોતે એ ભૂલી જાય છે કે એ પોતે જ એક શક્તિ છે, નારીને નારાયણી કહેવાય છે. એક સ્ત્રી જ છે કે, જે એક બાળકને પુરુષ બનાવી શકે છે.

છેલ્લે, એક જાણીતા સાયરેએ ખૂબ જ સરસ લખ્યું છે કે..

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ખુદા બંદે સે ખુદ પૂછે, બતા તેરી રજા ક્યા હે.

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