

An analysis of the levels of women's empowerment and gender equality in India

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Abstract - Promoting gender equality and empowering women continue to be crucial worldwide objectives, as emphasised by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG-5). Notwithstanding considerable advancements in tackling gender inequalities via worldwide, regional, and local efforts, women in India have always encountered severe obstacles originating from a patriarchal culture. Historical traditions such as sati, purdah, female foeticide, infanticide, dowry, and domestic abuse have effectively marginalised women. However, efforts have been made via constitutional and legal changes to address and overcome these problems. Recent decades have seen notable progress in women's rights, driven by heightened awareness and lobbying, bolstered by many government initiatives targeting their empowerment. Nonetheless, deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs persist in perpetuating gender prejudice in both public and private domains. This paper presents an examination of the degrees of women's empowerment in several states of India, using secondary data obtained from official sources. This paper examines the effects of female literacy on health and decision-making, the significance of government assistance via infrastructure and programmes, and the impact of women-focused organisations and self-help groups on economic empowerment. The results indicate that while there has been some improvement, continuous efforts are necessary to completely eliminate gender prejudice and improve women's empowerment.

Keywords- Women empowerment, gender equality, societal progress, sociocultural norms

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment and gender equality have become central to global agendas, reflecting a growing recognition that achieving these goals is crucial for a just and sustainable world. The journey toward ending gender inequality and ensuring women's emancipation is both complex and enduring. Women empowerment is not only a fundamental human right but also a key to attaining sustainable development, as highlighted by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2021). Gender equality serves as both an end in itself and a means to create a prosperous, peaceful, sustainable, and inclusive global society.

The fourth and most important meeting on women's concerns, the Beijing Platform for Action, was convened by the United Nations. One world in which all women and girls are free to pursue their own happiness was the goal of this conference, which tackled twelve pressing issues facing women (UN Women, 2014). By 2030, one of the particular objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women (Women and

Health, 2021). In an effort to challenge gender inequality and promote equality, numerous international conventions have been ratified, including CEDAW, the Convention on Political Rights of Women, and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (International Conventions on Women, 2020).

A disturbing truth emerges from worldwide data notwithstanding these efforts. The UNDESA reports that 736 million women, or one-third of the world's population, have been victims of sexual or physical abuse at some point in their lives, beginning at the age of 15. Unpaid domestic care and labor is still disproportionately prevalent, and the COVID-19 epidemic has only made matters worse (UNDESA, 2020). Additionally, women only make about 28% of executive positions globally. Pandemic delays have increased the expected time to attain gender parity from 99.5 to 135.6 years, according to the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2021).

Articles 14, 15, and 42 of the Indian Constitution provide women's equal rights, while the country's constitution also backs affirmative action programs to combat prejudice from the past and level the playing field. To encourage more women to become involved in politics and have a say in local decision-making, the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution established reserves for women in municipal bodies (Hazarika, 2011). Ujjawala, Pradhan Mantri Janani Suraksha Yojana, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, and Pradhan Mantri Janani Suraksha Yojana are only a some of the many programmes aimed at empowering women since independence (MOW & CD, 2021). But even after 70 years of independence, women in India still confront a lot of unfairness and discrimination, which is a result of long-standing gender biases that go through generations (Pradhan, 2020). Lower female literacy rates, underrepresentation of women in political and leadership positions, and a 28-place drop in India's global gender gap index ranking from 150th to 140th place are to blame for the 62.5% widening of the gap, according to a new report from the World Economic Forum (Shettigar & Mishra, 2021). Persistent patriarchal attitudes and difficulties in executing laws and programs are the main roadblocks to gender equality (Saxena, 2019).

This article will take a look at women's situation in several Indian states from the angles of education, health, economy, politics, and society and culture. Examining the causes of new trends and inequalities, it will determine how far along the path to gender equality each of these nations is.

• A Framework for the Theory of Women's Empowerment

Improving women's roles and position in society is a multi-faceted endeavor, and the idea of women's empowerment is multi-faceted in and of itself. The three interconnected components of this complexity that Kabeer's paradigm highlights are agency (the capacity to define and act upon one's objectives), resources (material, human, and social), and results (Kabeer, 1999). The four main ideas outlined by this model—assets, knowledge, will, and capacity—emphasize the significance of individual components of empowerment (Singh & Singh, 2020).

One common definition of women's empowerment is the provision of resources that allow women to exercise agency in their own lives, leading to increased feelings of autonomy and value (Bayeh, 2016; Kaviarasu & Xavier, 2006; Mallik, 2021; Krishna, 2016). According to Sen (1999), UNFPA (2021), Loya (2021), and Farzana et al. (2018), it is essential for both women's autonomy and sustainable development. Societal gains from women's empowerment might include less domestic violence, better child nutrition, and increased growth (Sethuraman, 2008).

Over the years, a number of strategies aimed at empowering women have emerged. Women were

seen as helpless objects of assistance in the welfare approach, one of the first, rather than as powerful agents of change. In this view, welfare programs for women should focus on enhancing their reproductive responsibilities and general health. The Women in growth (WID) perspective, on the other hand, argued that economic growth and women's empowerment are mutually supportive by highlighting women's economic responsibilities and integration (Duflo, 2012). The Gender and Development (GAD) strategy that followed focused on societal and cultural factors, pushed for gender parity in development efforts, and aimed for systemic change via top-down initiatives. Emphasizing women's subordination in numerous life arenas, the more modern Empowerment Approach is grassroots-oriented and gender-sensitive. Research by Collins (2013), Muyoyeta (2007), Siddgowda (2015), Shunmuga et al. (2015), Tasli (2007), and Valimaa (2004) suggests that this approach treats women as active participants rather than passive beneficiaries in order to strengthen their self-reliance and influence changes in law, policy, and cultural norms.

• Assessing the Empowerment of Women

On a global and regional scale, several indicators of women's empowerment have been established. In the past, economic statistics like GDP, per capita income, and Gross National Product (GNP) were used. Nevertheless, gender differences were not completely captured by these measurements. The United Nations Development Program's Gender Development Index (GDI) takes into account health, education, and GDP as it relates to buying power, while adjusting the Human Development Index (HDI) for gender disparity (Muyoyeta, 2007). A measure of gender disparity in economic and political involvement and decision-making, the Gender Empowerment Index (GEI) focuses on decision-making power rather than fundamental metrics (Muyoyeta, 2007).

According to Lopez-Claros and Zahidi (2005) and Asalu et al. (2018), the Gender Gap Index put forth by the World Economic Forum provides a holistic perspective by factoring in economic participation and opportunity, political empowerment, educational achievement, and health and well-being. The African Gender Development Index (AGDI) is one regional index that takes political, economic, and social factors into account. Education and health are examples of social indicators; income, employment, and resource availability are examples of economic indicators; and political parameters evaluate representation in important decision-making positions (UNECA, 2009). According to Chang et al. (2013) and Sharma & Sanchita (2017), there is a wide variety of indicators that may be used to measure women's empowerment, such as health, economic engagement, socio-cultural variables, and political possibilities.

• Women's Position in India

Women make up over half of India's population, which is rather high considering the country only occupies 2.4% of the Earth's surface area and is home to 17.7% of the world's population (Trading Economics, 2022). One example of the demographic shifts that have taken place in the nation is the rise of the urban population, which reached 29.2% in 2015, up from 17.1% in 1950 (Gulankar, 2019). India has a literacy rate of 74.04% in 2011 (India Book, 2020), with men's literacy standing at 82.14% and female's at 65.46%. In 2011, there were 940 females for every thousand males, an improvement from 933 in 2001. According to Arora (2021), the overall fertility rate fell from 2.7 in 2005-06 to 2.1 in 2019-20.

All four parts of India's constitution—the preamble, the fundamental rights, the fundamental duties, and the directive principles—foster gender equality. It ensures parity and gives the government the authority to advance women's rights (National Legal Research Desk, 2012). To further empower women, the constitution includes provisions like Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(b), 39(c), and 42, as well as Article 243 for reservations in municipal authorities.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was approved by India in 1993, among other international treaties and conventions that aim to strengthen women's rights. The establishment of the National Commission for Women in 1990 and the designation of 2001 as the "Year of Women's Empowerment" reflect ongoing efforts to address gender disparities. Despite these advancements, challenges remain, and the implementation of laws and policies continues to be critical in bridging the gender gap (Hussain, 2014; Kumar, 2021; Shettigar & Mishra, 2021).

2. LITERATURE OF REVIEW

Adhikari et al. (2023) The methods of multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) are used in this study in order to determine the crucial aspects that contribute to the empowerment of women in India in the fields of sports, politics, journalism, media, and technology. For the purpose of determining the most effective criterion for empowerment, the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) and the Technique for Order of Preference by Similarity to Ideal Solution (TOPSIS) MCDM techniques are used. The views of several experts are taken into consideration in order to establish which of the six criteria is the most appropriate. These criteria are as follows: family support, financial support, cultural and religious barriers, child marriage, nutrition, and shame and concealment. AHP is the procedure that is used in the calculation of the weights. There are also six other alternatives that are taken into consideration in this paper: empowerment in sports, politics, administrative service, journalism or media, social work, and technological. This set of options is ranked using the TOPSIS algorithm. A sensitivity analysis is carried out by deleting certain criteria and doing a comparison research in a fuzzy environment.

This is done in order to check the validity and robustness of the findings.

Kumari et al. (2023) Equality between the sexes and the empowerment of women have been at the forefront of world affairs in recent years. A aim that has been highlighted by the United Nations in its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG-5) is the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. On a global, regional, and local scale, several projects and initiatives have been undertaken in an attempt to eradicate gender disparity. Due to the patriarchal mentality that has existed in India from ancient times, women have been subjected to discrimination and stereotypes. Women have been subjected to a variety of social ills, including but not limited to sati, the purdah system, female foeticide, female infanticide, dowry, and domestic abuse. In an effort to eradicate such ills, a number of constitutional and legislative measures have been draughted. Women have made significant strides in terms of their empowerment in modern times, and they have grown more aware of the rights that they are entitled to because of this. For the sake of emancipating women, the central government and state governments have both initiated a number of different programs. On the other hand, the patriarchal mentality is still prevalent, and women continue to face discrimination based on their gender in both public and private institutions. The study makes an effort to conduct an analysis of the degree to which women are empowered in the various states of India. Data obtained from a variety of government sources served as the basis for the study's secondary data collection. In addition, an investigation of the factors that are accountable for the patterns has been carried out. Based on the findings of the research, it has been determined that female literacy has a good impact on the health of females as well as their ability to make decisions. A further factor that contributes to the empowerment of women is the assistance that the government provides in the form of infrastructure and programs. groups that are focused on women and groups that provide self-help have worked to empower women economically and give them more control over their own decisions.

Priyadharshini et al. (2022) In the last decade, it has been abundantly obvious that gender equality and women's empowerment are crucial components in national well-being and the advancement of social and economic institutions. A key component of India's National Population Policy 2000 is the inclusion of a section on "empowering women for health and nutrition." An interesting aside: out of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG), India has signed on to the one that promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women. By merging the concepts of gender equality and women's empowerment into one MDG, it is implied that the two are complementary. Achieving gender parity demands empowering women, and empowering women necessitates achieving gender

parity. At first Both ideas are multi-faceted since gender inequality and women's disempowerment are pervasive in many spheres of human interaction and activity. Consequently, they give rise to a plethora of potential signs. To compare men's and women's positions on certain attributes is the general goal of gender equality and inequality indexes. Disempowerment and empowerment indicators, on the other hand, are not always related. Conversely, indicators of empowerment aim to evaluate the responsibilities, perspectives, and entitlements of men and women.

Singh et al. (2020) Women have been granted a secondary place in this culture, which is reflected in the economic, social, and political arenas. This is because this society is traditionally patriarchal. However, the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender equality have always been and will continue to be a key topic, and stakeholders have shown the highest attention in this regard. With the purpose of determining whether or not India is prepared to meet the Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the United Nations, this study conducts an in-depth analysis of the condition of India in comparison to other nations. As a survey of current material published in journals, books, reports of different non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government organisations, and international organisations, as well as websites, the article builds its case on the basis of secondary sources. The study takes a critical look at the empowerment of women in India, paying attention to a variety of models and aspects. Indicators of women's empowerment are discussed in this article, along with constitutional safeguards, plans and programs by the government, and information about their implementation. Nevertheless, as compared to other nations, the country places a poor ranking. It is necessary to review and adjust programs in order to accomplish Sustainable Development Goal 5 by the year 2030.

Sundar (2017) in the context of economics, society, and culture, the word "gender" refers to the characteristics and possibilities that are associated with different genders. There are many distinct biological and physical features that determine whether a person is a male or a woman in most countries. In order to further the cause of women's empowerment, this article discusses the significance of gender equality. It provides an overview of the gender inequality situation in India as well as the many forms of inequality that exist between men and women. The significance of gender equality, as well as the role that gender equality plays in women's empowerment, gender concern in development, and gender mainstreaming in development, are topics that are discussed in this article. This study comes to a close with some intriguing results as well as some recommendations for policy considerations.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATABASE

• Methodology

This study aims to assess women empowerment through the Women Empowerment Index (WEI) by utilizing data from various secondary sources. The methodology involves selecting relevant indicators and sub-indicators, compiling data from authoritative sources, and applying statistical formulas to derive the index. The following steps outline the methodology used in this study:

1. **Data Collection:** The study relies on secondary data obtained from reputable sources. These sources include:
 - **National family health survey (NFHS-5):** 2019–2020 -The International Institute for Population Sciences provided technical support to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare over the course of this study.
 - **Men and Women in India 2019:** This publication is a product of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's Social Statistics Division and the National Statistical Office.
 - **Indian Crime Rates in 2020:** Officially issued every year by the National Crime Records Bureau of India's Ministry of Home Affairs, this is the 68th edition.
2. **Selection of Indicators:** The study selects five primary indicators to construct the Women Empowerment Index, each with specific sub-indicators. These indicators cover various dimensions of empowerment:
 - Educational Empowerment
 - Economic Empowerment
 - Political Empowerment
 - Socio-Cultural Empowerment
 - Health Empowerment

Each indicator is assessed through positive or negative sub-indicators, as outlined in Table 1.

3. **Index Calculation:** The Women Empowerment Index (WEI) is calculated using the following formulas:

- **For positive indicators:**

$$WEI_{uvw} = \frac{X_{uvw} - \text{Min}_w(X_{uvw})}{\text{Max}_u(X_{uvw}) - \text{Min}_u(X_{uvw})}$$

- **For negative indicators:**

$$WEI_{uvw} = \frac{\text{Max}_w(X_{uvw}) - X_{uvw}}{\text{Max}_w(X_{uvw}) - \text{Min}_w(X_{uvw})}$$

Here, X_{uvw} represents the value of the u -th variable of the v -th component in the w -th state. WEI_{uvw} denotes the index value of the u -th variable, v -th component of the WEI in the w -th state (Yadav and Radhakrishnan, 2017).

Positive indicators are calculated using Equation (1), whereas negative indicators are calculated using Equation (2). Negative impact variables include dropout rates, crime rates, early marriage rates, and fertility rates.

• Database

The database for this study is derived from the following sources, which provide comprehensive and reliable data on women's empowerment indicators:

1. National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) (2019–21): This survey provides detailed data on health and family welfare, including indicators related to health empowerment and education. It is conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with assistance from the International Institute for Population Sciences.
2. Women & Men in India, 2019: Published by the National Statistical Office, this report offers data on various socio-economic parameters, including educational and political empowerment indicators.
3. Crime in India, 2020: This annual report by the National Crime Records Bureau provides data on crime statistics, including those related to women's safety and socio-cultural indicators.

Indicators and Sub-Indicators

Indicators	Sub-Indicators
Indicator of Educational Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education (18–23 Years) • Dropout Rate of Girls in Primary Schools (1 to 5) • Women Literacy Rate • Women with 10 or more years of schooling
Indicator of Economic Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women owning a house and/or land (alone or jointly with others) • Women who worked in the last 12 months and were paid in cash • Women having a bank or savings account that they use themselves
Indicator of Political Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State-wise Women Voters Turnout for General Election – 2019 • State-wise Women participation in 17th Lok Sabha (Percentage of Women MPs) • State-wise Women participation in 17th Lok Sabha (Percentage of Women first time elected) • State-wise participation of women in State Assemblies
Indicator of Socio-Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rate of Total Crime against Women

Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women aged 20–24 years married before age of 18 years • Sex Ratio • Currently married women who usually participate in three household decisions
Indicator of Health Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Use of Family Planning Methods • Institutional Births • Mothers who consumed iron folic acid for 180 days or more when they were pregnant • Total Fertility Rate • Adolescent Fertility Rate for women aged 15–19 years

This methodical methodology guarantees a thorough evaluation of women's empowerment in many aspects, utilising trustworthy secondary data sources and a disciplined calculating technique.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

• Education

In order to measure women's empowerment, education is an important metric to consider. It improves human capital, boosts self-esteem, and helps women in many ways: in terms of their health, their age at marriage, their life expectancy, their economic engagement, their political representation, and their ability to make decisions (Nayar, 2004). Females with more education had lower rates of death and fertility, on the other hand (Velkoff, 1988). Regardless of these advantages, there are still gender gaps in schooling across socioeconomic groups (Saxena, 2017).

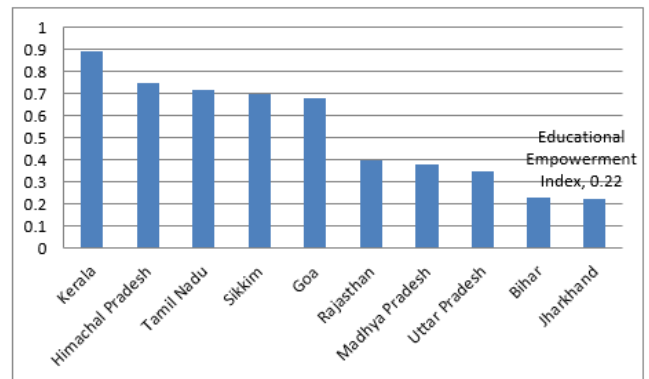


Figure 1: Empowerment Index (Educational)

There are large geographical differences in the level of education that Indian women get, according to the educational empowerment index. At 0.22 and 0.23 on the educational index, respectively, states like Jharkhand and Bihar are at the bottom of the list. This points to a serious problem with the education of girls in these states. Only 28.8% of Bihar's female population has maintained a formal education for 10 years or longer, with the state's female literacy rate sitting at 55% (NFHS-5 statistics). Furthermore, only 13.1% of college students are female, and 1.5% of elementary school-aged females drop out. Research has shown that the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh (BIMARU) have very poor literacy rates and learning outcomes (Balani, 2017). For example, according to the PLFS (2017–

18) statistics, one out of every two females in Rajasthan is illiterate, demonstrating a substantial gender literacy disparity. The dowry system, early marriages, insufficient school infrastructure, a dearth of female teachers, high rates of dropout due to familial responsibilities, poverty, and entrenched patriarchal norms that prioritize males as breadwinners over females as caregivers are all factors that contribute to low female education in rural areas (Azad India Foundation, 2020; Choudhary, 2019; Mishra, 2019).

Conversely, states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Sikkim, and Himachal Pradesh all have educational index scores higher than 0.68, indicating strong achievement. With an index score of 0.89, Kerala is at the top of the list for educational metrics, showing remarkable performance. According to NFHS-5 statistics, it has the highest female literacy rate at 97.4% and 77% of females have finished 10 years or more of education. Additionally, from pre-primary to pre-university levels, Kerala has the greatest age-specific female attendance rate (Abhinandan, 2020). The attendance percentages for different age groups in Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu are also quite high (Chandra, 2019a, 2019b). Sikkim and the aforementioned states have made substantial investments in educational facilities with a focus on female education (Rana & Jyoti, 2018).

Health-

Another important metric for measuring women's empowerment is their health, as this reveals the larger cultural, social, and economic factors impacting women. It is more complicated to utilize health indicators to quantify women's status than men's health due to their distinct biological, cultural, and social issues (Kalra, 2019; Singh, 2020; Tinker et al., 2000; WHO, 2021; Women & Health, 2021).

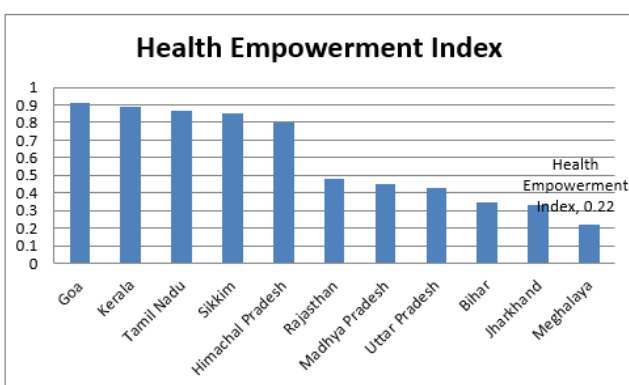


Figure 2: Educational empowerment index

A total of five metrics measuring women's well-being make up the health empowerment index. Among them, three positive indicators stand out: (1) the prevalence of current family planning techniques among women aged 15–49; (2) the number of births that take place in institutional settings; and (3) the percentage of pregnant women who took iron and folic acid for at least 180 days. Also taken into account are two

unfavorable metrics: the total fertility rate (TFR) and the adolescent fertility rate (AFR). These metrics are useful for comparing women's health and healthcare access in various areas.

This indicator does not do well for states like Jharkhand, Bihar, and Meghalaya, which have ratings lower than 0.45. With an index value of just 0.22, Meghalaya is ranked last. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is over 2 in all three states, with the exception of Bihar and Meghalaya (Pathak, 2021). Bihar still has the highest TFR in the nation, despite a drop from 3.4 (NFHS-4) to 3.0 (NFHS-5). Adding insult to injury, the high teen fertility rates in these states (77 in Bihar and 64 in Jharkhand) make women's health issues even worse. Complications during and after pregnancy are increased due to early marriages, prolonged reproductive periods, and high fertility rates, which in turn lead to a higher Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) (Kumari & Verma, 2021). Superstitions, lack of knowledge about vaccinations, and poor hygiene practices all have a negative impact on women's health, which in turn contributes to reproductive health issues in rural and tribal areas. This is compounded by a lack of specialized doctors, inadequate obstetric care, and socio-cultural factors like gender discrimination, low educational attainment, and poverty (Kumari & Verma, 2021; Prakash, 2019). (Ghosh, 2017). According to Choudhury (2016), the Jharkhand Economic Survey (2015–16) indicated that over 90% of rural expecting moms are unaware of the need of adequate nutrition and health.

Goa, on the other hand, ranks best with an index score of 0.91 when it comes to women's health, while Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and other states do remarkably well. All health indices show that these states are doing quite well. Sikkim has the lowest TFR at 1.1, followed by Goa at 1.3, Kerala at 1.8, and Tamil Nadu at 1.8; these states all have low rates of institutional births, which exceed 90%. The teenage fertility rates in Goa and Kerala are fourteen and eighteen percent, respectively, and they are among the lowest in the country. According to Dehury and Mohapatra (2019), Klepinger et al. (1999), and UNDESA (2013), reducing the number of births among teenagers improves maternal and newborn health, increases women's access to education and economic opportunities, and decreases the dangers to these groups. greater female literacy rates, healthcare systems that are both vast and cheap, and greater per capita incomes are all factors in these states' success. An important factor is the need for more education and sensitivity for women's health (Dehury et al., 2017; Jose et al., 2014; Singhal & Andrade, 2013). Improving women's health is a crucial part of empowering women, and these elements make it easier to do so.

Economy-

According to Ayene (2016) and Kishor and Gupta (2004), economic empowerment is a life-altering process that gives women and girls the tools to

break free from economic constraints and become agents of positive change in their communities and economies. There are more societal advantages that result from women's economic liberation than just personal ones. There is a positive correlation between women's empowerment and increased family investment, which in turn boosts demand, health, and educational outcomes—all of which add up to higher human development (UN India n.d.) (Fig. 3).

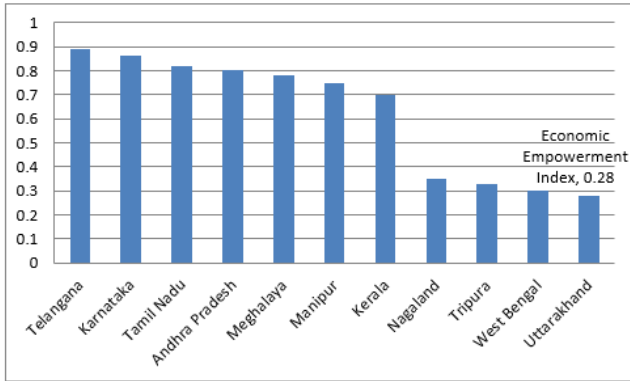


Figure 3: Empowerment Index (Economic)

In India, women's financial and property rights, as well as their economic engagement, are measured by the economic empowerment index. Nagaland, Tripura, West Bengal, and Uttarakhand are among the states where women do not have much economic influence. Across all three metrics, Nagaland ranks worst. Out of all the women in Nagaland, only 63.7% have authority over their bank or savings account, 23.6% have worked for cash in the previous 12 months, and only 26.9% own a home or property (either alone or with others). Less than 25% of women worked for cash in the last year in states like as Assam, Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal, while the lowest proportion of women owning a home or property is in Tripura. Adverse societal norms, discriminatory legislation, a lack of legal protection, unacknowledged unpaid labor, and restricted access to assets and property are some of the systemic hurdles that the United Nations has highlighted as having a detrimental effect on women's economic empowerment (UN Secretary General, 2016).

On the other hand, three states—Telangana, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu—rank first through seventh with index values more than 0.65. Index values of 0.89 for Telangana, 0.86 for Karnataka, and 0.82 for Tamil Nadu place it first, second, and third, respectively. All three metrics show that women in Telangana are doing well: According to the Telangana Socio-Economic Outlook (2021), women from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds are greatly helped by the approximately 4 lakh Self-Help Groups (SHGs) with 43.4 lakh members, and 66.6% of women own either houses or land. When it comes to the percentage of working-age women who own their own bank or savings account, these southern states likewise rank quite high. When it comes to organized

sector women in India, a MOS & PI survey found that the greatest proportion is in the state of Telangana (Nilesh, 2020).

The economic empowerment index also places northeastern states, such as Meghalaya and Manipur, highly. Women in Meghalaya have more freedom and property rights than in other states because of the state's matrilineal system. One reason Meghalaya scored so well on the rating is because women play an important role in tribal economies (Meghalaya Development Report, 2008). Success examples from high-performing states show the potential for revolutionary change via focused interventions and inclusive policies, but the economic empowerment of women remains a major concern, especially in states with limited participation and access to financial assets.

Socio-Cultural Empowerment of Women

The socio-cultural parameter plays a crucial role in determining women's empowerment. Indicators such as crime against women, child marriage, sex ratio, and women's decision-making capacity highlight the status of women within society. Social and cultural norms often embed gender stereotypes and prejudice, which hinder women's empowerment (Fig. 4).

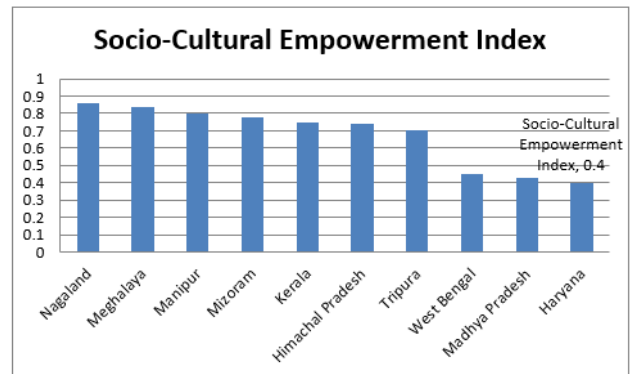


Figure 4: Empowerment Index (Socio-Cultural)

Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Assam are some of the states that do badly on socio-cultural measures. United Nations Children's Fund reports that five states—Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh—are home to more than 50% of child brides in India. Goal 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Agenda aims to end child marriage as a human rights violation (UNICEF, 2019). A number of factors contribute to the prevalence of child marriage, including but not limited to: economic hardship, lack of education and literacy, housing status (rural vs. urban), religious beliefs, and social class (CRY, 2020). Punjab and Haryana are among the lowest in terms of sex ratio at 938 and 926, respectively, while states like Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Haryana also maintain low sex ratios. There is a marked bias for sons in these regimes, which manifests itself in policies like infanticide and

female feticide. Furthermore, there is a major problem with crimes perpetrated against women. The crime rate against women is three times higher in Assam (154.3) than in the rest of the country (56.5) (Ramesh, 2021). Due to an upsurge in occurrences of domestic violence, abduction, and molestation, Assam has been at the top for four years running. The crime rate against women is disproportionately high in certain Indian states, including Odisha, Rajasthan, Telangana, and Haryana. A part of the problem is the persistent patriarchal mentality and low conviction rate (Saini et al., 2021). Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that there has been an uptick in crime reporting, which indicates a more favorable attitude towards reporting infractions (Ramesh, 2021).

Northeastern states like Nagaland (index score of 0.86), Meghalaya, Manipur, and Mizoram are among the top scoring states in terms of socio-cultural empowerment. There are less crimes committed against women in Nagaland, fewer children married off at a young age (5.6%), a more balanced gender ratio (1007 girls for 1000 males), and 99% female representation in decision-making positions. In the northeastern states, women have a much larger say than in other areas when it comes to healthcare and family-related purchases (Banerjee, 2015). According to Buongpui (2013) and Khonglah (2008), tribal women in the northeastern area have more freedom and experience less social ills including dowry, female infanticide, and honor murders. Kerala and Himachal Pradesh both have low rates of child marriage and a good sex ratio, with women also having a say in family decisions. There have been gains, however data at the national level shows that there are still structural difficulties (Mishra, 2021).

Political Empowerment of Women

Figure 5 shows that women's empowerment includes political representation and engagement. To promote a gender-sensitive and inclusive society and to address women's challenges, it is essential for women to be involved in decision-making at higher levels (Devi & Lakshmi, 2005; Nisha & Vezhaventhan, 2018).

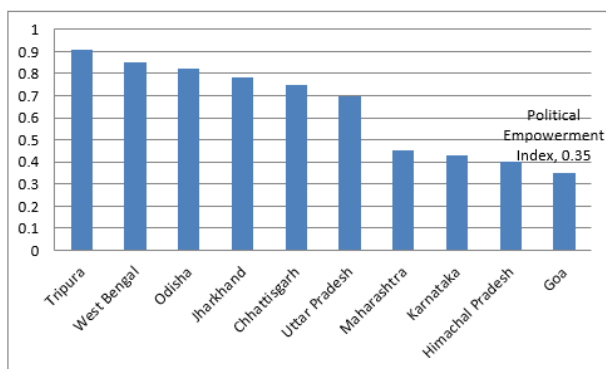


Figure 5: Empowerment Index (Political)

Women still have a low presence in Indian politics, despite the fact that their engagement has increased. Women made up a record-breaking 14.3% of legislators in the 19th Lok Sabha election. But it's still

a long way from parity. Political empowerment tends to be more effective in states that score lower on socio-economic metrics. The following states have high rankings in this index: West Bengal, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha. At 0.91 on the score, Tripura has the highest female voter participation and the most representation in the state's elections. Although there is one female lawmaker, it does not reflect wider representation due to the two Lok Sabha seats allotted to Tripura.

Utterakhand, Telangana, Goa, Mizoram, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, and Punjab are among the states that rank poorly in terms of political empowerment. Some states, including Goa, Mizoram, and Nagaland, have no female lawmakers at all in the Lok Sabha. Particularly underrepresented are women from states with a single Lok Sabha seat, such as Nagaland and Mizoram. Goa and Himachal Pradesh have similar challenges with minimal female participation; the former has two seats and the latter has four.

Although there has been some improvement, India's overall record in promoting political empowerment is disheartening. The patriarchal worldview limits women's possibilities and perpetuates the stereotype that women can't lead. There are several obstacles that female politicians encounter, such as cyberbullying and insults. A lot of women in politics are really proxy candidates—women who are put in charge by male relatives or guardians via reservation or quota systems (Nisha & Vezhaventhan, 2018; Venkiteswaran, 2021).

Empowerment of Women -

With an index score of 0.71, Tamil Nadu is the most empowered state in India when it comes to women. Four of the five metrics used to determine this index are quite strong for Tamil Nadu. With 84% female literacy and a primary school dropout rate of just 0.8%, this state has one of India's best records for female education (Fig. 6). In an effort to lower the female dropout rate in all groups, the government of Tamil Nadu has launched a number of programs, including the Periyar EVR Nagammaar scheme (Gokila, 2015). The health care system in Tamil Nadu is second to none. The state has an extremely low fertility rate of 1.8 and almost all babies are born in hospitals. In the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, almost all women (92%) have some kind of bank account. The state's efforts to empower rural women economically have been fruitful via Self-Help Groups (SHGs), which encourage members to save money, learn to be entrepreneurs, and become active members of their communities (Prema & Veeramuthu, 2019). One SHG that has played a significant role in promoting gender equality is the Mahalir Thittam SHG (Seenivam, 2012). More than 90% of women in Tamil Nadu have a say in home decisions, and the state has an admirable sex ratio of 1088 females for every 1000 males. The state has a very low incidence of crimes committed against females. The political component of Tamil Nadu, on

the other hand, rates medium. In the 17th Lok Sabha elections, 72% of the electorate was female, yet there was very little female representation in the legislature.

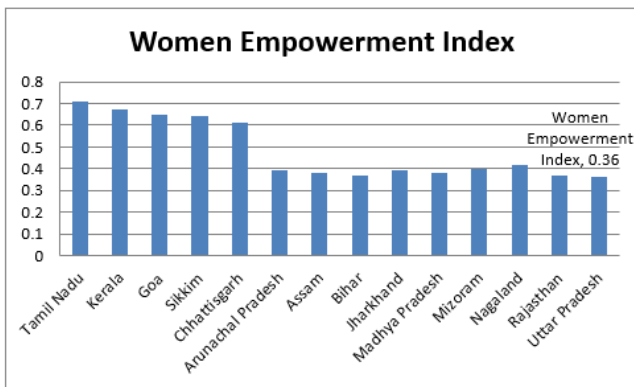


Figure 6: Women empowerment index

With an index score of 0.67, Kerala is the second-best state in India when it comes to health, education, and socio-cultural aspects. Having said that, it does worse when it comes to economic engagement and political representation. With a primary school dropout rate of 0%, Kerala has India's highest female literacy rate. Also, there are a lot of women making decisions at home (94% female participation rate) and a high sex ratio (1,121 females for every 1000 men). The health care system in Kerala is top-notch, with a total fertility rate of just 1.8 and almost all births taking place in hospitals. Poverty eradication and addressing gender concerns including safety and financial empowerment are the goals of the women-centric Kudumbashree initiative. Having said that, only 27% of women in Kerala own property and 25% of working women are paid in cash, thus the state does not do well when it comes to economic engagement.

The state of Goa ranks third with an index score of 0.65. It does very well in the areas of socio-cultural, education, and health, but does average work in the areas of economics and politics. Goa has an impressively low primary school dropout rate of about 0.2% and a very high female literacy rate of 92%. With 93% of the population active, women in this state are heavily involved in making decisions at home. Additionally, the overall fertility rate is low at 1.3, and there is a very low incidence of child marriage at 5.4%. Almost all births are recorded in institutional settings.

The state of Sikkim has an impressively low total fertility rate of 1.1 and a high percentage of institutional births (94%). There are very few cases of female infanticide or dowry-related fatalities in Sikkim since women are highly prized. With more than 50% of women in Sikkim having some kind of property or land, economic engagement is modest. Although the state of Chhattisgarh does well on the economic and political fronts, its educational index score is somewhat low at 0.43.

Despite their varied cultures and largely egalitarian values, north-eastern states like as Arunachal

Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, and Nagaland all have poor performance. Poverty, bad health, domestic violence, and war are some of the problems these states confront. Although their female literacy rates are good, their educational indices are negatively affected by their high primary school dropout rates.

CONCLUSION

The health, age at marriage, and decision-making abilities of women are favorably influenced by their literacy and education levels. Goa, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Sikkim are some of the states that have done a better job of empowering women since the government has invested in their education and health via different programs and infrastructure. The economic empowerment and public awareness campaigns spearheaded by women-centric organizations and self-help groups were critical factors in the liberation of women. When it comes to women's empowerment, southern states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana, and Kerala do better since SHGs are present there. The level of political representation at the highest levels has increased over time, but it is far from enough. Due to increased Lok Sabha seat distribution, states with larger population, such West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, have more women representing them. The 'BIMARU' report notes that when it comes to women's empowerment, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh all rank low. There has been a negative effect on women's empowerment due to these states' dismal performance on demographic, socioeconomic, and developmental metrics. Poverty, violent wars, superstitions, and opposition to embracing modern healthcare and family planning techniques are common in the North-Eastern states of India, even though women there have a higher standing than in mainstream Indian culture.

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