

Towards an Empowered India: Women’s Role in Achieving the Viksit Bharat 2047 Vision

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Abstract:

As India approaches its centenary of independence in 2047, the vision of a "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India) becomes increasingly central to national discourse. This research paper explores the critical role of women’s empowerment in achieving this vision. Despite notable progress, deep-seated gender disparities persist, particularly in areas such as education, healthcare, and workforce participation. The GYAN framework—comprising Garib, Yuva, Annadata, and Nari—serves as the cornerstone for India's Viksit Bharat 2047 vision. Among these pillars, the empowerment of women stands as a crucial factor in realizing this ambitious national goal. Despite India's progress, deeply entrenched structural barriers and societal norms continue to perpetuate gender disparities, particularly in educational attainment and workforce participation. Addressing these challenges requires targeted strategic interventions that emphasize education, healthcare access, financial independence, and policy reforms focused on achieving and sustaining gender equality.

Keywords: Women’s Empowerment, Viksit Bharat 2047, Gender Equality, Strategic Interventions, Policy Reforms, Workforce Participation

Introduction

The year 2024 marked a pivotal moment in India's political landscape, drawing intense global attention as the country prepared for a crucial election. This election aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Amrit Kaal,' a golden era aimed at transforming India from a 'developing' to a 'developed' nation. At the core of this vision is the ambitious goal of building a \$30-trillion economy. Modi’s "Developed India" or Viksit Bharat vision is more than a slogan; it is a detailed roadmap guiding India's journey towards economic, social, and technological advancement.

Viksit Bharat seeks to create an inclusive economy where every citizen can participate and benefit. The government aims to foster a business-friendly environment that encourages investment, economic growth, and innovation through initiatives like Make in India, Digital India, and Startup India. A strong emphasis on digitization, domestic manufacturing, and an

entrepreneurial ecosystem is key to realizing these objectives. Modi envisions lifting millions out of poverty and unleashing India's full economic potential. Infrastructure development is crucial to this mission, with projects focused on creating world-class roads, railways, ports, urban infrastructure, and enhancing digital connectivity. Programs like the Smart Cities Mission, Bharatmala, Sagarmala, and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana illustrate the government's commitment to sustainable growth, better connectivity, and affordable housing.

Inclusive development and social welfare are cornerstones of Viksit Bharat, aiming to extend the benefits of economic growth to all citizens. The government has introduced several landmark initiatives, including Ayushman Bharat for healthcare, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan for sanitation, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao for gender equality, and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana for financial inclusion. These initiatives aim to empower marginalized communities and expand access to essential services. Environmental sustainability is another crucial aspect, with the government launching initiatives to promote renewable energy, water conservation, and sanitation, such as the Jal Jeevan Mission and the National Solar Mission.

A key pillar of Viksit Bharat is leveraging technology to improve governance, enhance transparency, and ensure efficient delivery of services. Programs like Aadhaar and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) have streamlined subsidies and welfare benefits, reducing leakages and ensuring direct assistance to beneficiaries. Modi's vision for Viksit Bharat also emphasizes gender equality, recognizing it as essential to the nation's holistic development.

India is making significant progress under the Viksit Bharat vision, evident in its technological achievements, economic growth, and cultural resurgence. Modi's ambitious plan seeks to unlock India's full potential, driving the nation towards unprecedented growth, prosperity, and a prominent global standing.

This paper has three key objectives:

- To explore the impact of the Viksit Bharat vision on women.
- To identify the challenges women face in the current scenario.
- To propose strategies to overcome these challenges.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach, using content analysis to examine existing literature on women's empowerment and its role in achieving the vision of "Viksit Bharat 2047." The study systematically reviews academic articles, government reports, policy documents, and international indices to identify the key barriers and enablers of women's empowerment in India. The analysis is guided by the GYAN framework, which underpins India's developmental goals, focusing specifically on the 'Nari' pillar—representing women's empowerment.

Review of literature

Empowerment of Women in India: A Critical Analysis" by Sushma Yadav and Anil Dutta Mishra (2006) This book provides a comprehensive analysis of the various dimensions of women's empowerment in India, covering aspects like education, health, and political participation. It critically examines the policies and programs aimed at empowering women, making it a key resource for understanding the impact of Viksit Bharat on women's

empowerment.

"Women, Work, and Empowerment in India" by Reema Nanavaty (2007), This book delves into the relationship between women's work and empowerment in India, exploring how economic independence can lead to greater social and political empowerment. It is particularly relevant to the GYAN framework's focus on Nari (women).

"Women and Development: Issues and Challenges" edited by K. Shanthi (2009), A collection of essays that address various aspects of women's development in India, this book provides a multi-faceted view of the challenges and opportunities in empowering women. It is a valuable resource for understanding the broader context of women's empowerment in India.

"The Gendered Terrain of Development: Politics, Policy, and Everyday Life" by Saraswati Raju and Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt (2011), This book examines the intersection of gender and development in India, focusing on how policies impact women's lives. It provides a critical analysis of the structural and societal barriers that hinder women's participation in the workforce and education, making it essential for understanding the challenges to achieving gender equality.

"Women and Work in India: A Critical Discourse" by Sharit K. Bhowmik (2012)
Bhowmik's work explores the gender dynamics in India's labor market, analyzing the challenges women face in accessing equal employment opportunities. The book provides valuable insights into how economic empowerment can drive societal change and contribute to the Viksit Bharat vision.

"Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in India: Key Challenges and Policy Responses" by Naila Kabeer (2013) Published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, this article discusses the key challenges to gender equality in India and evaluates policy responses. It is critical for understanding the policy landscape related to women's empowerment.

"Gender Inequality in India: A Case for Inclusive Growth" by Shobha Rani Dash (2014)
Dash's book discusses the pervasive gender inequalities in India and argues for inclusive growth as a means to address these disparities. It highlights the need for policy reforms that focus on gender equality in all sectors, aligning with the objectives of Viksit Bharat 2047.

"Financial Inclusion and Women's Empowerment in India" by Anjali Ghosh (2015)
Published in *International Journal of Social Economics*, Ghosh's article discusses the role of financial inclusion in empowering women in India. It provides insights into how financial independence can contribute to gender equality, a key component of the GYAN framework.

"Women's Economic Participation and Empowerment in India" by Uma Shankar Jha (2016) This article, published in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, examines the factors that influence women's economic participation in India. It provides empirical data and analysis that are essential for developing strategies to increase women's workforce participation.

"Healthcare Access and Gender in India: A Policy Analysis" by Sanjay Kumar (2018)
This article, featured in *Journal of Health Management*, analyzes gender disparities in healthcare access in India and suggests policy interventions. It is vital for understanding how healthcare availability impacts women's empowerment.

Challenges

Empowering women in the vision of Viksit Bharat faces several obstacles, including entrenched societal norms and gender stereotypes that limit their access to education and economic opportunities. Inadequate infrastructure and safety concerns also hinder women’s full participation in the workforce and public life. Overcoming these barriers requires focused efforts on policy reform, cultural transformation, and strategic interventions to ensure women have equitable opportunities for empowerment.

1. Individual-Level Challenges

In India, traditional gender roles and societal norms often limit women's opportunities in education, employment, and decision-making, perpetuating inequality despite progress. Girls, particularly in rural and marginalized areas, face disparities in education due to poverty, biases favoring boys, safety concerns, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to higher education. Healthcare access is also challenging, with women encountering geographical, economic, and cultural barriers. Issues like maternal mortality, reproductive health, and diseases such as breast cancer are often under-resourced, while cultural stigmas lead to delayed treatment and poor health outcomes. These challenges reflect the persistent gaps in gender equality in India.

2. Organizational-Level Challenges

The gender pay gap in India remains a significant challenge, driven by factors like occupational segregation, discrimination, and biases in hiring and promotion. Women often earn 19% less than men for similar work, as highlighted by the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021, where India ranks 140th out of 156 countries in gender wage equality. This disparity underscores the urgent need for transparency in pay scales and equitable promotion practices. Additionally, women face a "glass ceiling" that restricts their career advancement, with only 7.3% of board seats in NSE-listed companies held by women in 2020. Unconscious biases, lack of mentorship, and workplace cultures that favor male leadership contribute to this underrepresentation. Workplace harassment is another critical issue, with nearly 70% of working women reporting harassment, despite existing laws. To address these challenges, organizations must implement zero-tolerance policies, promote gender diversity in leadership, and support work-life balance through flexible working arrangements and family support initiatives.

3. Industry-Level Challenges

Women in India are predominantly concentrated in sectors like education and healthcare, where they constitute a significant portion of the workforce. However, they remain underrepresented in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields and manufacturing, with only about 14% of the total STEM workforce being female as of 2020. This sectoral segregation, driven by societal expectations and traditional gender roles, limits women's access to higher-paying jobs in male-dominated industries. Women entrepreneurs also face challenges, such as restricted access to finance, networks, and mentorship. Despite government initiatives like Stand-Up India and Mudra Yojana, women-led startups receive only 2% of total venture capital funding. Furthermore, while India has introduced policies promoting gender diversity in workplaces, gaps in compliance hinder their effectiveness. Only 17% of board seats in NSE-listed companies were held by women in 2020. Overcoming these barriers requires collaborative efforts from

policymakers, businesses, and civil society to ensure equal opportunities for women across all sectors.

Strategies

India is implementing a comprehensive approach to empower women across all spheres of life, encompassing health, safety, education, employment, and entrepreneurship. These initiatives aim to ensure gender justice, equality, and active female participation in shaping India's socio-economic, political, and cultural landscape.

Integrated Support through One-Stop Centers: A network of 759 one-stop centers provides integrated support to over 830,000 women, offering services such as legal aid, medical care, and counseling.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Initiative: The BBBP program combats female feticide and promotes girls' education, contributing to an improved sex ratio at birth from 918 to 933 females per 1,000 males.

Gender-Sensitive Education: The new education policy promotes gender-sensitive curricula and has achieved parity in the gross enrollment ratio for girls and boys in higher education.

Women in STEM: Women comprise 43% of students in STEM fields in India, reflecting the country's commitment to enhancing women's participation in high-tech sectors.

Economic Inclusion through Financial Initiatives: Programs like the JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile) have promoted inclusive growth, with over 55% of the accounts under the Prime Minister's Jan Dhan Yojana held by women.

Digital Literacy and Empowerment: The Pradhan Mantri Grameen Digital Saksharta Abhiyan has empowered over 52% of its participants, who are women, by promoting digital literacy.

Empowerment through Self-Help Groups (SHGs): SHGs connect around 100 million women, transforming the rural economy. Additionally, over 4 crore houses have been built with ownership in women's names, enhancing their social status.

Increased Budget Allocation for Women-Centric Programs: The government allocated over \$37.3 billion for women-centric programs, reflecting a significant investment in women's empowerment.

Maternal Health Initiatives: India has prioritized maternal health, reducing the maternal mortality ratio from 167 to 97. Programs like ASHA and the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana provide healthcare and financial support to over 3.31 crore mothers.

Support for Women Entrepreneurs: Initiatives like the Mudra Yojana provide collateral-free loans, supporting women-led businesses, while schemes like Stand Up India and Startup India reserve funds for women-led startups.

Access to Essential Resources: Efforts to provide clean cooking fuel, safe tap water, and household toilets reduce the time burden on women, enhancing their well-being.

Affordable Sanitary Napkins: Sanitary napkins are sold at ₹1 per pad and are tax-exempt, promoting menstrual hygiene.

Women in Governance and Civil Aviation: India has over 1.4 million elected women representatives, and the Women’s Reservation Bill 2023 reserves one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. Additionally, women comprise 15% of India's pilots, significantly higher than the global average.

Impact

Women’s empowerment in India has the transformative potential to drive progress across societal, economic, and political domains. By promoting education, expanding economic opportunities, and supporting social initiatives, empowered women gain the agency to contribute significantly to national development. Economically, empowered women are key drivers of growth, actively participating in the workforce, entrepreneurship, and leadership roles. Their involvement not only expands the labor force but also enhances productivity, as gender equality has been consistently linked to economic prosperity. Women’s economic contributions strengthen household incomes, increase GDP, and reduce poverty rates, fostering economic resilience within families and communities. Empowerment also serves as a powerful tool for poverty reduction. Women who are empowered are more likely to generate income and reinvest it in their families’ education, healthcare, and nutrition, creating a positive ripple effect that improves the well-being of entire communities and breaks the cycle of poverty. In terms of health, empowered women are more likely to access healthcare services, leading to better maternal and child health, lower mortality rates, and improved family well-being overall. In education, women’s empowerment directly increases access for girls and enhances educational outcomes across society. Educated women are more likely to prioritize their children's education, creating a positive cycle that benefits future generations. Empowered women also participate more actively in political and social spheres, leading to more inclusive policies, better representation of women’s interests, and stronger governance that reflects the needs of all citizens.

Empowering women is crucial for achieving gender equality, challenging discriminatory practices and stereotypes to create a society where everyone has equal opportunities and rights. This fosters social justice and harmony. Women’s empowerment also contributes to innovation and development, as their involvement in STEM fields and entrepreneurial ventures brings diverse perspectives, sparks creativity, and drives technological advancements. Additionally, women play critical roles in environmental sustainability by advocating for sustainable practices and natural resource conservation. Empowered women contribute to peace and stability within their communities, promoting social, economic, and political resilience. They also drive cultural transformation by challenging traditional gender roles and norms, fostering a more inclusive and

progressive society based on equality, respect, and dignity for all. Empowering women is essential to achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat. It is not only a matter of justice and human rights but also a strategic imperative for sustainable development. By unlocking the full potential of half the population, India can foster a more equitable, resilient, and thriving society by 2047 and beyond.

Conclusion

Empowering women is not just a moral imperative but a strategic necessity for achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. To bridge the persistent gender gaps in decision-making, education, and workforce participation, India must implement sustained and deliberate efforts. By ensuring equitable economic opportunities, enhancing access to education, and enforcing robust gender equality laws, India can fully leverage the potential of its female population. The benefits of empowering women extend beyond economic growth, contributing to more inclusive governance and stronger communities. Gender parity is a cornerstone of a prosperous and resilient society. As India approaches 2047, prioritizing women's empowerment will be crucial in building a nation where everyone, regardless of gender, has the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the country's development and economic well-being. Achieving gender equality will not only strengthen Viksit Bharat but also ensure a brighter, more equitable future for all its citizens.

Future Scope of the Study

Future research could focus on developing specific policy recommendations to address gender disparities in education, healthcare, and workforce participation, and evaluating the impact of these policies over time. Longitudinal studies could examine how targeted interventions, such as skills development programs, access to credit, and gender-sensitive workplace policies, affect women's economic participation and leadership roles. Additionally, there is a need for region-specific studies to understand the unique cultural and socio-economic factors influencing women's empowerment in different parts of India.

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