

## Revisiting the State-centric Comparative Evaluation of Women's Socio-Economic and Political Empowerment in India

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### ABSTARCT

Women's empowerment in India remains a critical yet complex dimension of the nation's democratic and economic development. This study examines the progress and challenges of women's empowerment through four key parameters: literacy, sex ratio, workforce participation, and political representation. Despite constitutional guarantees and policy initiatives, gender disparities persist across these indicators, reflecting deep-rooted socio-cultural and structural barriers. The literacy rate among women has improved significantly, yet regional and rural-urban disparities continue to limit educational access. The sex ratio, though gradually stabilising, reveals persistent son preference and gender-based discrimination. Workforce participation remains disproportionately low, constrained by societal norms, wage gaps, and inadequate support systems. Political participation shows incremental growth, particularly in local governance due to reservation policies, but national-level representation remains insufficient for meaningful influence. The study argues that women's empowerment is intrinsically linked to India's democratic ideals and the vision of an inclusive economy. While legal and policy frameworks have created opportunities, their implementation is often hindered by patriarchal norms and institutional resistance. The findings highlight the need for comprehensive strategies that address education, health, economic opportunities, and political representation in an integrated manner. By analysing trends and challenges across these four parameters, this research contributes to broader discussions on gender equality, democratic governance, and inclusive development. The study concludes that sustainable empowerment requires not only policy interventions but also a transformative rethinking of gender roles in both public and private spheres.

**Keywords:** *Women's empowerment, Democracy, Literacy, Sex ratio, Inclusive economy*

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, gender disparity has been deeply entrenched in societal structures, creating systemic obstacles to women's growth and development. Patriarchal systems, which have dominated civilisations for centuries, institutionalised male authority over political, economic, and domestic spheres, relegating women to subordinate roles. In ancient and medieval societies, legal and religious doctrines often codified women's exclusion from education, property ownership, and public life. For instance, in many early civilisations, women were denied formal education, limiting their intellectual and professional advancement. Cultural practices such as female infanticide, child marriage, and sati in certain regions further reinforced their marginalisation. These historical patterns of subjugation were not merely social norms but were often enforced through laws and religious texts, embedding gender inequality

into the foundation of many societies. The industrial revolution and modernisation brought some progress, yet women continued to face restricted access to skilled labour, unequal wages, and exclusion from decision-making roles, perpetuating economic dependence and social disempowerment (Gámez & Angeles, 2021).

The legacy of historical patriarchy continues to influence contemporary gender disparities, manifesting in persistent wage gaps, underrepresentation in leadership, and societal expectations that prioritise domestic roles over professional aspirations. Colonial-era reforms in some regions introduced limited educational and legal rights for women, yet these measures often coexisted with deeply rooted biases that resisted substantive change. Even in post-independence democratic societies, women's political participation remained minimal due to institutional gatekeeping and cultural resistance. Traditional gender roles, reinforced through generations, have discouraged women from pursuing careers in the public sphere, governance, and other male-dominated fields. While feminist movements and policy interventions have challenged these norms, the historical weight of systemic discrimination still hinders full gender equality (Rosa & Clavero, 2021). The intersection of caste, class, and regional disparities further complicates progress, as marginalised women face compounded barriers. Addressing these deep-seated inequities requires not only legal and economic reforms but also a cultural shift that redefines gender roles and dismantles patriarchal ideologies that have constrained women's potential for centuries.

Literacy serves as a foundational pillar for women's empowerment, enabling access to education, economic opportunities, and informed decision-making. Educated women are more likely to participate in the workforce, advocate for their rights, and challenge discriminatory norms. Studies show that higher literacy rates correlate with improved health outcomes, reduced child mortality, and greater financial independence. When women are literate, they can engage with legal and political systems, strengthening their agency in household and community matters. Additionally, literacy fosters critical thinking, allowing women to question patriarchal structures and resist systemic oppression. Despite progress, gender gaps in literacy persist, particularly in rural and marginalised communities. Socioeconomic barriers, cultural biases, and inadequate infrastructure often limit girls' access to schooling. Empowering women through literacy is not just an educational goal but a transformative tool for social and economic progress. Sustainable development requires prioritising female education to ensure equitable participation in all spheres of life, ultimately fostering a more inclusive society (Bhuwania et al., 2024).

A balanced sex ratio is a critical indicator of gender equality and societal health. Skewed ratios, often resulting from son preference and gender-biased practices, reflect deep-seated discrimination against women. A favourable sex ratio enhances women's social status, reduces vulnerabilities like trafficking and forced marriages, and promotes equal access to resources. It also correlates with improved education and employment opportunities for women, fostering economic independence. Conversely, imbalanced ratios perpetuate patriarchal norms, limiting women's decision-making power and reinforcing systemic inequality. Addressing disparities requires stringent enforcement of laws against sex-selective practices and societal shifts to value girls equally (Schacht & Smith, 2017). A balanced sex ratio is fundamental to achieving

equitable development and women's empowerment. Women's workforce participation rate serves as a key indicator of economic empowerment and gender equality. Higher participation enables financial independence, enhances decision-making autonomy, and reduces vulnerability to poverty. Economic engagement also correlates with improved access to education, healthcare, and social mobility. However, structural barriers—including wage gaps, occupational segregation, and unpaid care responsibilities—often constrain female employment. Cultural norms and workplace discrimination further limit opportunities, particularly in formal sectors. Addressing these challenges requires policy interventions promoting equal pay, childcare support, and skills development. A robust female labour force strengthens economic growth while advancing gender parity in professional and leadership domains (Kumar, 2023).

Political participation is fundamental to women's empowerment as it enables direct influence over policymaking and resource allocation. When women hold elected positions, they prioritise issues like healthcare, education, and gender equality, leading to more inclusive governance. Representation in legislative bodies challenges patriarchal power structures and provides role models for future generations. However, systemic barriers, including party gatekeeping, cultural stereotypes, and safety concerns, continue to limit women's political engagement. Increased female participation correlates with reduced corruption and improved social welfare outcomes. Institutional mechanisms like gender quotas and leadership training can help overcome structural disadvantages in political systems. Given the relevance of the issue of women's empowerment in the socio-economic and political aspects of their lives, a comprehensive and periodic study is required to fill the knowledge gap, which this dynamic issue poses to society and governance at large.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Women constitute half of the global population and account for one-third of the workforce, yet they earn merely ten per cent of the world's income and hold less than one per cent of global property assets. Despite performing two-thirds of all working hours, reports of human rights violations against women continue to elicit a profound moral outrage. In India, where women represent a significant demographic segment, they remain in a marginalised position due to various socio-economic obstacles. Persistent societal issues such as dowry-related deaths, polygamy, child marriage, female infanticide, forced prostitution, and gender-based violence remain prevalent in the country. These factors have significantly hampered women's effective engagement in political processes and their participation in the democratic institutional framework (Mishra, 2014). Social development refers to the framework of norms, general regulations, and quality standards that shape human interactions. It constitutes a holistic strategy aimed at enhancing the living conditions of all citizens, with a specific focus on improving the circumstances of those who are impoverished or in need. This concept is linked to significant qualitative transformations within social structures, ultimately altering the opportunities available to individuals striving for elevated social status. By implementing social development initiatives, societies aim to create equitable conditions that foster overall improvement in the quality of life for diverse populations (Chompa, 2022).

A study highlights the worldwide challenge of women's illiteracy and its effects on social, political, and economic exclusion. It positions literacy as a crucial empowerment tool that allows women to enhance their health, childcare practices, political engagement, and economic contributions. The paper examines various literacy initiatives, policies, and global efforts designed to advance gender equality and empower women. It concludes that high-quality literacy education is vital for women's participation in developmental activities, advocating for grassroots initiatives, increased access to education, and customised programs that effectively meet the specific needs of women (Oyitso & Olomukoro, 2012). In numerous developing nations, significant gender disparities in education continue to exist, largely due to interventions that prioritise supply-side issues and outcome-focused strategies while overlooking the obstacles to accessing education. In contrast, the Mahila Samakhyas (MS) program demonstrates that fostering agency within marginalised groups is achievable and can effectively diminish the educational gap between genders. The intergenerational benefits linked to MS indicate that promoting empowerment may be a crucial first step towards achieving universal educational success. This approach highlights the importance of addressing the underlying social and cultural barriers that hinder access to education for women and girls, ultimately supporting greater equity in educational attainment (Bhuwania et al., 2024).

Sex selection is influenced by a variety of intricate economic, social, and cultural factors, including shifting patterns in the labour market and marriage, reforms in social policy, and prevailing social and cultural standards. Notably, even with the acknowledged connections among son preference, patriarchal values, and the disadvantages faced by women, sex ratios have exhibited greater imbalances concurrently with apparent advancements in women's empowerment across many nations. This is reflected in improvements in education and economic participation indicators (Vaughan, 2025). Preferences for sons over daughters can differ depending on the situation, but generally arise from the belief that sons bring more value to the family. This perception often includes their potential for higher earnings and contributions to family welfare. There are also cultural expectations regarding elder care, as daughters are traditionally expected to join their husband's family after marriage, leaving sons to care for ageing parents. Additionally, inheritance customs often favour sons, reinforcing their perceived status within the family structure. These factors combine to create a preference for sons, impacting family dynamics and societal attitudes toward gender roles across different cultures (Klaus & Tipandjan, 2015).

The employment and engagement of women in the workforce in India encounter numerous intricate and ongoing challenges, shaped by a wide range of historical, socio-cultural, and political influences. Although there have been advancements in certain sectors, and the economy is expanding quickly, it is concerning that the female labour force participation rate in India stands at approximately 32.7 per cent. This statistic highlights the ongoing barriers that women face in attaining equal participation in the labour market, reflecting deeper systemic issues that require attention and action for meaningful progress in gender equality within the workforce (Singh, 2024). Key economic factors affecting overall empowerment include income, women's business decisions, and self-employment. Social factors play a vital role in enhancing social empowerment. The findings from a Poisson regression analysis, which examined the various empowerment indicators, indicate that personal decision-making,

autonomy, self-confidence, business acumen, and participation in public discussions are significant determinants influencing the number of indicators utilised to boost the overall empowerment index. These elements collectively contribute to a broader understanding of empowerment, illustrating the intricate relationship between economic activities and social empowerment metrics for women (Senapati & Parida, 2023).

Political institutions that promote vital elements of women's political empowerment, such as representation and civil society, impact a nation's growth and development rate. By fostering women's empowerment, there is likely to be an enhancement in technological advancement, as this can affect the range of innovative ideas brought into the economy and lead to the adoption of more effective concepts. This dual influence highlights the importance of inclusive political frameworks in facilitating not just gender equality but also broader economic progress and innovation. Empowering women politically is thus essential for overall national development (Dahlum et al., 2022). To enhance women's empowerment, it is crucial to improve democratic governance in any country. Active engagement in the political process and agenda is vital for fostering effective governance and a sound democratic structure. In this context, political parties play a key role in boosting women's political participation (Das, 2020).

## **METHODS AND MATERIALS**

This study adopts a mixed-method research design that integrates descriptive statistical analysis, content analysis, and comparative approaches to systematically examine women's empowerment across Indian states through four key parameters: literacy rates, sex ratios, workforce participation, and political representation. The methodology combines both quantitative and qualitative data drawn from diverse primary and secondary sources to ensure comprehensive coverage of the subject. Primary data sources include official government publications. These are supplemented by secondary sources, including scholarly books and peer-reviewed journal articles on gender studies, reputable newspaper archives documenting women's political engagement, and analytical reports from organisations like UN Women and PRS Legislative Research.

The analytical framework employs descriptive statistics to map state-wise variations in empowerment indicators, with data visualisation techniques applied to identify spatial patterns and temporal trends. Content analysis methodology is utilised to systematically examine gender discourses in political documents, media narratives, and policy statements through qualitative coding techniques. Comparative analysis forms a crucial component of the study, enabling interstate comparisons of empowerment metrics to identify best practices and persistent challenges, with particular attention to the correlation between policy interventions like political reservations and measurable outcomes in women's representation. The research maintains rigorous ethical standards by using only publicly available data with proper attribution and adopting a gender-sensitive lens in data interpretation. This multidimensional methodological approach allows for both macro-level pattern recognition and micro-level insights into the complex interplay between policy, culture, and women's empowerment across India's diverse regional contexts, while the combination of statistical and interpretive methods strengthens the validity and depth of the findings.



## RESULTS

**Figure 1: Literacy rate in India**

Table 3.3 : State-wise Gender Gap in Literacy Rate among persons of age 7 years and above										
राज्य	ग्रामीण			शहरी			कुल			State
	Rural			Urban			Total			
	पुरुष	महिला	लैंगिक अंतर	पुरुष	महिला	लैंगिक अंतर	पुरुष	महिला	लैंगिक अंतर	
	Male	Female	Gender Gap	Male	Female	Gender Gap	Male	Female	Gender Gap	
आंध्र प्रदेश	67.5	53.4	14.1	86.3	73.1	13.2	73.4	59.5	13.9	Andhra Pradesh
असम	89.4	79.9	9.5	86.3	91.4	-5.1	90.1	81.2	8.9	Assam
बिहार	78.6	58.7	19.9	96.1	75.9	20.2	79.7	60.5	19.2	Bihar
छत्तीसगढ़	84.0	65.6	18.4	89.3	82.3	7.0	85.4	68.7	16.7	Chhattisgarh
दिल्ली	-	-	0.0	91.8	83.4	8.4	93.7	82.4	11.3	Delhi
गुजरात	85.7	68.0	17.7	94.1	86.3	7.8	89.5	74.8	14.7	Gujarat
हरियाणा	85.8	66.4	19.4	95.2	81.2	14.0	88.0	71.3	16.7	Haryana
हिमाचल प्रदेश	92.3	79.2	13.1	97.8	93.0	4.8	92.9	80.5	12.4	Himachal Pradesh
जम्मू और कश्मीर	84.9	66.0	18.9	88.5	75.7	12.8	85.7	68.0	17.7	Jammu & Kashmir
झारखंड	80.6	61.4	19.2	92.6	78.6	14.0	83.0	64.7	18.3	Jharkhand
कर्नाटक	78.2	63.1	15.1	92.5	83.7	8.8	83.4	70.5	12.9	Karnataka
केरल	96.7	94.1	2.6	98.2	96.4	1.8	97.4	95.2	2.2	Kerala
मध्य प्रदेश	77.9	61.0	16.9	91.4	79.5	11.9	81.2	65.5	15.7	Madhya Pradesh
महाराष्ट्र	87.0	71.4	15.6	95.3	87.6	7.7	90.7	78.4	12.3	Maharashtra
ओडिशा	82.0	67.3	14.7	94.4	85.9	8.5	84.0	70.3	13.7	Odisha
पंजाब	85.5	74.0	11.5	93.8	86.7	7.1	88.5	78.5	10.0	Punjab
राजस्थान	77.6	52.6	25.0	91.1	74.6	16.5	80.8	57.6	23.2	Rajasthan
तमिलनाडु	84.2	70.8	13.4	92.3	85.9	6.4	87.9	77.9	10.0	Tamil Nadu
तेलंगाना	70.6	53.7	16.9	91.7	79.0	12.7	80.5	65.1	15.4	Telangana
उत्तराखंड	93.1	79.0	14.1	97.4	85.9	11.5	94.3	80.7	13.6	Uttarakhand
उत्तर प्रदेश	80.5	60.4	20.1	86.8	74.9	11.9	81.8	63.4	18.4	Uttar Pradesh
पश्चिम बंगाल	82.0	72.6	9.4	91.4	84.7	6.7	84.8	76.1	8.7	West Bengal
भारत	81.5	65.0	16.5	92.2	82.8	9.4	84.7	70.3	14.4	India
स्रोत: / Source: NSS 75 <sup>th</sup> Round, Jul. 2017-Jun. 2018, National Statistical Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation										
* Literacy Rate in percent.										

Figure 1 evidently showcases the regional differences in the literacy rate of women in India, and this variance accounts for the other associated underdevelopment of women.

Figure 2: Sex ratio in India

Table 1.5 : Sex Ratio at Birth based on registered events								
राज्य/ केंद्र शासित प्रदेश	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	State/Union Territory
अंडमान और निकोबार द्वीप समूह	1031	925	987	957	953	965	984	Andaman & Nicobar Islands
आंध्र प्रदेश	955	971	806	935	931	935	939	Andhra Pradesh
अरुणाचल प्रदेश	993	895	964	1047	1084	1024	1011	Arunachal Pradesh
असम	902	885	888	921	904	903	956	Assam
बिहार	868	870	837	NA	NA	NA	964	Bihar
चंडीगढ़	870	898	901	907	909	938	943	Chandigarh
छत्तीसगढ़	934	938	980	968	934	931	940	Chhattisgarh
दादरा और नगर हवेली	890	1001	945	936	923	921	898	Dadra & Nagar Havelli
दमन और दीव	916	924	974	879	877	926		Daman & Diu
दिल्ली	896	898	902	918	929	NA	NA	Delhi
गोवा	947	928	900	910	943	948	947	Goa
गुजरात	886	NA	NA	898	897	901	909	Gujarat
हरियाणा	843	851	865	NA	914	923	916	Haryana
हिमाचल प्रदेश	896	903	910	934	930	918	936	Himachal Pradesh
जम्मू और कश्मीर	914	912	914	909	952	909	967	Jammu & Kashmir
झारखंड	886	879	863	NA	NA	NA	948	Jharkhand
कर्नाटक	926	893	896	949	957	947	949	Karnataka
केरल	948	948	954	965	963	960	969	Kerala
लद्दाख	Included in Jammu & Kashmir						1104	Ladakh
लक्षद्वीप	1043	891	945	914	839	953	957	Lakshadweep
मध्य प्रदेश	908	904	909	NA	902	905	921	Madhya Pradesh
महाराष्ट्र	911	883	904	NA	NA	NA	NA	Maharashtra
मणिपुर	684	686	NA	NA	757	934	880	Manipur
मेघालय	968	975	NA	937	942	927	922	Meghalaya
मिज़ोरम	963	973	964	964	964	975	954	Mizoram
नागालैंड	860	897	967	948	965	1001	953	Nagaland
ओडिशा	880	866	858	930	928	947	941	Odisha
पुडुचेरी	911	939	931	931	941	934	947	Puducherry
पंजाब	880	891	857	890	896	914	925	Punjab
राजस्थान	799	794	806	931	949	916	952	Rajasthan
सिक्किम	968	973	999	NA	NA	NA	NA	Sikkim
तमिलनाडु	834	818	840	932	933	942	939	Tamil Nadu
तेलंगाना	961	834	881	915	924	953	937	Telangana
त्रिपुरा	882	1000	917	962	945	949	974	Tripura
उत्तराखंड	865	862	825	929	956	960	954	Uttarakhand
उत्तर प्रदेश	881	877	885	NA	NA	NA	NA	Uttar Pradesh
पश्चिम बंगाल	897	919	911	NA	NA	941	951	West Bengal
भारत	887	881	877	NA	NA	NA	NA	India
स्रोत / Source : Civil Registration System, Office of the Registrar General of India								
NA:- Not Available.								

Figure 2 demonstrates the sex ratio as “the number of females per 1,000 males in the population”, which clearly indicates the preferences for males over the female population. This phenomenon is also influencing female infanticide.

**Figure 3: Worker Population Ratio**

Table 4.5 : State-Wise Worker Population Ratio for Persons Aged 15 Years & Above										
2022-23										
राज्य/ केंद्र शासित प्रदेश	ग्रामीण			शहरी			कुल			State / Union Territory
	Rural			Urban			Total			
	पुरुष	महिला	व्यक्ति	पुरुष	महिला	व्यक्ति	पुरुष	महिला	व्यक्ति	
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	
अंडमान और निकोबार द्वीप समूह	81.2	45.2	64.0	76.4	33.0	55.0	79.1	39.8	60.0	Andaman & Nicobar Islands
आंध्र प्रदेश	76.0	50.2	62.8	69.2	29.9	48.9	73.9	44.0	58.6	Andhra Pradesh
अरुणाचल प्रदेश	74.5	60.8	67.9	66.7	31.1	49.1	73.3	56.0	64.9	Arunachal Pradesh
असम	89.7	19.3	54.7	72.9	25.3	49.2	88.9	19.6	54.5	Assam
बिहार	72.0	23.0	47.8	63.2	11.4	38.7	71.2	22.0	47.0	Bihar
चंडीगढ़	88.3	26.1	57.1	68.4	20.5	45.0	69.2	20.8	45.6	Chandigarh
छत्तीसगढ़	83.2	65.8	74.7	73.0	30.9	51.6	81.2	58.6	70.1	Chhattisgarh
दादरा और नगर हवेली एवं दमन और दीव	85.6	52.2	70.1	89.2	24.6	62.0	88.0	35.4	65.0	Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu
दिल्ली	65.6	3.9	35.7	73.3	14.8	46.1	73.1	14.5	45.8	Delhi
गोवा	65.5	21.7	42.4	67.6	25.6	47.0	66.8	24.0	45.1	Goa
गुजरात	83.3	54.2	68.9	76.9	25.5	52.1	80.4	41.7	61.5	Gujarat
हरियाणा	68.1	20.5	44.7	68.4	18.2	45.3	68.2	19.7	44.9	Haryana
हिमाचल प्रदेश	81.1	72.0	76.5	72.7	28.5	49.8	80.3	67.6	73.8	Himachal Pradesh
जम्मू और कश्मीर	75.6	52.5	64.2	68.2	21.0	45.4	74.2	46.9	60.7	Jammu & Kashmir
झारखंड	79.5	52.3	65.6	65.6	15.7	40.9	76.8	45.5	60.9	Jharkhand
कर्नाटक	75.9	42.0	59.0	69.8	28.8	49.8	73.6	37.2	55.6	Karnataka
केरल	72.6	37.0	53.4	67.5	29.3	47.2	70.2	33.5	50.5	Kerala
लद्दाख	57.8	57.2	57.5	63.1	38.2	52.0	58.3	55.6	57.0	Ladakh
लक्षद्वीप	78.8	8.9	40.3	57.4	16.5	34.1	62.3	14.8	35.5	Lakshadweep
मध्य प्रदेश	84.8	52.0	69.0	73.6	20.6	47.6	81.9	43.8	63.4	Madhya Pradesh
महाराष्ट्र	76.1	49.8	63.2	72.8	25.9	50.0	74.7	39.8	57.6	Maharashtra
मणिपुर	69.3	28.7	49.1	62.1	33.0	47.7	67.2	29.9	48.7	Manipur
मेघालय	78.5	61.6	69.9	65.3	33.1	47.5	76.3	56.0	65.8	Meghalaya
मिज़ोरम	68.0	47.3	58.2	63.6	40.0	51.8	66.0	43.8	55.2	Mizoram
नागालैंड	79.3	69.6	74.7	65.5	45.8	56.0	75.4	62.9	69.4	Nagaland
ओडिशा	75.5	46.5	60.7	68.8	25.9	48.3	74.4	43.6	58.9	Odisha
पुडुचेरी	74.9	47.0	60.1	68.2	23.1	43.6	70.7	31.6	49.6	Puducherry
पंजाब	74.7	26.3	50.8	73.3	23.2	49.2	74.2	25.2	50.2	Punjab
राजस्थान	72.4	54.8	63.6	66.2	20.9	44.6	70.8	46.5	58.8	Rajasthan
सिक्किम	81.4	74.1	77.9	79.0	33.0	58.8	80.9	66.4	74.0	Sikkim
तमिलनाडु	72.4	47.5	59.6	70.1	26.8	48.3	71.4	38.6	54.7	Tamil Nadu
तेलंगाना	74.7	53.7	64.1	67.7	24.9	46.8	72.0	43.1	57.7	Telangana
त्रिपुरा	74.2	36.6	55.6	71.3	26.8	48.5	73.7	34.8	54.3	Tripura
उत्तराखंड	70.7	44.1	57.1	68.6	15.1	43.2	70.1	37.0	53.5	Uttarakhand
उत्तर प्रदेश	79.2	35.2	57.0	69.7	12.6	42.0	77.2	30.6	53.9	Uttar Pradesh
पश्चिम बंगाल	81.0	36.2	58.6	74.3	26.1	50.2	79.0	33.1	56.1	West Bengal
भारत	78.0	40.7	59.4	71.0	23.5	47.7	76.0	35.9	56.0	India
स्रोत / Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS, July 2022- June 2023), National Statistical Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation										
Note : The rate is according to Usual Principal & Subsidiary Status Approach (ps+ss)										

Workforce participation of the female population is very inadequate in India, given the patriarchal norms and various cultural practices, which can be observed in Figure 3.



Figure 4: Political participation of women in India

Table 5.3 : State-wise Women participation in 17 <sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, 2019				
राज्य / केंद्र शासित प्रदेश	महिला सांसद	कुल सीटें	महिला (%)	State/ Union Territory
	Women MPs	Total Seats	Women (%)	
अंडमान और निकोबार द्वीपसमूह	0	1	0	Andaman & Nicobar Islands
आंध्र प्रदेश	4	25	16	Andhra Pradesh
अरुणाचल प्रदेश	0	1	0	Arunachal Pradesh
असम	1	14	7	Assam
बिहार	3	40	8	Bihar
चंडीगढ़	1	1	100	Chandigarh
छत्तीसगढ़	3	11	27	Chhattisgarh
दादरा और नगर हवेली	0	1	0	Dadar & Nagar Haveli
दमन और दीव	0	1	0	Daman & Diu
दिल्ली	1	7	14	Delhi
गोवा	0	2	0	Goa
गुजरात	6	26	23	Gujarat
हरियाणा	1	10	10	Haryana
हिमाचल प्रदेश	0	4	0	Himachal Pradesh
जम्मू और कश्मीर	0	6	0	Jammu & Kashmir
झारखंड	2	14	14	Jharkhand
कर्नाटक	2	28	7	Karnataka
केरल	1	20	5	Kerala
लक्षद्वीप	0	1	0	Lakshadweep
मध्य प्रदेश	4	29	14	Madhya Pradesh
महाराष्ट्र	8	48	17	Maharashtra
मणिपुर	0	2	0	Manipur
मेघालय	1	2	50	Meghalaya
मिज़ोरम	0	1	0	Mizoram
नागालैंड	0	1	0	Nagaland
ओडिशा	7	21	33	Odisha
पुडुचेरी	0	1	0	Pudducherry
पंजाब	2	13	15	Punjab
राजस्थान	3	25	12	Rajasthan
सिक्किम	0	1	0	Sikkim
तमिलनाडु	3	39	8	Tamil Nadu
तेलंगाना	1	17	6	Telangana
त्रिपुरा	1	2	50	Tripura
उत्तर प्रदेश	11	80	14	Uttar Pradesh
उत्तराखंड	1	5	20	Uttarakhand
पश्चिम बंगाल	11	42	26	West Bengal
भारत	78	542	14	India

स्रोत / Source: Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi.

Figure 4 denotes the scarcity of female participation in the national level elections, mainly due to cultural norms and criminalisation of politics.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The comparative evaluation of women's empowerment across Indian states reveals significant disparities in socio-economic and political parameters, underscoring the complex interplay between policy interventions, cultural norms, and developmental outcomes. The analysis of four key indicators: literacy, sex ratio, workforce participation, and political representation, demonstrates that regional variations persist despite constitutional guarantees and progressive legislation.

Literacy rates show the most consistent improvement nationwide, yet substantial gaps remain between urban and rural areas, particularly in low-performing states. The sex ratio presents a more troubling picture, with the most developed states not necessarily demonstrating better outcomes, suggesting that economic progress alone cannot address deep-seated son preference. Workforce participation reveals a paradoxical trend where higher education does not automatically translate into employment, indicating structural barriers in labour markets and persistent gender roles in household responsibilities. Political participation shows the most uneven progress, with reservation policies creating islands of success in local governance but failing to substantially increase women's representation in state and national legislatures.

The findings challenge conventional assumptions about linear relationships between development indicators and women's empowerment. The apparent contradiction between educational attainment and workforce participation, for instance, suggests that empowerment is mediated by complex social factors beyond mere access to education. Similarly, the limited trickle-up effect of women's political representation from panchayats to parliament reveals systemic barriers in political parties and electoral processes. These disparities highlight how regional socio-cultural contexts mediate the implementation and effectiveness of gender policies, creating varied landscapes of empowerment across states. The study demonstrates that women's empowerment cannot be achieved through single-dimensional interventions but requires integrated approaches addressing education, health, economic opportunities, and political representation simultaneously. The comparative analysis underscores the need for context-specific policies that account for regional variations in gender relations and development challenges. While legislative measures like reservation policies have created important entry points, their transformative potential remains limited without complementary efforts to address cultural norms and institutional biases.

In conclusion, this state-centric evaluation reveals both progress and persistent challenges in India's journey toward gender equality. The multidimensional nature of empowerment necessitates moving beyond quantitative metrics to understand qualitative changes in women's agency and decision-making power. Future research should focus on intersectional analyses that account for how caste, class, and religion compound gender disparities. Policymakers must develop more nuanced strategies that recognise regional specificities while maintaining a commitment to universal gender justice principles. Ultimately, achieving substantive equality requires not just policy reforms but fundamental transformations in social attitudes and power structures that have historically marginalised women across India's diverse socio-political landscape.

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