

EDUCATOR

THE FIMT MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

YEAR : 2025 (JULY – DECEMBER)

BI - ANNUAL JOURNAL

ISSN NO. : 2277-9736

VOL XII(II)

CONTENTS

- *Navigating the shades of women empowerment: A critical enquiry of its diverse dimensions with an empirical Perspective*
Prof. S P Singh
- *Legal Status of Female Fighters: An Evaluation of International Legal Instruments for their Role in Armed Conflict*
Swetha Mariam Saji & Garima Upadhyay
- *From Women's Welfare To Rights: Policy, Development, and Legal Reform*
Rohit Tamang & Diwash Saibya
- *Book Review on 'Empowerment of Rural Women': A Historical Perspective*
Govindu Kondaiah
- *An Analysis of Role of Digital Equality for the Women Empowerment: A Study of Issues and challenges*
Dr. Teena Sundarbanshi
- *Self Help Groups, Women Empowerment and Environmental Management in Ambikapur city of Chhattisgarh*
Dr. Saman Narayan Upadhyay
- *Role of Gender Justice in Women Empowerment*
Prof. S P Singh & Dr Malvika Sharma
- *Gendered Realities in Digital Spaces: Empowerment, Exclusion, and Online Violence*
Ashelle Deyona D'souza & Vimala Mary A
- *Gender, Society, and Sustainability: Addressing Socio - Economic and Environmental Challenges in Northeast India*
Pooja & Nisha Sehrawat
- *Digital Disempowerment: Explicit Content and Women's Dignity in India*
Aryabhata Sah
- *Silent Burdens and Resilient Voices: A Comprehensive Study on the Mental Health Challenges and Well-Being of Women in Contemporary Society*
Pratibha

NAAC ACCREDITED



FAIRFIELD

INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT & TECHNOLOGY

ISSN 2277-9736

EDUCATOR

THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

JULY - DEC. 2025, VOL XII, ISSUE II



तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु

Fairfield Institute of Management & Technology

FIMT Campus, Bijwasan Road, Kapashera, New
Delhi-110037 (INDIA)



This volume should be cited as: Educator-The FIMT
Multidisciplinary Journal, Vol. XII, Issue II, 2025

ISSN: 2277-9736

Published By: FIMT Institutional Campus, 1037, Bijwasan
Road, Kapashera, New Delhi- 110097, India

Copyright: Fairfield Institute of Management and Technology

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without prior permission of the publisher. The publisher shall also not be responsible for any views/opinion expressed herein and author(s) solely shall be liable for the same or of any kind of plagiarism.

Address for Correspondence Editor
Fairfield Institute of Management & Technology
FIMT Campus, Bijwasan Road, Kapashera,
New Delhi-110037 (INDIA)





Chief Patron

Shri V. K. N. Bhardwaj
Chairman

Patron

Dr. Nalini Joshi
Executive Director

Advisory Board

Prof. (Dr.) Saroj Vyas

*Director,
FIMT, New Delhi*

Prof. (Dr.) Dipa Dube

*Dean, Rajiv Gandhi School of
Intellectual Property Law, IIT,
Kharagpur*

Prof. (Dr.) M. Afzal Wani

*Advisor, FIMT, New Delhi
Former Dean, USLLS, Guru Gobind Singh
Indraprastha University, New Delhi*

Prof. (Dr.) Tasleema Jan

*Dean, school of Education and
Behavioral Sciences, University
of Kashmir, Srinagar*

Prof. (Dr.) S. P. Singh

*School of Law,
FIMT, New Delhi*

Prof. (Dr.) R. L. Ujjwal

*USICT, Guru Gobind Singh
Indraprastha University,
New Delhi*

Prof. H. L. Sharma

Former Professor, NCERT, New Delhi

Dr Ritu Sharma

*Associate Professor, National
Law University, New Delhi*

Prof. (Dr.) Soumitra Mukherjee

*School of Environmental Sciences,
Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi*

Dr. Abdullah Bin Junaid

*Faculty, Institute of Management
Technology Dubai, International
Academic city, UAE*

Prof. (Dr.) Pramod Kumar Mehra

*Head, School of Humanities, Indira Gandhi
National Open University, New Delhi*

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Laxmi

Editorial Committee

Prof. (Dr.) Anita Mukherjee

**Dr. Mamta
Dr. Suman Yadav**

Dr. Vikash Kumar Singh

Mr. Akshay Shukla



ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The Educator - the FIMT Multidisciplinary Journal (ISSN No. 2277-9736) is a Bi-Annual and multidisciplinary journal to publish research papers in the fields of management, commerce, information technology, education, economics, and media studies. We publish the highest quality empirical, theoretically grounded work addressing the main areas of higher education and the dynamic role of the university in society. We seek to publish scholarship from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives and disciplinary orientations. Articles appearing in the Journal employ an array of methodological approaches, and welcome work from scholars across a range of career stages.

Objective: The most important objective is to give academicians and researchers a platform to submit their original research work for publication.

Review Process: Two or more reviewers will review all contributions by following the 'double blind' system.

The Educator -the FIMT Multidisciplinary Journal reserves the right of making editorial amendments in the final draft of the manuscript to suit the journal's requirements. All contributions to the journal are rigorously refereed and are selected on the basis of the quality and originality of the work. The journal publishes the most significant new research and review work in all areas pertaining to its scope and research being done in the world, thus ensuring its scientific priority and significance.



CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

It gives me immense pleasure to extend my warm greetings to all readers through the latest issue of *Educator: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, and to witness the continued growth and impact of this scholarly platform, which serves as a beacon of knowledge, research, and academic excellence.

I wholeheartedly welcome our valued academicians, researchers, and thought leaders to engage deeply with the contents of this journal and contribute meaningfully to the ever-evolving domains of research, education, and innovation. Through your insights and discoveries, we shape a brighter future for the next generation—one rooted in knowledge, compassion, and the welfare of all humanity.

Educator: A Multidisciplinary Journal aspires to bridge the gap between theory and practice by fostering a rich dialogue among scholars, practitioners, industry experts, policymakers, and educators from diverse disciplines. Its commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration and intellectual rigor has established it as a respected and reliable source of scholarly engagement.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to the editorial board and contributors, whose unwavering dedication, scholarly integrity, and pursuit of excellence have brought this publication to life. Their efforts not only uphold the highest standards of academic publishing but also inspire a culture of curiosity, inquiry, and innovation within our academic community.





Let this journal continue to serve as a vibrant platform
for ideas, discoveries, and collaboration that uplift and empower
educators and learners across the globe

Warm Regards

V. K. N. Bhardwaj
Chairman
FIMT Group of Institutions





FROM THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Dear authors, reviewers, and readers,

On behalf of our editorial team, we feel honoured and fortunate to offer a word of thanks to our readers, contributors, authors, editors, and anonymous reviewers, who volunteered to contribute to the success of the journal and also for its mission to improve the quality of care and research in the form of publication in different areas of education.

We are thankful to the founder and chairman honourable Shri V.K.N Bhardwaj and Patron Dr. Nalini Joshi, who have always been a guiding spirit and prime inspiration to publish this journal. We are grateful for their continuous support and encouragement to bring out the journal in a proper form. We also appreciate advisory for their assistance, advice, and suggestion in shaping the journal in this form.

Finally, we express our profound gratitude to everyone who lent us their expertise as an advisor, peer reviewer and author. We wish your continuous support and thanks for being part of this vibrant community. We encourage you to continue sending us your feedback, ideas, and original works to further improve the quality and impact of the journal.

Sincere Regards

Editorial Committee





ABOUT THE THEME

Navigating the shades of women's empowerment: A critical inquiry into its diverse dimensions and real-world impact

“There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women- Kofi Annan”

The theme “Navigating the shades of Women’s Empowerment” invites a critical and interdisciplinary examination of how empowerment is conceptualized, implemented, and experienced by women across varying socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts. Far from being a singular or linear process, women’s empowerment unfolds in multiple layers—ranging from legal rights and economic independence to personal agency, digital access, and psychological liberation. This journal theme emphasizes the need to move beyond tokenistic or surface-level narratives and explore the complex realities and contradictions inherent in empowerment discourses. It encourages contributors to interrogate the structures of power that shape women’s lives, the intersectional barriers they face, and the transformative potential of authentic empowerment efforts.



INDEX

1. Navigating the shades of women empowerment: A critical enquiry of its diverse dimensions with an empirical Perspective <i>Prof. S P Singh</i>	1
2. Legal Status of Female Fighters: An Evaluation of International Legal Instruments for their Role in Armed Conflicts <i>Swetha Mariam Saji & Garima Upadhyay</i>	4
3. From Women's Welfare To Rights: Policy, Development, and Legal Reform <i>Rohit Tamang & Diwash Saibya</i>	26
4. Book Review on "Empowerment of Rural Women: 46 A Historical Perspective" <i>Govindu Kondaiah</i>	
5. An Analysis of Role of Digital Equality for the Women Empowerment: A Study of Issues and challenges <i>Dr. Teena Sundarbanshi</i>	52
6. Self Help Groups, Women Empowerment and Environmental Management in Ambikapur city of Chhattisgarh <i>Dr. Saman Narayan Upadhyay</i>	66
7. Role of Gender Justice in Women Empowerment <i>Prof. S. P. Singh & Dr. Malvika Sharma</i>	78

8. Gendered Realities in Digital Spaces: Empowerment, Exclusion, and Online Violence	88
<i>Ashelle Deyona D'souza & Vimala Mary A</i>	
9. Gender, Society, and Sustainability: Addressing Socio-Economic and Environmental Challenges in Northeast India	104
<i>Pooja & Nisha Sehwat</i>	
10. Digital Disempowerment: Explicit Content and Women's Dignity in India	122
<i>Aryabhata Sah</i>	
11. Silent Burdens and Resilient Voices: A Comprehensive Study on the Mental Health Challenges and Well-Being of Women in Contemporary Society	133
<i>Pratibha</i>	

1

NAVIGATING THE SHADES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A CRITICAL ENQUIRY OF ITS DIVERSE DIMENSIONS WITH AN EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVE

Prof. S P Singh

Fairfield Institute of Management and Technology, New Delhi

History bears the fact that women have been the focus of attention of various studies with different angles, mainly the status of women. Initially, during the Vedic period, women enjoyed a dignified status in society; however, with the passage of time, this status began to decline due to rapidly changing socio-cultural and political circumstances. The invasion of foreigners had a decisive role in changing the socio-political structure of Indian society. In this transformation over a long period, the position of women suffered a deep setback. The attitude and understanding towards women became negative and discriminatory. During British rule, it further deteriorated. In independent India, Indian society inherited the legacy of the past, which caught the attention of socio-political reformers. Serious concerns were expressed for giving the due dignified position to women and to make her free from historical discrimination and exploitation at different levels. Various social and political thinkers and reformers contributed a lot to raising the issue of women's development and women's empowerment. The feminist movement had a significant impact on changing the mindset of society, as well as that of women themselves. The Indian constitution has also become the instrument of women's development and women's empowerment. In the Preamble of the Indian Constitution, the prominent values of Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Dignity

have been assured for every citizen. Article 15 of the Indian Constitution prohibits discrimination based on colour, caste, and sex, etc.

To ensure a dignified place for women at all walks of life large numbers of administrative and Legislative measures have been initiated at the level of the central government and state government, as per the support of the constitution.

Universalisation of Education and RTE has brought significant changes in the personality development of women. It has opened the way for women's employment in all areas of national life, which has added confidence and a sense of independence in them.

Reservation of women in local bodies and the proposed reservation of women in state assemblies and the national parliament have given a new importance to the issue of women's empowerment by giving them participation in decision-making platforms. The 21st century has added a new colour and shade for women's development in the wake of the evolution of modern society and global outlook. Now there is no boundary for women's advancement from some work at the micro level to space, ocean, and sky at the macro level. Now they are contributing domestic economy of the national economy. Now, traditional sectional inequality is giving place to inclusive development, where women's development is getting due attention.

Ground survey of contemporary India indicates the role of women in national development and Viksit Bharat. The capabilities and capacities of women are being properly utilized at different levels in almost all areas of various activities.

If we examine the history of women's development and their role in nation building, we find their good account, yet we can say it is a history of lost opportunities for women.

It will be necessary to refer here to the other side of the picture, also, where we see the pathetic position of women in society. Educational development and employment opportunities, and their place in the decision-making system, did not bring the desired situation of an equidistant and egalitarian society in relation to women's dignity. Laws, policies, and programmes for women's development need to be implemented under strong vigilance and monitoring to see the desired results. There should be a clear objective to place women in the social order as per the structure of traditional Indian society and the constitutional values and objectives. Holistic studies and observations are needed to understand the issues of women's empowerment in its desired perspective.

2

**LEGAL STATUS OF FEMALE FIGHTERS:
AN EVALUATION OF INTERNATIONAL
LEGAL INSTRUMENTS FOR THEIR ROLE
IN ARMED CONFLICTS**

Swetha Mariam Saji

Student

Garima Upadhyay

Student

Faculty of Law, University of Delhi, New Delhi

ABSTRACT

Women are frequently viewed primarily as victims rather than active participants in armed conflicts due to deeply ingrained cultural assumptions that depict them as inherently non-violent. However, historical and contemporary examples from conflicts around the world demonstrate that women can and do participate directly in military operations. Women are often involved in crucial support functions such as providing medical care, gathering intelligence, and maintaining communication networks, which are essential for sustaining armed movements. Analysing the part of female fighters armed conflicts is necessary not only for a better understanding but also because contemporary developments necessitate this examination. Their motivations for joining armed groups are diverse, including ideological visions, personal experiences, and, in some cases, coercion and forced recruitment. Most studies focus on the violence faced by women during armed conflicts or their role in peace building processes. This study differentiates itself by focusing on female fighters engaged

in armed conflicts from three capacities: as agents of liberation, victims of weaponisation, and perpetrators of violence, and by analysing these roles under existing international legal instruments. Even though the notion of formal equality is incorporated in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the protection mechanisms provided are minimal and not gender-neutral. The paper addresses the need for an inclusive approach in law to tackle the various problems faced by women. It argues for the enhancement of legal protections and recognition for female combatants to ensure gender justice and equity.

Keywords: Armed Conflicts, Female fighters, Geneva Conventions, Victims, Violence, Weaponisation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women are often viewed primarily as victims rather than active contributors in armed conflicts. This perception stems from deeply ingrained cultural assumptions that women are inherently non-violent. However, this view overlooks the different and significant part females play in armed conflicts, ranging from providing essential support to actively engaging in combat. Increasing participation of females in armed conflicts, especially in “Non-International Armed Conflicts (NIACs)” more at the national or limited groups, challenging traditional gender norms and expanding their roles in conflict zones.

Despite this increasing involvement, the legal protections for female combatants remain minimal in the Geneva Conventions (Geneva Conventions, 1949) and their protocols (Additional Protocol I and II, 1976). While various initiatives by United Nations organisations aim to prohibit violence during armed conflicts, significant gaps persist in the legal frameworks that protect female fighters. One critical issue is defining the meaning of female fighter under international law. This ambiguity hinders the ability to provide comprehensive

protection and recognition for women who participate in armed conflicts.

Female fighters often act as agents of liberation, establishing a world where gender justice and distributive justice are achieved. Their motivations for joining armed groups are diverse, including ideological visions, personal experiences, and, in some cases, coercion and forced recruitment (Dureuke, 2016). The subsequent sufferings and violence they face as victims of weaponisation need thorough analysis. It is essential to move beyond the simplistic view of females as mere victims and consider their roles as potential perpetrators of violence. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing the legal loopholes that exist in international legal instruments related to female combatants. Most studies focus on the violence females face amid armed conflicts. This study differentiates from other studies in this impact as it mainly focuses on female fighters engaged in armed conflicts from three capacities in relation to International legal instruments.

This paper aims to analyse the concept of armed conflicts in the contemporary period focusing on the roles played by females. The analysis is conducted from three perspectives: *“women as agents of liberation, victims of weaponisation, and perpetrators of violence”*. Through the analysis of recent legal instruments and identification of existing loopholes, this research seeks to propose an inclusive approach to the legal framework that promotes gender justice and challenges the traditional notions of masculinity and the non-violent nature of women. The methodology for this research relies on a doctrinal approach, utilising a range of sources including legal enactments, declarations, case laws, reports, books, articles, and journals. This article focuses on the perception of the various roles of females in armed conflicts and suggest measures for improving their legal protections and recognition.

II. THE NOTION OF ARMED CONFLICTS

An armed conflict is when combat occurs between the armed forces of two or more countries, or between organised armed groups. By the very definition, “Armed Conflicts can be categorised into International Armed Conflicts and NIACs”. “By virtue of article 2 common to Geneva Conventions, use of armed forces between two States comes within the scope of International Armed Conflict (Geneva Conventions, 1949).” According to *Tadic case* (Prosecutor, 1995), “the Tribunal stated that *an armed conflict exists whenever there is a resort to armed force between States*”. As per “the Additional Protocol 1 to Geneva Conventions, *armed conflicts where people fight against colonial domination, alien occupation, and racist regimes to exercise their right of self-determination also come under the purview of International armed conflict* (AP I, 1977).” In the context of NIACs, two frameworks outline the criteria for defining such conflicts. They are common art. 3 of the “Geneva Conventions” (Geneva Conventions, 1949) and art. 1 of “Additional Protocol II” (AP II, 1977). Common Art. 3 (Geneva Conventions, 1949) operates to NIACs taking place within the territory of a member state. For such conflicts to qualify, they should at least attain a certain magnitude and involve organised armed forces, setting them apart from isolated or sporadic acts of violence. By contrast, “Additional Protocol II” (AP II, 1977) adopts a narrower scope: it governs conflicts occurring within a “High Contracting Party’s territory” that pit its armed groups against insurgent groups that maintain territorial control and are capable of sustained military operations. Importantly, this excludes situations of violence occurring exclusively between non-state armed groups. “The ICTY, contributes to defining NIACs under Common Art. 3, affirming that *protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organised armed groups*

constitutes a NIAC, even without direct involvement of the government's armed forces (Prosecutor, 1995)."

In armed conflicts, male domination has historically been prevalent. However, in recent times, there have been an increase in female combatants, who play vital and multifaceted roles that challenge traditional gender norms and significantly contribute to both state and non-state military operations. Women serve in regular armed forces, guerrilla movements, and resistance groups, often taking on leadership and strategic positions.

The concept of "hegemonic masculinity, as postulated by Connell, *perpetuates the dominant social position of men and the subordinate social position of women in armed conflict*" (Connell, 2005). In armed conflicts, women combatants often encounter opposition from male combatants who perceive their involvement as undermining masculine identity. Feminist scholars emphasise that women's roles in war extend beyond victimhood, highlighting their capacity to act as agents of transformation (Andrabi, 2019). Armed conflict can open way to empowerment, as the absence of men within the family and women's increased visibility in public life enable them to assume new responsibilities and roles that push against conventional gender expectations.

III. ROLE OF FEMALE FIGHTERS IN ARMED CONFLICTS

Women are frequently perceived mainly as victims rather than "active agents" in armed conflicts. This widespread public perception stems from the relative invisibility of women within armed groups and the prevailing cultural assumption that women are inherently non-violent. However, it is a mistake to infer from the apparent absence of women in armed groups that they do not or cannot play significant roles during armed conflicts. In reality, women often contribute in various

capacities and may serve as combatants, spies, messengers, and logisticians, among other roles.

Understanding why females choose to participate or refrain from participating in armed struggles requires attention to the broader social conditions, including the nature of the conflict, patterns of societal organisation, pre-existing networks, and historical context. As women become more engaged in social, economic, and political spheres, traditional assumptions that confine them to limited roles begin to erode, making their involvement in conflicts more likely. Women, who often face marginalisation in socio-economic and political spheres, perceive revolutionary struggles not just as reactions to oppressive regimes imposed by external forces, but also as challenges to the discriminatory practices prevalent within their own communities.

Scholars identify three primary mechanisms that connect women's wider social integration with their participation in armed movements. First, access to education and employment provides women with competencies that are valuable to insurgent groups (Thomas et al, 2018). Second, greater socialisation and interaction with men in pre-conflict activities foster recognition of women as capable partners in collective struggle (Thomas et al, 2018). Third, enhanced educational and professional opportunities increase women's exposure to political processes and networks, creating pathways into armed organisations (Thomas et al, 2018). Despite these insights, pinpointing the exact motivations behind women's participation remains complex, particularly in contexts of ethnic conflict and genocide.

In regions such as America, the Middle East, and Europe, female combatants have contributed significantly to securing their territories and restoring internal order. In "Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Mozambique, women and girls played crucial roles

during civil wars, serving as strategists, material and logistics providers, and fighters to help secure peace and stability (Thomas et al, 2018).” The Nigerian military has also included women in several internal operations, with their roles varying based on their corps and the nature and severity of the internal security threat. “Women were particularly valuable to the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador as skilled medics and radio operators due to their higher literacy rates compared to their male peers (Berghof, 2010).” “The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) initially involved women in support roles but later trained them for combat, with women comprising a significant portion of their forces (Alexander, 2014).” “Similarly, in the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), about 30% of the guerrilla force is female, with women sharing tasks and responsibilities equally with men (Franco, 2017).” The role of female fighters associated with armed conflicts can be analysed in three perspectives: As agents of liberation, as victims of weaponisation and as perpetrators of violence.

Women as Agents of Liberation

In armed conflicts around the world, women often play critical roles as agents of liberation, contributing to efforts aimed at achieving freedom, justice, and peace in their communities. They mobilise grassroots movements, advocate for human rights, and promote dialogue and reconciliation initiatives. Women’s unique perspectives and experiences bring attention to the main reasons of conflicts, such as inequality and social injustices, thereby shaping more all-inclusive approaches to liberation. They are active agents in providing essential services and support to affected populations, including humanitarian assistance, healthcare, education etc. Women’s community-based organisations and networks play crucial roles in providing safety nets and building resilience in conflict-affected communities.

One significant way women contribute to liberation is through their active participation in armed resistance movements. Women have been involved in various capacities, from combatants to strategists, organisers, and leaders. Their involvement challenges traditional gender norms and stereotypes, breaking barriers in male-dominated spaces and asserting their right to participate fully in struggles for liberation. Moreover, women often serve as catalysts for social change and peace building within their communities.

A perspective in regard to peace-building is “*Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) processes*” (UNSC Res 1325). Disarmament focuses on the collection and control of arms and ammunition, which are essential for creating secure and stable environments following conflict. For women, this entails addressing the proliferation of weapons that often exacerbate gender-based violence and insecurity. Demobilisation involves downsizing or disbanding armed forces, including female combatants, and supporting the min the transition to civilian life. Reintegration, on the other hand, is a complicated procedure aimed at assisting former combatants and their dependents to reintegrate into post-war communities. For women, this involves social, economic, and psychological support to facilitate their inclusion in decision-making processes, sustainable employment, and the adjustment of attitudes and expectations. Reintegration initiatives must be gender-sensitive and address the unique challenges faced by female ex-combatants, including stigma, trauma, and limited access to resources.

The UNSC’s First resolution on “*Women, Peace and Security*” focuses on the need for encouraging women’s participation in peace-building process (UNSC res 2467, 2019). The Resolution 2467 states that “*member states need to take active steps to increase the participation of women in all*

decision-making processes pertaining to prevention, management and resolution of conflict, at the national, regional and international level" (UNSC Res 2467, 2019). According to "United Nations Secretary General's Report of 2023, Women's involvement in peace processes has stagnated, with only a small fraction of recent agreements incorporating provisions specifically addressing women, girls, or gender issues" (UNSG, 2013). Out of 18 peace agreements reached in 2022, only six included such provisions, mirroring trends from previous years where these provisions accounted for roughly 20 to 35 percent (UNSG, 2013). Notably, only one agreement that of South Sudan, involved a local women's organisation in its signing or witnessing. While women have played pivotal roles in local negotiations, facilitating access to resources, securing humanitarian aid, and mediating conflicts, their participation at the national level remains limited. Women's representation was notably absent from various peace processes and political talks concerning critical situations, including those in Ethiopia, Kosovo, Sudan, Myanmar, and Libya.

Women as Victims of Weaponisation

Weaponisation of women refers to the deliberate and systematic use of gender-based violence and discrimination as tools of conflict, control, and domination. In conflicts worldwide, women often find themselves targeted specifically because of their gender, becoming victims of various forms of violence and exploitation. One common manifestation of the weaponisation of women is "sexual violence, including rape, sexual slavery, and forced prostitution". Perpetrators use these brutal acts as tools of war to intimidate, humiliate, and exert power over communities. Women and girls become primary targets, facing the devastating physical, psychological, and social consequences of sexual violence, often enduring

long-term trauma and stigma. The “Geneva Conventions (Geneva Convention, 1949) and Additional Protocols (AP I and AP II, 1977) condemn the practice of sexual violence against women during armed conflicts.” *“Sexual violence, including rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, and other forms, is classified as both a crime against humanity and a war crime under the Rome Statute (Rome Statute, 1998), thereby explicitly prohibiting such acts.”* Women are often subjected to gender-based discrimination and restrictions on their rights and freedoms as part of conflict strategies. This may include forced displacement, denial of access to education and healthcare, and restrictions on freedom of movement.

Women may be coerced or forcibly recruited into armed groups, often as combatants or support personnel. They are exploited for their labour, used as human shields, or subjected to propaganda and manipulation. In these roles, women are not only victims of violence but also unwilling participants in perpetuating conflicts. Thus, they are compelled to perceive the role of suicide bombers and sacrifice their own life. *“Human Rights Watch concluded that virtually every post-pubescent female survivor of militia violence in Rwanda was subsequently raped, with estimates ranging from 250,000 to 500,000 cases of rape”* (African Rights, 1995). In Sierra Leone, “the Special Court of Sierra Leone recognised forced enslavement, sexual violence, slavery, and rape of women as crimes against humanity (Oosterveld, 2009).”

Women as Perpetrators of Violence

The conventional viewpoint encompasses a series of arguments characterised by prevalent themes and assumptions regarding gender roles and violence. It mirrors the widespread notion that women inherently possess greater nurturing qualities and are less prone to aggression compared to men,

either due to inherent traits or social conditioning. Consequently, in contexts of conflict, women are typically not viewed as combatants or actively participating in the violent aspects of warfare. This view cannot be supported. Women may engage in acts of violence within armed groups or militias, taking on combat roles, participating in attacks, or even leading units.

Additionally, they may be involved in support roles such as logistics, intelligence gathering, or propaganda dissemination, which contribute to the perpetuation of violence. Females acting as suicide bombers and engaging in sexual violence during armed conflicts supports the concept that women act as perpetrators of violence.

Women have at times been central actors in violent conflicts, though their roles have often been overlooked in accountability processes. In Nazi Germany, women contributed significantly to the machinery of genocide yet were seldom prosecuted for war crimes. “In Rwanda, women in positions of authority actively encouraged the genocide, and around 6% of those detained for genocide-related crimes were women (African Rights, 1995).” In more recent contexts, Kurdish women have increasingly enlisted in the Peshmerga to combat the threat posed by ISIL (Cohen, 2013). “Evidence from a 2010 population-based survey in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) reveals that 41% of female survivors of sexual violence identified women among their perpetrators, while 10% of male survivors reported the same (Cohen, 2013).” Likewise, conflicts in Liberia, Haiti, and Sierra Leone saw female fighters implicated in acts of sexual violence, ranging from rape using objects such as firearms to sexual assaults against men, including genital mutilation.

IV. INTERNATIONAL LEGAL INSTRUMENTS PERTAINING TO WOMEN FIGHTERS IN ARMED CONFLICTS

The participation of females in war was minimal until World War I. So, there was little perceived need for their special protection before then. However, this does not mean that women lacked protection entirely. From the inception of IHL, women were afforded the same general legal protections as men. Starting in 1929, women have enjoyed specific protections under IHL. The four “Geneva Conventions” (Geneva Conventions, 1949) and their Protocols (AP I and AP II, 1977) establish a “system of formal equality, ensuring that no adverse distinction can be drawn between individuals based on sex, race, nationality, religion, political opinions, or any other similar criteria.” The Third Geneva Convention states differentiation on the basis of sex is permissible only if it has a favourable impact. It requires *“that prisoners of war be treated equally, without adverse distinctions based on race, nationality, religion, or politics, while considering rank, sex, health, age, professional qualifications etc and that a female prisoner of war cannot receive or undergo a harsher Punishment than a male member”* (Geneva Convention III, 1949). Women prisoners and detainees are granted special protection through separate quarters and supervision by women, aiming to shield them from sexual violence. Common Art. 3 prohibits acts that violate personal dignity, including humiliating and degrading treatment. Rape and other forms of sexual violence, though not explicitly mentioned, are considered violations of personal dignity under this article. Expectant mothers, nursing mothers, and mothers of young children receive special attention under IHL. They benefit from provisions that ensure early release from prison, priority in medical care, emergency relief, and continuous food and medical supplies.

International human rights law also emphasises safeguarding individuals from harm and advancing dignity. Human rights law extends its application beyond conflict scenarios. It is applicable during the times of both peace and conflict concentrating on shielding individuals from governmental actions that infringe upon their human rights, while IHL operates solely in times of conflict.

The UDHR (UDHR, 1948), supported by ICCPR (ICCPR, 1977), continues to serve as a cornerstone in safeguarding rights fundamental to human dignity. Additionally, CEDAW (CEDAW, 1979) include obligations for nations to eradicate intolerance against women in every sphere and highlights the necessity of equality before the law alongside legal protection from violence. United Nations organs have also advanced initiatives to ensure women's active participation in peace building. "The UN Women is focused on gender equality and women's empowerment and has played a crucial role in advocating for the protection of women and children during emergencies and armed conflicts (UN Women, 2024)." Similarly, the "Commission on the Status of Women", functioning under the ECOSOC achieved notable progress between 1968 and 1974 (UN Women, 2024). "The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) further situated armed conflict within a broader framework, identifying sexual violence as a core issue (Beijing Declaration, 1995)." It recognised women's heightened vulnerability to the consequences of armed conflict and explicitly linked these risks to the broader discrimination and disadvantage they face in society (Beijing Declaration, 1995).

The UNSC has also undertaken significant initiatives to improve the situation of women in contexts of armed conflict. A milestone development was the adoption of the first Resolution on "Women, Peace, and Security", SCR 1325 in

October 2000 (SCR 1325, 2000). “This resolution represented a turning point as it explicitly integrated women into the peace and security agenda, acknowledging that armed conflicts have distinct and disproportionate impacts on females in comparison to males.” It stressed the essential role of women’s meaningful participation in peace negotiations, peace processes, and broader peace building activities. The framework of SCR 1325 is organized around four interrelated pillars: “women’s role in conflict prevention, their involvement in peace-making and peace building, the safeguarding of women’s rights both during and after armed conflicts, and addressing gender-specific needs related to repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration, and post-conflict reconstruction” (SCR 1325, 2000).

Following the adoption of SCR 1325, the UNSC went on to pass nine additional resolutions under the WPS agenda. These may generally be divided into two principal categories: resolutions that enhance women’s participation in peace and security processes, and those that aim to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence. The latter set of resolutions began with “SCR 1820 in 2008, which for the first time recognised sexual violence as a deliberate tactic of warfare and emphasized its serious implications for international peace and security (SCR 1820, 2008).”

All of these resolutions underline “*the urgency of addressing sexual violence in conflict, categorising it as a serious breach of human rights and, depending on context, as a war crime, a crime against humanity, or even an act of genocide* (Rome Statute, 1998).” Moreover, under the Rome Statute “sexual violence is explicitly criminalised as both a “crime against humanity” and a “war crime,” prohibiting practices such as rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, and other comparable

acts of sexual violence” (Rome Statute, 1998). Despite the extensive protections provided in these international legal frameworks, certain gaps and inadequacies in enforcement and implementation exist.

V. THE EXISTING LEGAL AMBIGUITIES AND REQUIRED REMEDIAL MEASURES

There are several legal loopholes concerning female combatants, stemming largely from traditional gender norms and historical conceptions of warfare. One significant gap is the lack of explicit recognition of women as combatants under IHL. While IHL acknowledges the “principle of equality and non-discrimination”, it often fails to address the diverse roles women play in armed conflicts, including combat. This oversight can lead to discriminatory treatment and inadequate protection for female combatants, leaving them vulnerable to abuses both on and off the battlefield. The inadequate legal framework poses a significant hurdle in effectively implementing international conventions and protocols concerning “gender equality and women’s rights”. “It has been observed that there is a lack of binding international conventions specifically focused on the protection of women in armed conflicts” (Drahnovoska, 2018).

Additionally, the classification of certain acts of violence, such as sexual violence, as gender-specific crimes rather than violations of IHL, further complicates the legal landscape. Gender Neutral law has to be ensured. The traditional perspective that views men as perpetrators and women as victims of sexual violence needs to be changed. The various sexual violences that took place during armed conflicts in Liberia, Haiti, Sierra Leone, Rwanda etc proves that women fighters also engage in sexual assault and violences. The ambiguity that exists in prosecuting perpetrators and providing redress for victims, particularly when female combatants are

involved needs to be rectified.

Sexual violence against women has received significant attention in various international instruments aimed at upholding human rights and protecting civilians in conflict zones. Despite the existence of such provisions, the practical implementation mechanisms often fall short. This is evident in ongoing conflicts in regions like Ukraine, Gaza, and Myanmar, where women continue to face terrible forms of violence with impunity, indicating a failure of serious action by United Nations organizations to effectively address these atrocities.

While the role of women in peace building processes has been acknowledged and supported, there remains a glaring gap in incorporating their inclusive participation. Mechanisms and leaders tasked with facilitating peace negotiations frequently overlook the meaningful involvement of women, undermining the potential for sustainable peace agreements.

Even efforts related to DDR policies appear to be faltering in adequately addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by women in conflict-affected areas. Moreover, the traditional focus of IHL on state actors and conventional warfare often disregards the realities of non-state armed groups, where female combatants may be more prevalent. Although there have been some shifts in recognising this disparity, substantial improvements are still needed to ensure the comprehensive protection and inclusion of women in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

Measures:

To address the legal and systemic gaps concerning female combatants in armed conflicts, a multifaceted approach is needed. Several measures are essential to alleviate these loopholes. Amending IHL to explicitly recognise women as

combatants is feasible. This recognition would ensure that female combatants receive the same legal status and protection as their male counterparts. Gender-neutral laws need to be developed that acknowledge and protect the diverse roles women play in armed conflicts. This includes recognising women as both perpetrators and victims of violence. Protection should be extended to male victims also. Here a divergence from traditional notion becomes necessary. All international instruments and protocols related to armed conflicts need to incorporate a gender-neutral perspective. This includes recognizing sexual violence as a violation of IHL, regardless of the gender of the perpetrator or victim. Implementation of binding international conventions specifically focused on the protection of women in armed conflicts is essential. This would fill the current gap where existing conventions fall short.

Enhanced Protection Measures need to be developed and enforced. This includes safe reporting mechanisms, victim support services, and protection from retaliation. Ensuring the inclusive participation of females in peace negotiations and peace building processes is necessary. Females should have meaningful roles in decision-making positions to address the unique needs and perspectives they bring.

Implementation of comprehensive gender sensitization training for military, police, and peacekeeping forces is needed. This training should cover the legal rights of female combatants, recognizing and preventing gender-based violence, and ensuring non-discriminatory treatment. Moreover, fostering international cooperation whereby the international community can work towards a more equitable and effective framework for protecting and recognizing the roles of women in armed conflicts, thereby closing existing legal and systemic loopholes is essential.

VI. CONCLUSION

Historical and contemporary examples from conflicts around the world demonstrate that women can and do participate directly in military operations. Moreover, women are frequently involved in support functions that are crucial for sustaining armed movements, such as providing medical care, gathering intelligence, and maintaining communication networks. Motivated by political beliefs, defence of their communities, personal experiences, or coercion, women fighters bring unique perspectives and skills to the battlefield. However, they face significant challenges, including gender-based discrimination, sexual violence, and difficulties in post-conflict reintegration.

The cultural stereotype of women as inherently peaceful or non-violent overlooks the complex realities of their involvement in conflicts. Women's motivations for participating in armed struggles can be as diverse as those of men, including political, ideological, and personal reasons. A consistent finding is that, in some instances, women have been targeted during wartime through intentional sexual victimisation, treating their bodies as battlegrounds. Furthermore, the impact of armed conflict on female fighters extends beyond victimhood; they may emerge as leaders and key figures in both wartime and post-conflict reconstruction efforts and may even act as perpetrators of violence.

The involvement of women fighters is crucial for peace building and post-conflict reconstruction, emphasising the need for "gender-sensitive approaches in conflict resolution" and the recognition of their contributions. Postwar, female fighters often do not receive the same reintegration support as men. In Eritrea, female ex-combatants faced destitution and social isolation. Even in liberatory groups, after the conflict, women are often expected to return to civilian life without support,

highlighting the need for equitable demobilization programs.

Further the study analysed the protections guaranteed to women fighters under various legal instruments and evaluated the loopholes existed in it. These legal loopholes can be addressed by adopting a more inclusive approach to IHL that recognises and protects the rights of all individuals involved in armed conflicts, irrespective of gender. This entails adopting a gender-sensitive approach in both the interpretation and application of existing legal provisions, while also formulating new mechanisms tailored to the unique challenges encountered by female combatants. Tackling the weaponization of women calls for holistic strategies that place the protection and empowerment of women and girls at the forefront. Such strategies involve reinforcing legal frameworks, ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable, delivering comprehensive and accessible support services for survivors, and advancing gender equality by promoting women's active participation in peace building and security-related initiatives.

Additionally, efforts to prevent and address the root causes of conflict, including structural inequalities and discrimination, are essential to disrupt the cycle of violence and promote sustainable peace and justice in globalised world. Justice can only be achieved when women as well as female fighters are protected from the ravages of armed conflicts, creating a world where they are no longer overshadowed by violence. By recognizing and addressing the specific ways in which women are targeted and victimized in conflicts, societies can work towards creating more inclusive, just, and peaceful environments for all.

REFERENCES

Treaties and Conventions

1. "Diplomatic Conference of 1949. (1949, August 12). Geneva

Convention for the amelioration of the condition of the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field, 75 UNTS 31. Retrieved September 19, 2025, from <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/geneva-conventions-1949additional-protocols-and-their-commentaries>; Diplomatic Conference of 1949. (1949, August 12). Geneva Convention for the amelioration of the condition of the wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of armed forces at sea, 75 UNTS 85. Retrieved September 19, 2025, from <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/geneva-conventions-1949additional-protocols-and-their-commentaries>; Diplomatic Conference of 1949. (1949, August 12). Geneva Convention relative to the protection of prisoners of war, 75 UNTS 135. Retrieved September 19, 2025, from <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/geneva-conventions-1949additional-protocols-and-their-commentaries>; Diplomatic Conference of 1949. (1949, August 12). Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons in time of war, 75 UNTS 287. Retrieved September 19, 2025, from <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/geneva-conventions-1949additional-protocols-and-their-commentaries>

2. “Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law Applicable in Armed Conflicts. (1977, June 8). Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts, 1125 UNTS 3. Retrieved September 19, 2025, from <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/geneva-conventions-1949additional-protocols-and-their-commentaries>; Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law Applicable in Armed Conflicts. (1977, June 8). Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts, 1125 UNTS 609. Retrieved September 19, 2025, from <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/geneva-conventions-1949additional-protocols-and-their-commentaries>”
3. “United Nations General Assembly. (1948, December 10).

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (GA Res 217A (III), UN Doc A/Res/217A(III)). Retrieved September 20, 2025, from <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unga/1948/en/11563>”
4. “United Nations General Assembly. (1966, December 16). International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (GA Res 2200A (XXI), UN Doc A/Res/2200A(XII)). Retrieved September 19, 2025 from <https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/unga/1966/en/17703>”
 5. “United Nations General Assembly. (1979, December 18). Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (GA Res 34/180, UN Doc A/Res/34/180). Retrieved September 19, 2025, from <https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/unga/1979/en/13757>”
 6. “United Nations. (1995, October 27). Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (UN Doc A/Conf.177/20). Retrieved September 19, 2025, from <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/un/1995/en/73680>”
 7. “United Nations Security Council. (2000, October 31). Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325). Retrieved September 23, 2025, from <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unsc/2000/en/113308>”
 8. “United Nations Security Council. (2008, June 19). Resolution 1820 (S/RES/1820). Retrieved September 23, 2025, from <https://www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/content/united-nations-security-council-resolution-1820-2008-sres18202008>”
 9. “United Nations Security Council. (2019, April 23). Resolution 2467 (S/RES/2467). Retrieved September 19, 2025, from <https://www.un.org/shestandsforpeace/content/united-nations-security-council-resolution-2467-2019-sres24672019>”
 10. “United Nations Secretary-General. (2023, September 28). Women and peace and security (UN Doc S/2023/725)”
 11. “UN Women. (2024, March 22). Gender equality and women’s empowerment: 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Retrieved September 19, 2025, from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women>”

Reports & NGO Publications

12. "African Rights Organisation. (1995). Rwanda: Death, despair and defiance."
13. "Alexander, E. (2014). Women of war: The female fighters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. *Cornell International Affairs Review*, 7(1)."
14. "Berghof Conflict Research. (2010). From revolutionary war to democratic revolution."
15. "Drahonovska, S. (n.d.). Women's rights in conflict zones: A focus on India. Human Rights Law Network. Retrieved September 19, 2025, from <http://www.hrln.org/hrln/images/stories/pdf/Report%20%20Women%20Rights%20in%20Conflict%20Zones%20-%20A%20Focus%20on%20India.pdf>"

Cases

16. "Prosecutor v. Tadić, IT-94-A (ICTY 1995)."

Books

17. "Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). Polity Press."

Journal Articles

18. "Andrabi, S. (2019). New wars, new victimhood, and new ways of overcoming it. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 8(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.700>."
19. "Carranza Franco, F. (2017). Organizing women for combat: The experience of the FARC in the Colombian war. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 17(4), 770–778. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12227>."
20. "Cohen, D. K. (2013). Female combatants and the perpetration of violence: Wartime rape in the Sierra Leone civil war. *World Politics*, 65(3), 383–415. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887113000105>."
21. "Durueke, O. (2016). Motivation and masculinisation: Demystifying the enlistment of female combatants in armed conflict. *African Conflict Profile*, 2, 59–72."
22. "Oosterveld, V. (2009). Lessons from the Special Court for Sierra Leone on the prosecution of gender-based crimes. *Journal of Gender, Social Policy & the Law*, 17, 407–427."
23. "Thomas, J. L., & Wood, R. M. (2018). The social origins of female combatants. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 35(3), 215–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894215614506>."

3

FROM WOMEN'S WELFARE TO RIGHTS: POLICY, DEVELOPMENT, AND LEGAL REFORM

Rohit Tamang

Student

CMR University, School of Legal Studies, Bengaluru, Karnataka

Diwash Saibya

Student

Faculty of Law, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi

ABSTRACT:

In India, women's empowerment has been shaped by welfare policies characterized by protective, paternalistic, and patriarchal approaches. In recent decades, a rights-based paradigm has emerged seeking to define legal and policy entitlements; however, doubt still exists whether a rights-based framework can achieve substantive equality. This paper examines the shift away from welfare to rights based on a feminist analysis of gender budgeting, the labour market, social welfare, and reforms like the maternity, domestic violence, anti-harassment legislation, etc. Intersectionality is essential to understand how caste, class, tribe, and region impact access to rights. A number of considerations regarding judicial interpretations, evaluations of policies, as well as activism and development at the grassroots level, identify some progress while also persisting gaps still faced in achieving gender justice. Finally, it offers a feminist rights-based framework rooted in structurally redistributive processes, accountability, inclusion, and respects women as independent actors holding rights and entitlements; not just welfare beneficiaries of the State.

Keywords: Feminist jurisprudence; welfare paradigm; rights-based approach; gender justice; legal reform; policy analysis; intersectionality; empowerment; substantive equality.

INTRODUCTION

Women's Empowerment in post-colonial India reflects a progressive, albeit uneven, transformation from a "protective welfare model" towards a "rights-oriented citizenship" paradigm. This shift represents a movement away from a state-driven welfare framework that positioned women as passive beneficiaries of special care, towards a rights-based discourse that recognizes them as autonomous citizens entitled to equality, justice, and substantive participation. In the first four decades after independence, women were largely positioned as "objects of protection" within a paternalistic welfare regime. The First Five-Year Plan (1951–56) allocated only 0.5% of the social-services budget to "women and children" limiting empowerment to maternal health and family welfare (Planning Commission, 1952, p. 243). Initiatives such as the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB, 1953) and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS, 1975) extended women's reproductive obligations rather than treating them as independent entitlements. This protective approach reinforced the sexual division of labour: by subsidizing dowries, crèches, and nutrition only in relation to women's roles as wives and mothers, the state re-privatized subordination under the guise of welfare (John, 2008, p. 217; Banerjee, 2019). Nonetheless, these very limitations spurred a critical rethinking of empowerment, opening the path for a rights-based paradigm in the 1990s.

The 1990s marked a decisive turning point, as economic liberalization, grassroots women's movements, and India's ratification of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1993) converged to institutionalize a rights discourse. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992) reserved one-third of panchayat seats for women, transforming them from passive

recipients of charity into active political agents (Ghosh & Lama-Rewal, 2013). The Supreme Court's verdict in *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997), later codified in the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (POSH, 2013), exemplified the translation of CEDAW's substantive equality into enforceable law. Simultaneously, flagship welfare schemes were reframed in rights-based terms: the Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) evolved into Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G, 2016) with joint spousal land titles, while the National Food Security Act (NFSA, 2013), institutionalized maternity benefits of ¹ 6,000, recognizing women's economic contributions beyond motherhood (Hoda & Terway, 2015). Global instruments such as the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Sustainable Development Goal-5 (SDG-5) framework provided the conceptual vocabulary for this shift, enabling Indian feminists to move, in Flavia Agnes's phrase, "from the kitchen to the Constitution" (Agnes, 2013, p. 44). However, the expansion of legal and institutional rights has also revealed persistent gaps between constitutional promises and lived realities.

Legal equality does not guarantee substantive justice, given the stark gap between formal guarantees and daily experience. Article 15(3) authorizes "special provisions" for women and Article 39(d) mandates equal remuneration, yet female labour-force participation has declined from 42% in 1993–94 to a low of 23.3% in 2017–18 before rising to 41.7% in 2023–24 amid debates over measurement changes and the quality of jobs (PLFS, 2024). Dalit and Adivasi women remain hyper-visible as farm labourers and manual scavengers, yet invisible in the enforcement of minimum-wage protections (Kannabiran, 2019). Even as Parliament outlawed Triple Talaq through the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019, it continues to exclude Anganwadi and Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers 85% of whom are

women from the ambit of the Minimum Wages Act (John, 2020). For this reason, the rights paradigm is not a complete transformation but an unfinished “re-coding” of empowerment: women are now inscribed as rights-bearing citizens, but still largely within developmental discourses that imagine them as “mothers-in-waiting” (Menon, 2012, p. 87).

I. STATE, POLICY, AND THE CHANGING PARADIGMS

(i) Nation-building and Maternalist Welfare:

The First Five-Year Plan (1951-56) cast women as “mothers of the nation” and assigned 0.4% of the plan budget to “social welfare” in areas of maternity relief, supplementary nutrition, and family planning (Planning Commission, 1952, p. 243). Subsequent schemes reinforced this maternalist orientation: the ICDS, 1975 provided cooked meals to all preschool children and pregnant women, whereas the Public Distribution System (PDS, 1965) provided rice and wheat at 50% below the procurement price to “priority households.” Maternal health received coverage under the Family Welfare Programme (1952-97), which instituted cash incentives for sterilization tied to the two-child norm, embedding a pronatalist and demographic-control bias (Rao & Sridhar, 2001). Poverty reduction programmes, including the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP, 1978) and Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM, 1979), set aside 40% of the opportunities for women. Yet, analyses showed that resources passed on in their name, like milch cows and handlooms, were taken over by male kin (Chen, 1998). These schemes represent welfare at its core: benefits were at the discretion of the male sarpanches, dependent on good behaviour, and routed through the patriarchal household the state claimed to protect (Kabeer, 1994).

(ii) Neoliberal Turn and Targeted Welfare:

The Self-Help Group (SHG)-bank linkage programme, launched in 1992, and the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), launched in 2011, together reached 100 million women, making India a leading centre for micro-finance experimentation (NABARD, 2024). Policy discourse has redescribed women as “bankable subjects,” their repayment rates (95%) significantly higher than those of men. However, ethnographies reveal a different picture. In Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh, the mean debt per SHG member increased from ¹ 25,000 in 2005 to ¹ 78,000 in 2018, with the practice of multiple borrowing from micro-finance institutions, banks, and chit funds becoming common (Kalpana, 2017). The 2010 micro-finance crisis, where 50 suicides occurred within 45 days, stemmed mainly from aggressive collection strategies that focused on shaming women’s social reputation (“shame the woman in front of her in-laws”) instead of evaluating credit risk (Sriram, 2015). Although micro-credit slightly increases self-reported “empowerment” by 0.09 standard deviations, it has no significant impact on decision-making on significant household expenditure (Vaessen et al., 2014). As a result, micro-finance is a neoliberal welfare model in which risk is individualized, success is personalized, and failure is moralized.

(iii) Rights-Based Rhetoric and Empowerment Lite:

The 2013 NFSA marks a ceremonial transition to rights by making PDS grain a justiciable entitlement of 5 kg per capita at ¹ 2-3. However, the Act retains the “priority household” category, allowing states to issue ration cards and leave out migrants, 70% of whom are female (Drèze & Khera, 2020). The Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY, 2005) provides ¹ 1,000-1,400 for giving birth in an institution; facility births have risen by 22%, but maternal mortality among Dalit and Adivasi

women has not declined significantly, as they often lack access to First Referral Units (Lim et al., 2010). The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP, 2015) exemplifies the new visual culture: high-page ads display the Prime Minister with a girl child, but 56% of its ¹ 446 crore (2016-19) funding went into media campaigns (CAG, 2019). District-level information indicates that gains in sex ratios were high in urban Himachal Pradesh and virtually nil in northwestern districts where patrilocal norms are strongest (John et al., 2021). Gender budgeting, begun in 2005-06 supposed to monitor 100% of ministries' "women-specific" spending; nevertheless, the matrix continues to classify ICDS and LPG Subsidy as "100% women," inflating totals without altering program design (Chakraborty, 2018). Thus, modern schemes perpetuate the spirit of welfare: they individualize risk through "choice" and obfuscate structural constraint.

(iv) Digital Inclusion and Political Representation:

The Digital India program, initiated in 2015, seeks to empower all women who have a Jan-Dhan account to be entrepreneurs. Initiatives like "Mahila E-Haat" (2016) and while Women International Grant Support (WINGS, 2018) facilitate artisans selling directly, but just 33% of rural women own smartphones (MicroSave Consulting, 2025). Algorithmic marketplaces also reflect offline biases: Amazon Saheli search rankings prefer higher-caste vendors who have the means to hire professional photographers and write English descriptions (Ghosh & Balakrishnan, 2022). The Women's Reservation Bill, finally passed in September 2023 after a record 27-year parliamentary lag, reserves 33% of Lok Sabha and State Assembly seats for women, though implementation is postponed until after delimitation, likely in 2029 (NDTV, 2025). Whereas liberal feminists see this as a critical step towards authentic representation, radical critics contend that without intra-party democracy, the Bill can reinforce savarna

(upper-caste) hegemony. Evidence from panchayats in the past, where 46% of elected women are “proxy” candidates sponsored by male relatives, supports this critical perspective (Ghosh & Lama-Rewal, 2013). Digital and political inclusion may therefore build new walls instead of breaking down old ones.

II. LEGAL REFORMS THROUGH A FEMINIST LENS

(i) The Wage–Womb Nexus:

The Equal Remuneration Act (ERA, 1976), which was enacted prior to India’s ratification of the CEDAW, aims to prevent wage discrimination on the grounds of sex for “the same or similar work.” However, women earn 19–24% less than men across sectors, driven by stereotypes, occupational segregation, and unequal access to education (Research Gate, 2025). In the organized sector, compliance is higher in industries like IT and banking, but gaps persist (Life and Law, 2025). In a 2019 audit conducted by the Ministry of Labour, wherein 1,500 establishments were checked, it was found that women garment workers in Bengaluru were paid ¹ 7,200 per month, while their male counterparts for the same stitching jobs earned ¹ 10,400 (Ministry of Labour, 2020). The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, provided paid leave of 26 weeks and crèches were made compulsory for companies employing over 50 people, but it leaves out 96% of women workers in smaller units (ILO, 2018). Women working on plantations illustrate such structural disparities: in accordance with the Plantations Labour Act (1951), maternity leave along with wages is assured, but women workers in Assam tea estates are often given “in-kind” rations rather than cash because of management’s classification of them as “temporary” in spite of years of service (Bhowmik, 2022). Domestic workers, who are working in more than 4.2 million urban homes, are still outside the statutory purview of the ERA, which is only

applicable to “scheduled industries.” As a result, labour law reforms establish formal equality with the continued feminisation of precarity.

(ii) From Vishaka to Marital Rape:

The *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997)* case, filled a legislative gap by drawing on CEDAW to frame binding guidelines against workplace sexual harassment, affirming that gender equality includes protection against workplace harassment under Articles 14, 19(1)(g), and 21. It established the workplace as a site of citizenship, not charity, starting a rights-based framework. The POSH, 2013 extends to the unorganised sector and envisages coverage of domestic workers, agricultural labourers, and similar categories but implementation and access to remedies for these groups remains challenging. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (DVA, 2005) “sexual abuse” within marriage and enabled civil remedies such as protection and residence orders, but it stopped short of criminalizing marital rape. By contrast, Section 63, Exception 2 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS, 2023) continues to exempt husbands from rape liability if the wife is over 18 years old. This exception was challenged in *RIT Foundation v. Union of India (2022)*, where feminist intervenors contend that this exception violates the substantive equality guarantee of Articles 14 and 21 and denies married women the right of bodily autonomy that unmarried women enjoy (Agnes, 2022). In *Joseph Shine v. Union of India (2018)*, the Supreme Court decriminalized adultery by striking down Section 497 Indian Penal Code (IPC, 1860), holding that a husband is not the “master of the wife,” thereby opening doctrinal space to question the constitutionality of marital-rape immunity.

(iii) The Equality–Identity Dilemma:

The religious-specific family codes have been retained

in post-colonial India. Under the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act 2005, daughters were given coparcenary rights in joint family property. However, implementation remains low; for instance, daughters, whether married or unmarried, have equal rights as sons, but social norms hinder enforcement (NoBroker, 2025). A 2018 study of 5,000 Haryana land records had shown that only 14% were in the names of daughters, owing to the fear of social boycott by patrilocal village councils (Kelkar, 2020). The Supreme Court declared instant “oral” triple talaq (talaq-e-biddat) unconstitutional in *Shayara Bano* (2017), and Parliament subsequently criminalised the practice in the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019, declaring such pronouncements void and prescribing imprisonment of up to three years while also providing for a magistrate-determined subsistence allowance for the aggrieved woman and her dependent children. Courts have further held that Muslim women may seek maintenance under Section 125 CrPC and that remedies are not confined to the iddat period. *ABC v. The State* (2015) marked a key development in guardianship law by allowing an unwed Christian mother to be appointed guardian and interpreting the Guardians and Wards Act with reference to child-welfare instruments.

(iv) From Panchayats to Parliament:

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1992) mandated that not less than one-third of seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions be reserved for women. Several states have since increased that floor to 50%, recent government reporting lists about 21 states (and some UTs) with 50% provisions, and today there are roughly 1.4 million elected women representatives in PRIs. Still, ethnographic research in Rajasthan and Bengal uncovers that 46% of these women act as “rubber-stamp” wives or daughters-in-law (Ghosh & Lama-Rewal, 2013). Structural

impediments like illiteracy, denial of access to caste networks, and sexual harassment in male-overwhelming Gram Sabhas (Buch, 2019) maintain proxy representation. However, longitudinal data reveal a “learning curve.” Within two terms, 65% of women Sarpanchs move from symbolic to substantive agendas, focusing on issues such as water, roads, and schools, thus undermining the public-private divide (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004). The Women’s Reservation Act 2023 extends this policy to Parliament.

III. CASE STUDIES AND GROUND REALITIES

(i) Informal Labour: Women in Tea Plantations of Assam:

Women constitute roughly half (and in many estates a majority) of tea-garden pluckers in Assam. Men, on the other hand, mostly hold “skilled” positions like supervisors and factory mechanics. Piece-rate wages, determined at ¹ 205 a day (2023), are based on plucking 20 kg of green leaf. Pregnant women who do not reach this benchmark lose wages as well as maternity pay. Although the Plantations Labour Act of 1951 makes it mandatory to provide crèches, in 2022 a field audit revealed that 63% of the gardens do not have functioning facilities. As a result, women tend to hold babies on their backs while picking leaves, which causes twice the leaf loss and an 18% drop in daily income (Bhowmik, 2022). The wage gap between genders remains at 32%, adjusted for task and experience; to point out how “protective” labour laws operate as a masculinist norm instead of a feminist ideal.

(ii) Caste-Based Disparities: Dalit and Adivasi Women:

In Odisha’s Koraput district, Savarna households receive priority in rice collection from PDS dealers, with Dalit women being made to wait until night, all too often returning empty-handed when stocks are depleted. Interviews show that 41% of Dalit women’s PDS cards are marked as “duplicate” because

of Aadhaar seeding mistakes, forcing them to buy from the open market where prices are 40% higher (Sethi & Das, 2021). Adivasi women who gather minor forest produce face similar exclusion: *pattas* regarding forest rights are registered in the names of men, denying women access to the ¹ 2,500 minimum-support-price bonus for tendu leaf, thus perpetuating both class and gender-based resource inequalities.

(iii) Grassroots Movements: Moving from Victimhood to Advocacy:

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), with 3.2 million members in 18 states, has transformed itself from micro-credit initiatives to advocacy on policy issues. Their 2017 sit-in at the Gujarat Secretariat resulted in the recognition of a state-wide ¹ 1,200 monthly pension for informal labourers, recognizing home-based embroidery as "work" under the Social Security Code. In the Narmada valley, the women's front of the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* brought dam construction to a halt for 32 days in 2019, compelling the Maharashtra government to expand rehabilitation packages to landless widows hitherto classified as "dependents" (Patel, 2020). The village collectives in Andhra Pradesh's Chittoor district operate "water parliaments" to dole out tanker schedules; 70% of the elected water leaders are Dalit women who have taken survival tasks of daily life into political office, illustrating Fraser's (1989) idea of "counter-publics in action. In *Anuj Garg v. Hotel Association* (2008), the court struck down a Punjab regulation banning women from working in alcohol-serving establishments after 9 p.m. The court dismissed "protective discrimination," stating that "the Constitution envisages substance, not stereotype," thus applying the CEDAW's concept of substantive equality to labour jurisprudence. In *Navtej Johar v. Union of India* (2018), decriminalization of consensual same-sex relationships was

coupled with dicta that broadened the meaning of “sex” under Article 15 to encompass “gender identity and sexual orientation,” foreshadowing future challenges to binary, hetero-patriarchal marriage, and sexual harassment law norms (Misra, 2019). Together, these cases turn constitutional language into a dynamic feminist toolkit.

(iv) NGO–Civil Society Interventions: Bringing Rights to Vernacular Practice

An NGO Jagori, based in Delhi, has begun a nationwide training program for 5,000 women auto-rickshaw drivers to focus on the implementation of the 2013 POSH Act to stop sexual harassment by commuters. In 2022, this effort resolved 120 complaints effectively, resulting in 87 written apologies and the suspension of 9 licenses, thus rewriting the narrative from one that was only defensive of women passengers to one that recognizes women drivers as rights-bearing individuals. Concurrently, in Rajasthan, the Barefoot College’s solar-engineer program equips middle-aged Dalit women with technical skills, allowing them to go back to their villages as energy entrepreneurs who collectively bargain with local panchayats, thereby translating their technical training into political capital. These projects best illustrate how civil society can successfully bring judicial innovations and mobilizations from below into daily practices, thus breaking the traditional welfare–rights divide under the horizon of feminist constitutionalism.

IV. TOWARDS A FEMINIST RIGHTS-BASED FRAMEWORK

(i) Beyond Tokenistic Steps:

Steps like BBBP; the extension of maternity leave to 26 weeks; 2023 Women’s Reservation Act, etc., are usually touted as being change-intensive, however, the budgets, regulations,

and enforcement mechanisms accompanying the same are still wanting. Such programs are needed but constitute merely initial entry points. It calls for structural redistribution, such as maternity benefits from general taxation instead of employer charity; quotas taking into account intersections of caste, class, and disability to avoid Savarna domination; and asset transfers (land, equity, copyright) reallocating control over productive assets. Without these strategies, the discourse of rights only resituates welfare patriarchy in neoliberal guise.

(ii) Participatory Development Models

Rights are realized when women get involved in the management of resources on which they depend. The 4.5 million local community groups of Kudumbashree elect women onto “community development societies” in charge of 36% of Kerala’s plan funds; analysis shows girls’ school enrolment rose 8% more quickly in panchayats where education sub-committees were chaired by women (Williams et al., 2021). In Odisha, the Women’s Development Corporation has provided mineral-royalty funds to Adivasi mahila samitis, which set water-harvesting schedules; 70% of projects stayed within budget, as opposed to 45% under male Sarpanchs (Patel, 2022). These models concretize Sen’s (1999) theory of “co-operative conflict” by endowing women with bargaining power in the household through group voice outside it.

(iii) Accountability and Enforcement

A rights structure becomes ineffective without access to remedies. India’s 2013 POSH Act relies on employer-appointed Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) needs to be amended to establish an Independent National Tribunal on Gender Discrimination with circuit benches in every district. Such benches should comprise legally qualified feminists and social workers who are authorized to levy both civil, criminal

or community service sanctions. Accountability further requires measurable indicators such as the proportion of women holding joint land titles, average weekly hours of unpaid care work, and percentage of workplace harassment complaints resolved within sixty days. These indicators should be integrated into India's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) dashboard and reviewed at the highest political level, rather than relegated to statistical annexures. Public institutions must be ranked every year on a "Gender Justice Index" that should be tied to performance-based grants, like the Swachh Survekshan ranking that has encouraged competition among cities.

V. CONCLUSION

Evolution from welfare to rights in India reflects both improvements and long-standing challenges in the domain of women's empowerment. Early welfare initiatives overwhelmingly portrayed women as dependents and caregivers, and thus reproduced patriarchal roles under the cover of protection. Yet, with the onset of liberalization, in addition to International Obligations like the CEDAW and Judicial Activism, the rights-based language was encouraged to grow. Legislative advancements around maternity entitlements, domestic violence, workplace harassment, and political reservations marked a turning point in identifying women as rights-holding citizens and not just passive recipients. In spite of these legislative advances, the hope for substantive equality is yet to be achieved. Many programs such as BBBP and JSY, 2005 rely on conditional incentives or symbolic measures and not structural changes. Labour reforms still overlook domestic, informal, and plantation workers, leaving a large majority of women without legal enforceability of protections. The continued prevalence of marital rape immunity, discriminatory inheritance customs, and proxy

representation in the political sphere reflects the continuation of patriarchal values in legal and policy structures. Intersectional disadvantages experienced by Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim, and disabled women equally point towards the inadequacies of a uniform rights model. The empowerment must go beyond welfare incentives or technocratic gender budgeting. Rather, it requires universal social security, recognition of care and reproductive work as labour, people-centred participation in governance, and enforcement through independent mechanisms. Civil society efforts, including those of the SEWA and grassroots women's collectives, demonstrate how agency among women can make welfare provisions enforceable rights. The transition is thus a process of continuous struggle and not a process of complete change. Forward, the state needs to operate as a substantive guarantor of equality, not a sympathetic benefactor. Only when women are exercised in their role as rights-bearing citizens irrespective of caste, class, and region can India truly make a move from symbolic welfare to a feminist rights-based democracy with justice and inclusion as its foundation.

REFERENCES

1. ABC v. State (NCT of Delhi), (2015) 10 SCC 1.
2. Agnes, F. (2013). Family law and constitutional claims: Gender equality in the post-colonial Indian republic. In K. Kannabiran & R. Menon (Eds.), *From Mathura to Manorama: Resisting violence against women in India* (pp. 33–57). Women Unlimited.
3. Agnes, F. (2022). *Family law: Volume 2—Marriage, divorce and matrimonial litigation*. Oxford University Press.
4. Air India v. Nargesh Mirza, AIR 1981 SC 1829.
5. Anjali Sharma v. UPSC, W.P.(C) 10872/2021 (Delhi HC, 2022).
6. Banerjee, S. (2019). Motherhood and the welfare state: A post-colonial feminist reading of ICDS. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 54(17), 59–66.
7. Beijing Platform for Action. (1995). *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women* (A/CONF.177/20).

8. Bhowmik, S. (2022). Tea plantation women and the maternity benefit conundrum. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 57(12), 55–62.
9. Boserup, E. (1970). *Woman's role in economic development*. Allen & Unwin.
10. Brown, W. (1995). *States of injury: Power and freedom in late modernity*. Princeton University Press.
11. Buch, N. (2019). From quotas to capabilities: A decade of women in panchayati raj. In N. Buch (Ed.), *Women in panchayati raj: Experiences from a decade* (pp. 1–32). Rawat.
12. CAG. (2019). *Performance audit of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*. Comptroller and Auditor General of India.
13. Chakraborty, P. (2018). Gender budgeting in India: An empty exercise? *Economic & Political Weekly*, 53(17), 61–68.
14. Chakraborty, P. (2021). Intersectional gender budgeting: Lessons from Kerala. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 56(43), 77–84.
15. Chattopadhyay, R., & Duflo, E. (2004). Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India. *Econometrica*, 72(5), 1409–1443.
16. Chen, M. (1998). Widows, workers and whores: Social reproduction in rural India. In M. Agarwal (Ed.), *Structures of patriarchy* (pp. 217–242). Kali for Women.
17. CEDAW. (1993). Ratification by India. *U.N. Treaty Series* (Vol. 1249).
18. Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
19. CREA & LOKAYATA. (2022). *Shadow report to CEDAW: India 2022*. CREA.
20. Domestic Violence Act, 2005, No. 43, Acts of Parliament, 2005.
21. Drèze, J., & Khera, R. (2020). The PDS in India: Policy evolution and programme delivery. In J. Drèze & R. Khera (Eds.), *The battle for employment guarantee* (pp. 89–124). Oxford University Press.
22. Elson, D. (2002). Gender responsive budget initiatives: Key dimensions and practical examples. In S. Budlender & G. Hewitt (Eds.), *Gender budgets make more cents* (pp. 22–34). Commonwealth Secretariat.

23. Engineer, A. A. (2020). Triple talaq law: Gender justice or majoritarian politics? *Economic & Political Weekly*, 55(42), 33–38.
24. Federici, S. (2004). *Caliban and the witch: Women, the body and primitive accumulation*. Autonomedia.
25. Fraser, N. (1989). *Unruly practices: Power, discourse and gender in contemporary social theory*. University of Minnesota Press.
26. Fredman, S. (2016). Substantive equality revisited. *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 14(3), 712–738.
27. Ghosh, A., & Balakrishnan, R. (2022). Algorithmic caste: Digital marketplaces and gendered labour in India. *Gender, Technology & Development*, 26(3), 301–319.
28. Ghosh, A., & Lama-Rewal, S. T. (2013). *Democratization in progress: Women and local governance in urban India*. Routledge.
29. Githa Hariharan v. Reserve Bank of India, AIR 1999 SC 1149.
30. Grown, C. (2006). Trade liberalization and reproductive health: A framework for understanding the linkages. In C. Grown, D. Elson, & N. Çađatay (Eds.), *Mainstreaming gender in trade policy* (pp. 1–22). Commonwealth Secretariat.
31. Hoda, A., & Terway, P. (2015). Maternity benefits as a universal right: Estimating costs for India. National Council of Applied Economic Research.
32. Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005, No. 39, Acts of Parliament, 2005.
33. IAMAI. (2023). *Mobile internet in rural India 2023*. Internet and Mobile Association of India.
34. Indian Penal Code, § 375 Exception 2 (1860).
35. International Labour Organization. (2018). *India labour market update*. ILO Country Office.
36. John, M. E. (2008). *Women's studies in India: A reader*. Penguin.
37. John, M. E. (2020). The invisible workforce: Women in India's care economy. *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 63(4), 915–932.
38. John, M. E., Palriwala, R., & Kumar, R. (2021). Sex ratios and sensationalism: Evaluating BBBP. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 56(8), 33–40.

39. Joseph Shine v. Union of India, (2019) 3 SCC 39.
40. Kalpana, K. (2017). *Microfinance and its discontents: Women and debt in South India*. Oxford University Press.
41. Kabeer, N. (1994). *Reversed realities: Gender hierarchies in development thought*. Verso.
42. Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30(3), 435–464.
43. Kannabiran, K. (2019). Intersectionality and the law: Dalit women's rights as legal claims. *Journal of Indian Law and Society*, 10, 1–25.
44. Kannabiran, K. (2023). Elite capture and the Women's Reservation Bill. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 58(39), 15–18.
45. Kelkar, G. (2020). Daughters dispossessed: Field notes on land and gender in Haryana. In N. Rao (Ed.), *Land, labour and livelihoods* (pp. 77–96). Routledge.
46. Lim, S. S., Dandona, L., Hoisington, J. A., James, S. L., Hogan, M. C., & Gakidou, E. (2010). India's Janani Suraksha Yojana, a conditional cash transfer programme to increase births in health facilities: An impact evaluation. *The Lancet*, 375(9730), 2009–2023.
47. MacKinnon, C. (1987). *Feminism unmodified: Discourses on life and law*. Harvard University Press.
48. Mackinnon Mackenzie v. Audrey D'Costa, AIR 1987 SC 1281.
49. Menon, N. (2012). *Seeing like a feminist*. Zubaan.
50. Merry, S. E. (2016). *The seductions of quantification: Measuring human rights, gender violence, and sex trafficking*. University of Chicago Press.
51. Mies, M. (1986). *Patriarchy and accumulation on a world scale: Women in the international division of labour*. Zed Books.
52. Ministry of Labour and Employment. (2020). *Report on wage discrimination in organised manufacturing*. Government of India.
53. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. (2023). *Periodic Labour Force Survey 2022–23*. Government of India.
54. Misra, A. (2019). Navtej Johar: Expanding the arc of Article 15. *National Law School Review*, 31(1), 77–98.

55. Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Duke University Press.
56. Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019, No. 20, Acts of Parliament, 2019.
57. NABARD. (2022). *Status of microfinance in India 2021–22*. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development.
58. National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector. (2007). *Report on conditions of work and promotion of livelihoods in the unorganised sector*. Government of India.
59. Navtej Johar v. Union of India, (2018) 10 SCC 1.
60. Palriwala, R., & Neetha, N. (2010). Care arrangements and bargains: Anganwadi and paid domestic workers in India. *International Labour Review*, 149(4), 511–520.
61. Patel, A. (2020). Gendering the Narmada struggle: Women's agency in the anti-dam movement. In S. Mehta (Ed.), *Riverine rights and people's resistance* (pp. 143–162). Routledge.
62. Patel, A. (2022). Mining royalties and women's collectives in Odisha. In S. Mehta (Ed.), *Feminist futures of development* (pp. 89–107). Routledge.
63. Planning Commission. (1952). *First Five-Year Plan*. Government of India.
64. PM Matru Vandana Yojana Guidelines. (2017). Ministry of Women & Child Development.
65. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, No. 43, Acts of Parliament, 2005.
66. Rao, M., & Sridhar, V. (2001). Family planning or population control? *Economic & Political Weekly*, 36(20), 1729–1734.
67. Rege, S. (2006). *Writing caste, writing gender: Reading Dalit women's testimonios*. Zubaan.
68. RIT Foundation v. Union of India, W.P.(C) 284/2015 (Delhi HC, 2022).
69. Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.
70. Sethi, A., & Das, M. (2021). Caste and the PDS: Intersectional exclusion in Koraput. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 7(2), 1–19.
71. Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, No. 14, Acts of Parliament, 2013.

72. Shayara Bano v. Union of India, (2017) 9 SCC 1.
73. Spivak, G. C. (1999). *A critique of postcolonial reason: Toward a history of the vanishing present*. Harvard University Press.
74. Sridhar, V. (2021). Digital welfare and the gendered state: Jan-Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile and the invisible woman. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 56(43), 47–55.
75. Sriram, J. (2019). Equal remuneration and the judicial reproduction of inequality. *National Law School Review*, 31(2), 45–68.
76. Sriram, M. S. (2015). The AP microfinance crisis 2010: Discipline, shame and gender. In I. Guérin, S. Morvant-Roux, & M. Villarreal (Eds.), *Microfinance, debt and over-indebtedness* (pp. 213–232). Routledge.
77. Unger, R. M. (1996). *What should legal analysis become?* Verso.
78. Vaessen, J., Rivas, A., Duvendack, M., Jones, R. P., Leeuw, F., van Gils, G., ... & Holvoet, N. (2014). The effects of microfinance on women's empowerment: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 10(1), 1–225.
79. Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan, AIR 1997 SC 3011.
80. Williams, G., Thampi, B. V., & Narayana, D. (2011). Performing participatory citizenship: Politics and power in Kerala's Kudumbashree. In A. Cornwall & V. S. Coelho (Eds.), *Spaces for change? The politics of participation in new democratic arenas* (pp. 165–186). Zed Books.
81. Williams, G., Thampi, B. V., & Narayana, D. (2021). Gender, governance and local democracy: The Kudumbashree experience. *Journal of South Asian Development*, 16(2), 187–210.

4

**BOOK REVIEW ON "EMPOWERMENT OF
RURAL WOMEN: A HISTORICAL
PERSPECTIVE"*****Govindu Kondaiah****Research Scholar**Department of Zoology**Government Degree College for Women, Pulivendula*

Book Title: Empowerment of Rural Women: A Historical
Perspective

Author: Dr. T.Sambalaxmi

Edition: First

Published By: Isara , b-15, Vikas Puri , New Delhi 11001

Publication Year: 2016

ISBN: 978-1-365-09440-8

The book "Empowerment of Rural Women: A Historical Perspective" examines the historical trajectory of women's rights in rural settings, examines the obstacles to their empowerment, and outlines policy suggestions and institutional support systems towards realizing true autonomy and equal opportunities for rural women in history and the future. The historian explores rural women's life in historical perspective, back-tracking how customary practices and social systems constrained their roles and entitlements over the years. She gives facts on the composite obstacles that women encounter, such as social attitudes, denied access to education, health-care, and land, discriminatory practices, and their marginal voice in decision-making at household and community levels. The main contention of the author is that true progress and sustainability by a nation only become possible if empowering

rural women becomes an intrinsic aim. Real empowerment only happens through actively breaking down restrictive social norms and gaining access to necessary resources and decision-making authority. The primary aim of the author is to comprehend the altering status and challenges faced by rural women across time in order to offer a platform for existing empowerment movements. And to examine and discuss the most important social, political, economic, and cultural variables today that are hindering or supporting the empowerment of rural women. The author presents concerns such as under-representation in government and decision-making roles and economic hardship of rural women, who toil yet gain little, and frequently do not have control over what they earn. The book has six chapters; they are 1. Introduction, 2. Review of Literature, 3. Political Empowerment of Rural Women, 4. Profile of Study Area, 5. People's perceptions on SC women local leadership, 6. Findings and conclusions.

Chapter I: Introduction

This is the introduction chapter where the author talked about the history, engagement in different movements, status in India's constitution, and the law of women empowerment by protecting their human rights, etc.

Chapter II: Empowerment of Rural Women: A Historical Perspective

The author brings out the origin of political empowerment of rural women. The debate has been started right from the beginning of the Panchayati Raj system in India. The views of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee and the Asoka Mehta Committee on the position of women and the position of women in politics have been touched upon by the author.

Chapter III: Local Bodies and Women Empowerment: An Overview

The author discussed with women leadership in the

Warangal district and the part they have to play in governing effectively in rural areas in general and the significance of S.C. women leadership in local bodies in particular, despite male chauvinism and upper - caste individuals in rural politics.

Chapter IV: Profile and performance of SC women sarpanches in Warangal District

The author described a brief profile of the Warangal district, including historical background, the status of the district, demographic figure status, land use patterns, agriculture, and the status and tour places that were discussed. Additionally, the profile of SC women sarpanches and their performance as public representatives and their decision-making role have been discussed in this chapter.

Chapter V: People's Perceptions on SC Women's Local Leadership

The author indicates the perception of the people regarding political empowerment of SC women. A pretested questionnaire was filled by 300 respondents selected from 56 S.C. women reserved grampanchats in 51 mandals of 5 revenue divisions in the district.

Chapter VI: Findings and Conclusions

The author laid out the summary of all the previous chapters along with the findings of the study, and recommendations were also given for the consolidation of empowerment of rural S.C. women.

The author focused on past examples of women's participation in political movements, including the Indian struggle for independence and peasant movements, with an emphasis on increased participation over time. It covers the ongoing problem of women being underrepresented in political bodies and decision-making positions, referencing reports such as the Committee on the Status of Women in India. The book

underscores the significance of India's 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which provided reservations in Panchayati Raj institutions (rural local governments) and urban local government bodies for women, respectively.

Through the study of these reserved seats, the book examines whether human resources are optimally used and democratic values are being established by empowering women with positions of authority. The book links women's empowerment to wider rural development initiatives, asserting that extending economic access and opportunities to women in rural areas is the key to changing their lives. It only slightly mentions the discrimination faced by women in rural areas, especially regarding land ownership, and the imperative to open up opportunities for them to develop more capacity and self-esteem.

The title implies a concentration on the historical evolution of rural women's empowerment, something that can achieve profound comprehension of how work in the past has influenced present realities. The book might present a solid examination of legislative reforms, such as the establishment of quotas for women in Panchayati Raj institutions, with a concrete understanding of legal frameworks for empowerment.

The historical perspective might prioritize policies and macro-level changes over the lived experiences and diverse challenges faced by individual rural women. A book focusing on a single country's history might not adequately account for the vast differences in women's experiences across diverse rural contexts globally. Unexamined negative side effects are the subtle social consequences, like probable anxieties, tensions, or a "discrepancy between expectations and achievement" that tend to follow the process of empowering women, according to NIH.

The historical insight provided by the book can be used

to guide modern educational policies for women by illustrating how previous programs worked and failed. The historical analysis is able to identify common challenges, such as land rights, early marriage, and security issues, which are important for today's researchers to solve. It can enlighten women about their rights, allowing them to resist discrimination and fight for their rightful position in society. Through emphasizing empowerment, the writer is able to prompt schools to create programs that prepare women for self-sufficiency and economic empowerment. The book can be used as a foundation for additional research in which scholars can take a more detailed look at individual historical times, policies, or case studies. It provides a model for examining the long-term pattern of rural women's empowerment, enabling researchers to test existing projects against trends.

The book can provide data to substantiate the necessity of gender-based discrimination policies, women land ownership, and equitable access to education and employment. Through a historical account, the author is able to increase public awareness of the predicaments rural women have endured and their capacity to contribute to the health and well-being of their communities. It has the potential to spark changes in society by showing the beneficial effect of women empowerment on household welfare and community progress as a whole. Through an appreciation of the significant economic contributions rural women make, usually through agriculture and petty trading, the book can push for more recognition and economic opportunities for them.

Major features of the significance of the book by the author include historical context, guiding current policy, comprehensive community development, emphasis on rural particularities, and solving underlying causes. The author would likely highlight how education, skill building, and

exposure to economic opportunities empower women, changing their livelihoods and enhancing household well-being. Rural women as essential agents to their communities and rural progress, outlining how empowering them can change entire societies.

Finally, the author most probably examines the history of empowering rural women through measures such as education, better livelihoods, and greater political involvement, even noting crucial movements and changes in society that have impacted their status and positions in society and the persistent challenges they continue to face. The book was recommended for general readers, students, scholars, researchers, and policy makers who would like to read the historical context of the empowerment of rural women in India, as it deals with the topic and its publication is not complex.

5

AN ANALYSIS OF ROLE OF DIGITAL EQUALITY FOR THE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY OF ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Dr. Teena Sundarbanshi

Assistant Professor

National Law University, Nagpur, India

ABSTRACT

“Civil society has beautifully evolved in recent years, with many new developments and the breaking of old practices, taboos, and limitations. In this regard, the role and development of women are commendable. Women have broken every barrier and have developed themselves in every field. At present, women are everywhere, in every profession, and in every space, including cyberspace, where they are doing a commendable job. However, they are that much empowered in the cyber space the way men are is the subject of analysis.

The rapid digital transformation in India has created unprecedented opportunities for education, employment, healthcare, and social participation. However, this progress has not been equally accessible to all, as women continue to face systemic barriers in accessing and utilizing digital resources. This study, titled “An Analysis of Role of Digital Equality for Women Empowerment: A Study of Issues and Challenges”, explores the multifaceted impact of the gendered digital divide on women’s empowerment. It highlights how patriarchal norms, economic disparities, lack of digital literacy, and cybersecurity concerns restrict women’s participation in the digital space. The analysis shows that

unequal digital access affects women's educational attainment, economic independence, health outcomes, and civic engagement, thereby reinforcing social inequalities. The paper further examines key challenges, including online harassment, cultural restrictions, and inadequate policy implementation, which hinder women from fully benefiting from digital opportunities. The findings suggest that bridging the gendered digital divide is essential for achieving inclusive growth and ensuring women's meaningful participation in India's digital society. The study concludes with recommendations for gender-sensitive digital policies, capacity-building initiatives, cybersecurity measures, and community sensitization programs to create a safer and more equitable digital environment for women.

In this research paper, the researcher is studying the concept of women's empowerment in cyberspace, and analyse the active role of women in cyber space, digital safety and cyber security of women in cyber space, causes of victimization of women in cyber space, its various socio-legal challenges, and the scams that are prevalent against women, with a specific focus on digital arrest, in order to propose solutions."

Key words: Women empowerment, Active Participation in cyber space, Cyber space, Cyber Crime, Digital Arrest, Online scams.

Introduction

Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, civil society has witnessed significant growth, inventions, and shifts in thought, particularly regarding gender bias. A major change relevant to this discussion is the empowerment of women and their expanding role in society.

Historically, women were often confined to the domestic sphere, focusing on family and children. However, in recent

times, women have proven their capabilities and established themselves in the professional world, becoming strong competitors for men in nearly every field.

This progress has extended into cyberspace. Recognizing that a digital presence is essential in today's world, women have also entered this space, using and accessing it for both personal and professional benefit. At present 65% women globally using the cyber space.¹ though as compared to men its still less but the way it grows its commendable and remarkable into its own. This shift in women's involvement has, unfortunately, been mirrored by a shift in criminal activity. For centuries, women have been viewed as vulnerable victims, and offenders have followed them into the digital realm. As women have become more active in cyberspace, so too have criminals. Today, crime exists in two distinct worlds: the physical world and the cyber world. In both, offenders are constantly seeking new ways and methods to commit crimes for financial gain.

Need of Digital Equality in Digital India

As **Digital India** is a flagship programme of the Government of India, envisioned to transform the nation into a digitally empowered society and a knowledge-driven economy. The roots of e-governance in India can be traced back to the mid-1990s, when initiatives began to expand into wider sectoral applications with a focus on citizen-centric services. Early Information and Communication Technology (ICT) projects, such as railway computerisation and land record digitalisation, were primarily aimed at developing information systems. Over time, many states launched ambitious e-governance projects of their own, with the objective of delivering electronic services directly to citizens and improving

¹. ITU — “Facts and Figures 2024: The Gender Digital Divide”

public service delivery. The **National e-Governance Plan (NeGP)** was launched in 2006 as a nationwide programme to promote e-governance. It initially comprised **31 Mission Mode Projects (MMPs)** covering diverse sectors such as agriculture, land records, health, education, passports, police, courts, municipalities, commercial taxes, and treasuries. Out of these, **24 MMPs have been implemented**, delivering either a full or partial range of the intended services. However, the NeGP also revealed several shortcomings, including limited integration among government applications and databases, inadequate government process re-engineering, and underutilization of emerging technologies like mobile platforms and cloud computing. To address these challenges, the Government of India launched the e-Kranti programme, with the vision of “*Transforming e-Governance for Transforming Governance*.” Under e-Kranti, all new and ongoing e-governance projects, as well as existing projects being modernized, are required to align with its core principles: ‘Transformation, not Translation’; ‘Integrated Services, not Individual Services’; mandatory Government Process Re-engineering (GPR) in every MMP; ICT infrastructure on demand; Cloud by default; Mobile first; fast-tracking approvals; mandatory standards and protocols; language localization; National GIS (Geo-Spatial Information System); and robust security and electronic data preservation.²As over all, at present the way Indian government is digitalizing everything so for the growth and equal opportunity its necessary to have digital equality everywhere and in every aspect since digitalization has not only been part of luxury but it’s become important part of life and survival.

2. "Digital India" Ministry of electronics and Information Technology, FAQ - Digital India | Leading the transformation in India for ease of living and digital economy | MeitY, Government of India

Digital inequality and its Type

“The Indian Constitution grants various rights to everyone, including the right to equality without any discrimination on the basis of gender or other factors. It is expected that everyone will enjoy this equality both in the real world and in the cyber world.”³ state machinery not only liable to create the space for the women for this equality but also liable to provide security and other assistance so that this equality can be established in real sense. However, at present there are many types of digital inequality has been faced by the citizens where the people are not able to get the access of digital equality on equal basis. This inequality can be categorised on the basis Geographical area, rural urban divide, monetary status, caste or social status wise inequality. As geographically there are some areas which are not subject of digital development or internet since there are geographical hindrances like mountain, forest area etc.⁴ as per the rural urban divide Only 31% of the rural population has access to and uses the Internet, in contrast to 67% of the urban population.⁵ Other than that social status poverty is obvious causes which creates the digital inequality in India like, individuals in the richest 60% are four times more likely to use digital payments than those in the poorest 40%.⁶ And other is gender inequality in digital space.

Gender Digital inequality

“The Indian Constitution grants various rights to everyone, including the right to equality without any

^{3.} Article 19 “Right to Equality” The constitution of India 1950.

^{4.} “Challenges and Solutions in Rural Wireless Connectivity” Challenges and Solutions in Rural Wireless Connectivity, (visited 14 September 2025).

^{5.} Indian inequality Report 2022.

^{6.} Indian inequality Report 2022.

discrimination on the basis of gender or other factors. It is expected that everyone will enjoy this equality both in the real world and in the cyber world.”⁷ state machinery not only liable to create the space for the women for this equality but also liable to provide security and other assistance so that this equality can be established in real sense.

Although, woman is struggling to establish this equality due to the past practices however, in spite of that as already mentioned, women have been participating everywhere despite the many hurdles they have to face. While women have actively proven themselves in the real world after much struggle, the question remains whether their participation in the cyber world is the same, or if they are still lagging behind men.

Digitalisation is becoming very important aspect now a days it becomes need of survival, specially after covid 19 people not only understand the importance of digitalization but practicing it in every way of their life. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated India’s digital transformation, with a 500 percent increase in tele-health consultations, a structural shift towards online shopping that enabled e-retail to reach 95 percent of districts, and digital payments crossing 100 million transactions per day. So, at present for the women empowerment digitalization and active participation of women in the digital world become important and unavoidable aspect, however the main tools of appreciating the digitalization is smart mobile phones and its accessibility. However, Indian women are 15 percent less likely to own a mobile phone, and 33 percent less likely to use mobile internet services than men. In 2020, 25 percent of the total adult female population owned a smartphone versus 41 percent of adult men. ⁸Recently as per

7. Article 19 “Right to Equality” The constitution of India 1950.

8. "India’s gendered digital divide: How the absence of digital access is leaving women behind, ORF, August 22, 2021.

the survey, conducted by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's National Family Health NFHS-5 in the year of 2019-2021 It has been revealing that 33% of women use the internet, while the figure is 57% for men.⁹ Other than that as per the survey which has been conducted by the NGO on digital inequality its been shown that Indian women are 15 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone and 33 per cent less likely to use mobile internet services than men.¹⁰

Causes of Digital Inequality from Gender Perspective

In India, gender-based digital inequality is primarily rooted in deep-seated social, economic, and cultural barriers.

Patriarchal Norms: India, with its deeply rooted patriarchal family structure, often limits women's access to digital resources. In many households, men are the primary holders of mobile phones and other digitally connected tools, while women are granted only restricted or conditional access, usually when considered necessary or permitted by male family members. This unequal distribution is reinforced by societal norms that prioritize men's education, mobility, and decision-making authority, thereby creating a gendered divide in digital access and opportunities. As per the present study India does not equality in digital world still there is existences of digital divide which is creating the digital inequality in India.¹¹ Other than that in the survey done by the Ministry of statistic and Programme implementation there is gender gap regarding the uses of smart phones.¹²

9. "Only 33% Of Women In India Use Internet, Men Account 57%: Study" "Times of India" Updated Dec 18, 2023, 15:55 IST

10. "Women constitute one-third of Internet users in India: Study" The Indian Express, Tuesday, Sep 16, 2025

11. Mobile Gender Gap Report, 2024, GSMA – The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2024 (visited on 12 September 2025).

Economic Resources: Economic constraints further worsen the divide, as limited family resources are more likely spent on men's digital needs than on women's because still at many places people are facing poverty and for them the digital smart phones are item for luxury and if they wants to choose they will prefer and give to the boys rather than girl and many times affordability of the resources is also matters for that as result of it economic resources can be consider as cause of digital inequality.

Digital illiteracy: Low levels of digital literacy among women, especially in rural areas, prevent them from fully utilizing online opportunities for education, employment, and empowerment.¹³ however, government is taking many efforts for having the digital literacy in India, as result of from 74% we are on 80.9 % still there is many things are about to achieved because its overall digital literacy but from the perspective of gender its still less.

Digital Security: Safety concerns, such as fear of online harassment and cybercrimes, also discourage women from active digital participation. Additionally, structural gaps in infrastructure, such as poor connectivity in rural and marginalized regions, disproportionately affect women who already have less freedom of movement. Together, these factors reinforce gender-based digital inequality, limiting women's role in the digital transformation of India.

^{12.} "Percentage of persons able to use mobile (including smartphone) for each State/UT (Age-group wise & Gender-wise)" "Percentage of persons able to use mobile (including smartphone) for each State/UT (Age-group wise & Gender-wise)" | Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation | Government Of India (visted on 12 September 2025).

^{13.} India's Literacy Hits 80.9%, Digital Skills Rising: Dharmendra Pradhan, India's Literacy Hits 80.9%, Digital Skills Rising: Dharmendra Pradhan (visited on 20 Sep 2025).

A digital security and online harassment, scams is also giving the reason to the male gender of the family to prevent the use of digital tools by the women.

Overall, Cybersecurity has emerged as a significant hurdle in the path of women's empowerment in the digital era. While online platforms provide women with opportunities for education, employment, entrepreneurship, and social participation, the threat of cybercrimes such as stalking, trolling, bullying, identity theft, and non-consensual circulation of private data discourages many from active engagement. Fear of online harassment and reputational damage often restricts women from freely expressing themselves, exploring opportunities, or even pursuing digital careers. The lack of strong awareness about cyber safety measures, coupled with inadequate legal literacy, further increases their vulnerability. Moreover, limited trust in law enforcement and the stigma attached to reporting cybercrimes silence many women, preventing them from seeking justice. As a result, instead of becoming an empowering space, the digital sphere often reinforces gender-based barriers, unless robust cybersecurity frameworks, effective law enforcement, and awareness campaigns are strengthened to ensure women's safe and equal participation.

However, at present government started to take initiatives and introduce some programmes like Digital Shakti so that Digital Security and its awareness can be increased in order to get the maximum participation by women in digital world.¹⁴

¹⁴. A cybersecurity revolution to empower women across India, A cybersecurity revolution to empower women across India (visited on 20 September 2025)

Impact of Digital inequality on women and their empowerment

India's gendered digital divide highlights how the lack of equal access to technology is leaving women behind in the journey of empowerment. In many households, men are prioritized when it comes to owning mobile phones, internet access, and digital tools, while women are often given limited or conditional use. This unequal access restricts women from exploring opportunities in education, online learning, employment, digital banking, and entrepreneurship, which are increasingly dependent on digital platforms. Without digital connectivity, women remain excluded from crucial information, government schemes, healthcare services, and even basic communication networks that could improve their quality of life. Furthermore, the inability to participate in the digital world also limits their voice in social and political spaces, making them less visible in the discourse of progress. Thus, digital inequality is not just a technological gap but a barrier that reinforces existing gender disparities and prevents women from achieving their full potential in India's rapidly advancing digital society.

Educational Impact: Digital inequality directly affects women's access to education, especially in rural and marginalized areas. Girls often lack personal devices and internet connectivity, which prevents them from participating in online classes, e-learning platforms, and digital literacy programs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many girls dropped out of school because digital resources were prioritized for boys in the family. This limited access not only reduces their educational attainment but also weakens their ability to compete in a digital-driven job market, thereby deepening gender disparities.

Economic Impact: The absence of digital access

restricts women from engaging in income-generating activities that depend on technology. Women entrepreneurs, particularly those in small businesses, are unable to leverage e-commerce platforms to expand their markets. Similarly, women in rural areas face barriers in accessing digital banking, government subsidies, and financial literacy programs, leaving them financially dependent on men. The growing reliance on digital platforms for jobs, freelancing, and remote work further excludes women, widening the gender gap in economic empowerment.

Social & Cultural Impact: Digital inequality reinforces traditional social norms that limit women's mobility and visibility. Restricted access to digital platforms reduces women's participation in social media advocacy, awareness campaigns, and networking opportunities. Without a digital presence, women's voices are often absent in debates surrounding social justice, equality, and policy reforms. Dependence on male family members for access to online information further strengthens patriarchal control, making it difficult for women to challenge cultural barriers and assert their independence.

Political & Civic Impact: The gendered digital divide also limits women's role in democratic and civic spaces. Women without digital access are often unaware of government welfare schemes, online grievance redressal systems, or opportunities for digital participation in governance. Their exclusion from e-governance platforms reduces their visibility in political decision-making and weakens their ability to exercise informed citizenship. As digital platforms are increasingly used for political mobilization, campaigns, and activism, women's lack of access marginalizes them from key democratic processes.

Health & Well-being Impact: Limited digital access

prevents women from utilizing telemedicine services, online health consultations, and awareness programs related to reproductive health, nutrition, and mental well-being. In rural areas, where healthcare infrastructure is already weak, digital exclusion further denies women access to timely medical advice and government health schemes delivered through digital platforms. This gap not only affects their physical health but also adds to emotional stress, as women feel left behind in a society where healthcare is becoming increasingly digitalized.

Safety & Cybersecurity Concerns: Concerns about online safety and cybercrimes pose another barrier to women's empowerment. Many women face harassment, stalking, trolling, and threats in the digital space, which discourages them from using online platforms freely. Families often restrict women's use of mobile phones and internet access in the name of "safety," which further limits their opportunities for growth and learning. The lack of digital literacy and awareness of cyber laws makes women more vulnerable to exploitation, while underreporting due to stigma and weak law enforcement keeps the cycle of victimization unaddressed.

Conclusion

The study reveals that gender-based digital inequality in India is not merely a technological issue but a structural and social challenge deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, economic disparities, and cultural restrictions. Women continue to face barriers in education, employment, healthcare, and civic participation due to limited or conditional access to digital resources. This exclusion restricts their empowerment, reinforces dependency on male family members, and weakens their representation in the digital economy and democratic processes. Furthermore, concerns around cybersecurity and online harassment exacerbate the problem, as fear and stigma discourage women from engaging freely in the digital space.

Unless these gaps are addressed, India's vision of inclusive digital growth will remain incomplete, leaving women further behind in the process of development.

Suggestions

- **Policy Interventions** – The government must integrate gender-sensitive policies into digital initiatives like *Digital India* by ensuring affordable access to devices and internet connectivity for women, especially in rural and marginalized communities.
- **Digital Literacy Programs** – Targeted training programs should be introduced to enhance women's digital literacy, enabling them to utilize e-learning, online banking, e-commerce, and telemedicine services effectively.
- **Economic Empowerment through Technology** – Women entrepreneurs and self-help groups should be supported with digital tools, subsidies, and training to participate in online markets and digital finance systems.
- **Cybersecurity & Legal Awareness** – Stronger cyber safety frameworks, rapid grievance redressal mechanisms, and awareness campaigns are needed to protect women from cyber harassment and to encourage them to report crimes without fear or stigma.
- **Community & Family Sensitization** – Awareness campaigns must address patriarchal mindsets within families, promoting equal digital access for men and women to ensure that women are not restricted by cultural or safety-related barriers.
- **Public-Private Partnerships** – Collaboration between government, NGOs, and private companies can help bridge the digital divide by providing subsidized devices, localized training content in regional languages, and community-based digital hubs for women.

- **Research & Data Collection** – Continuous monitoring and gender-disaggregated data on digital access will help policymakers identify gaps and design more effective, evidence-based interventions.

6

SELF HELP GROUPS, WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN AMBIKAPUR CITY OF CHHATTISGARH

Dr. Saman Narayan Upadhyay

Assistant Professor

Department of Legal Studies

Sant Gahira Guru University, Ambikapur, Chhattisgarh

ABSTRACT

The Ambikapur city of Surguja District in northern Chhattisgarh is a role model of women empowerment and environmental management through the women led Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The Solid and Liquid Resources Management, a key component of the Swachh Bharat Mission, has been successful in the Ambikapur city with the help of the women led SHGs. The Ambikapur Municipal Corporation data reveals socioeconomic empowerment of vulnerable women of Ambikapur city in twofold revenue resources; first is in the form of monthly wages out of the cleanliness charges collected from the houses and commercial units; and second is in the form of shares in the money collected from the sale of wastes. Data also reveals that, in addition to generating a stable income resource, women led SHGs have significantly contributed in the scientific management and disposal of solid and liquid wastes of the city. They have transformed about 16-acre waste landfill site into a sanitation awareness park named 'Oxygen Park.' They have also saved a huge money of the municipal corporation spent in the transportation of wastes to the landfill sites and doing soil and leachate treatment every year. This research paper finds some health issues faced by the women

while collecting and segregating the commercial wastes and presents suggestion to overcome these health hardships with scientific equipment.

Keywords: Self-Help Groups (SHGs), women, Solid and Liquid Resources Management (SLRM), zero-waste landfill, health issues and scientific equipment.

I. Introduction

“I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved”

– Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

“Without 50 per cent of the population, we can’t march forward. We’ve not been leaders; we’ve not even been recognised as workers. Women need to take themselves more seriously,”

-Elaben Bhatt(TNN, 2022)

There is a strong connect of women empowerment with the development of a nation and management of environment. Women are widely recognized for their important role in managing the environment and advancing a country’s socioeconomic growth. Empowerment of women leads to social development that eventually promotes economic development of country. Women’s empowerment is therefore crucial to a country’s socioeconomic development. Generally speaking, a national policy for socioeconomic growth cannot overlook women’s development. Only in a safe and stable environment might a country’s socioeconomic progress be sustained. According to Principle 4 of the Rio Declaration of 1992, environmental preservation must be included into national development policies in order to meet sustainable development goals (UNGA, 1992). According to Principle 20, the Rio Declaration of 1992 affirms the critical role that women play in environmental management and development and calls

for their full involvement in order to meet the objectives of sustainable development (UNGA, 1992). Women who are empowered make a substantial contribution to environmental preservation.

In India as well as other countries, women constitute half of the population. Women are working in both public-private and organized-unorganized sectors. There is a large size of women population engaged in unorganized sector. Women put their great entrepreneurial skills in unorganized sector spread over rural and urban regions. In the rural regions, women put their skills and labour in all unorganized rural employment sectors such as agriculture, animal husbandry, poultry farming, sheep rearing, collection and selling of minor forest produces, cutting and selling of fire wood etc. In the urban regions, women are working in all unorganized urban employment sectors such as housekeeping, sales girls, bidi making, handicrafts, and handlooms etc. In spite of putting their heart and soul in the unorganized rural-urban employment activities, neither social nor economic condition of women have improved.

In order to change the face of socioeconomic development of women, a microfinance experiment was carried out by Ahmedabad based Elaben Bhatt in 1972 establishing a women-led cooperative named SEWA¹ (Self Employed Women's Association) to facilitate credits for self-employment of women to make them self-dependent (Misra, 2022). Elaben had formed SEWA for socioeconomic development of women working in informal sectors on the principle that the poor women do not require charity rather they require an enabling mechanism to put their entrepreneurial skill to come out of

¹. Elaben Bhatt had registered her SEWA under the Trade Union's Act, 1926 on April 12, 1972 with registration number G.938. Accessed from <https://www.sewa.org/our-founder-elaben-bhatt/>

the vicious circle of poverty and vulnerability (Misra, 2022). The SEWA has successfully registered 2.1 million strong memberships in 18 States across India at her demise in 2022 (TNN, 2022). The SEWA has provided self-employment to the women and promoted cooperative production through microfinancing (Dubey, 2022). Seeing great success of SEWA, other NGOs like Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA) has promoted micro-credits to the women working in informal sectors.¹⁶ A global popularity to the SHGs has been advanced by Prof. Dr. Muhammad Yunus of Bangladesh, the then Professor of Economics at Chittagong University and currently Chief Adviser to the interim government of Bangladesh, establishing Grameen Bank in 1983 for micro-lending to the poor women to start their small scale businesses.¹⁷

This research paper examines the potential and performance of Sel-Help Groups, engaged in the solid and liquid resources management in the Ambikapur city of northern Chhattisgarh in India, to empower local poor and marginalized women and conservation of environment. Major portion of research data (70%) has been retrieved from the open access resources available on the internet. Small portion of research data (30%) has been directly collected from the field to verify the authenticity of open access data.

II. Government Schemes for Socioeconomic development of Women

To elevate the socioeconomic conditions of rural-urban women, the Union and State governments of India has launched various programmes. Some of these schemes and programmes are briefly discussed hereunder:

^{2.} Accessed from <https://myrada.org/history/> on 24.09.2025

^{3.} Accessed from <https://grameenbank.org.bd/about/founder> on 24.09.2025

a. Lakhpati Didi Scheme

At the occasion of 77th Independence of India on 15th August 2023, Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Damodar Modi has gifted this most ambitious scheme to the nation to create a base of 2 crore lakhpatididis in Indian villages working in SHGs with a capital more than Rs. One lakh in every hands. This scheme facilitates timely and adequate technical, instrumental, financial and market support to the women-led SHGs to enhance their sustainable livelihood (Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, 2023).

b. Mudra Yojana

Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Ltd (MUDRA) yojana has been established by the Government of India in 2015 to fund the unfunded by the commercial banks, Regional Rural Banks, and small finance banks etc. under aegis of the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana in order to facilitate nearly 10 crore employment in the micro enterprises. The MUDRA yojana is categorized into four categories of loans; namely, Shishu (covering loans upto Rs. 50,000/-), Kishore (covering loans above Rs. 50,000 and upto Rs. 5 Lakhs), Tarun (covering loans above 5 Lakhs and upto Rs. 10 Lakhs), and TarunPlus (covering loans above 10 Lakhs and upto 20 Lakhs)(MUDRA, 2025).

c. TREAD Scheme

The Trade Related Entrepreneurship Development Assistance Scheme (TREAD) is a promising initiative of the Government of India launched by its Ministry of Small-Scale industries in 1996. The TREAD scheme primarily focuses upon women entrepreneurial skill development of women providing them financial-technical assistance through the NGOs. Women may receive collateral loan upto Rs. 30 lakhs out of which 30% is sanctioned by the Government and 70 % is sanctioned by commercial banks (Capital, 2024).

d. Standup India Scheme

The Standup India has been introduced in 2016 to facilitate loans to entrepreneurs belonging to Schedule Caste (SC), Schedule Tribe (ST) and women who were facing financial challenges to run their enterprises. Under this scheme, at least one SC, one ST and one woman, above 18 years of age, can get loan of Rs. 10 lakhs to 1 crore from one branch of a bank at a very low interest rate to start her greenfield enterprise in trading, manufacturing and service sectors (Ministry of Finance, 2022).

e. Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) for Women

STEP is a pan-India scheme of the Government of India to develop women's employability skills in various fields including agriculture, horticulture, food processing, tailoring, handlooms, handicrafts, computer and IT-enabled services etc. (Niti Ayog, 2025).

f. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY)

The MSY is a Central Government scheme to provide micro financial upto Rs. 1,40,000 to low-income SC/ST/OBC women between 18-55 years age to start their income generating activities. The micro finance is granted to a cluster of minimum 20 women (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2025).

There have been more than hundreds of the government schemes for the socioeconomic empowerment of the women across the country. Many of these schemes have been operated in groups of women. Several Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have come forward to support and develop entrepreneurship of women. This financial support has brought a paradigm shift in the socioeconomic conditions of the women.

III. Creation of Self-help groups and making it women centric

The Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are well-known concept for two decades. The SHGs are viable alternative means to achieve the goals of socioeconomic development ensuring community participation. The SHGs are informal primary units of the community. It is a group of people belonging to homogeneous socio-economic status. It is formed to achieve common socioeconomic objectives of the people who have so come together to form SHGs (Mayoux, L., 1998). There is no governmental criterion to form an informal SHG. Generally, there are 10 to 20 persons in a SHG and its size is increased by their members in order to cater advantages of governmental schemes.

Women constitute a significant size of informal sector. Their contribution in local employment activities is enormous but without a credit. The concept of SHG has been taken hand to hand by women to raise their socioeconomic development across the world. In India, over ten crore women have joined SHGs and they are leading to almost half of the government recognized start-ups, for example 69% of the 46 crore borrowers under the PMMY are the women (Rustagi et al., 2024).

IV. Government Schemes for women empowerment and environmental management

The Solid and Liquid Resource Management (SLRM) project is such a government scheme that is not only leading to the women empowerment but also plays vital role in the environmental management at grassroot levels. The SLRM project is a part of the Swachh Bharat Mission launched in 2014 (Taru, 2016). The SLRM centers are established and operated by the local bodies. Gram Panchayats are establishing and operated SLRM centers in the rural areas and Municipal Corporations are establishing and operating SLRM centers

in the urban areas. Basic purpose of the SLRM centers is to make the respective areas garbage free and bin free area. The SLRM centers are engaging local SHGs, instead of outsourcing labors, for door-to-door collection of wastes. These doors are houses, hospitals, shops and government offices. Women are the key members of these SHGs. The SHGs are not only preventing scattering of wastes from these doors but they are also transporting the wastes to the SLRM centers for scientific disposal. They are being paid by the local bodies for their services of transporting solid and liquid wastes to the SLRM centers. Besides monthly payments, the members of the SHGs are also benefitted with the share generated from by-products made from such wastes, such as fertilizers, composts, manures etc.

V. Women empowerment and environmental management through SHGs in Ambikapur

The Ambikapur Municipal Corporation is located in the Surguja district of northern Chhattisgarh housing about two lakhs people. In the year 2015, District Collector of Surguja has introduced several schemes for the empowerment of women including promotion to form SHGs of women. The collector has also introduced her ambitious plan to make Ambikapur cleanest city in India with the help of women operated SHGs. She succeeded in the mission by providing SLRM training to women operated SHGs of this city inviting Vellore based SLRM experts named 'Indian Green Services (IGS)' to Ambikapur city (Murthi, 2015). Eventually, the Ambikapur Municipal Corporation has received national award for cleanest city in India in its category successively for many years including year 2025.

There are more than 550 women engaged in 19 SLRM centers of 48 wards of Ambikapur Municipal Corporation (this data is collected by the author). As per SLRM nodal officer

of this municipal corporation, about 50 tones wastes are daily collected by SLRM workers from the houses, hospitals and commercial units. These wastes are sorted on the same day in hundreds of categories. About 80% garbage are directly sold to scrap vendors, 10% is converted in manures, composts and fertilizers and remaining 10 % is sold to factories as fuels. The revue so generated is distributed among the women through their SHGs engaged in the SLRM centers. in addition to this, the women workers are receiving wages out of revenue generated collection of sanitation charges from the houses, hospitals and commercial units beginning with Rs. 50 per month to Rs. 5,000 per months depending upon the size of units.

The SLRM has not only changed the socioeconomic condition of women of this city but it has also made the city a bin-free city, a cleanest city in India. The SLRM has released financial burden of the Municipal Corporation to transport garbage to landfill sites and doing soil and leachate treatment every year. The SLRM has saved nearly eighty lakh rupees per annum of the corporation for doing these exercises.

Most significant contribution of the SLRM is the transformation of 16-acre dumpsite of the city into a sanitation awareness park named 'Oxygen Park'(Niti Ayog, 2023). It has converted a waste land into a revenue generating tourist site and children park.

VI. Conclusion and suggestions

The SHGs has changed the face of socioeconomic empowerment of women of Ambikapur city. The SHGs composed of women belonging to vulnerable section of Ambikapur city has develop a strong connect with the SLRM centers established and administered by the Ambikapur Municipal Corporation. The women members of these SHGs are popularly called as 'Cleanliness Didis (SwacchhataDidis).' They have found a strong and steady revenue resource through

the SLRM centers. Monthly cleanliness charges collected from houses and commercial units are distributed among them. Besides this, they also get share out of the money earned from the sale of wastes. They have made Ambikapur city India's first zero-waste landfill city by scientifically managing the city wastes at SLRM centers. They have completely lifted economic burden of municipal corporation to transport the city waste at landfill sites and carry out soil and leachate treatment every year.

The women engaged in the collection and segregation of wastes are working manually. It has caused lead adverse impact on their health. Many of them are suffering from lung diseases and other ailments due to exposure to some of the harmful commercial wastes. Therefore, I am presenting some of the illustrative suggestions, not exhaustive, as below:

1. The women should be provided personal protective equipment (PPE) safety kits including:
 - a. **Masks:** for protecting the respiratory system from airborne particles generated from the wastes;
 - b. **Gloves:** for protection of the skin from potentially hazardous wastes;
 - c. **Face Shields:** for additional protection of the face and eyes from the dangerous wastes;
 - d. **Gowns or Coveralls:** for protection of the body from exposure to harmful contaminants; and
 - e. **Hair Covers and Shoe Covers:** for maintaining hygiene and preventing contamination.
2. The women should be equipped with waste collection, lifting and segregation machines to minimize their contact and exposure to hazardous wastes.

REFERENCES

1. Baghel, D. (2015). Socio-Economic Development of Women through Self Help Groups with Reference to Rajnandgaon District of Chhattisgarh. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 20(10), 67–79. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-201056779>
2. Capital, K. (2024). *TREAD Scheme Benefits for Women Entrepreneurs*. <https://kinaracapital.com/tread-scheme-benefits-for-women-entrepreneurs/>
3. Dubey, M. (2022, November 5). SEWA pioneered by Elaben Bhatt was an innovative experiment. *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/sewa-pioneered-by-elaben-bhatt-was-an-innovative-experiment/article66097341.ece>
4. Mayoux, L. (1998). Research Round-Up Women's empowerment and micro-finance programmes: Strategies for increasing impact. *Development in Practice*, 8(2), 235–241. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614529853873>
5. Ministry of Finance. (2022). *Frequently Asked Questions: Stand Up India Scheme* [Government of India]. Press Information Bureau. <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2022/apr/doc20224535701.pdf>
6. Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. (2023). *Strategy for two crore LakhpatiDidis*. Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. https://lakhpatidn.lokos.in/lakhpati/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Strategy_English.pdf
7. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. (2025). *Mahila Samriddhi Yojana* [Government of India]. myScheme. <https://www.myscheme.gov.in/schemes/cbssc-msy>
8. Misra, L. (2022, November 5). A vision for women's empowerment: The story of Ela Bhatt's SEWA. *The Indian Express*. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/a-vision-for-womens-empowerment-the-story-of-ela-bhatt-s-sewa-8250510/>
9. MUDRA. (2025, September 28). *Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY)* [Government of India]. <https://www.mudra.org.in/>

10. Murthi, P. V. V. (2015, May 21). Vellore expert introduces SLRM concept in Chhattisgarh. *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/vellore-expert-introduces-slr-concept-in-chhattisgarh/article7229985.ece>
11. Niti Ayog. (2023). *From Dumpsite to Sanitation Park: Ambikapur's Success Story in Solid and Liquid Resource Management* [Government of India]. Champions of Change. <https://abp.championsofchange.gov.in/content/768from-dumpsite-to-sanitation-park-ambikapurs-success-story-in-solid-and-liquid-resource-management>
12. Niti Ayog. (2025). *Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)* [Government of India]. Skilling Livelihoods & Labour Welfare. <https://www.nitiforstates.gov.in/best-practice-detail?id=106334#>
13. Rustagi, N., Pathak, H., Kataria, R., & Kumari, P. (2024). *From Women Development to Women led Development* (Government of India No. RU-56-01-366-060324/EXPLAINER). Press Information Bureau. <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2024/mar/doc202436319901.pdf>
14. Taru. (2016). *Detailed project report solid and liquid waste management for GarhiHarsaru gram panchayat*. TARU Leading Edge. https://www.gwp.org/globalassets/global/gwp-sas_files/wacrep/2016/new-dpr_slwm_final.pdf
15. TNN. (2022, November 3). Gnanadharani Ela Bhatt, grande dame of SEWA, passes away in Gujarat at 89. *The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/gandhian-ela-bhatt-grande-dame-of-sewa-passes-away-in-gujarat-at-89/articleshow/95263535.cms>
16. UNGA. (1992). *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development: Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (No. A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I)). United Nations General Assembly. Accessed from https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_CONF.151_26_Vol.I_Declaration.pdf

7

**ROLE OF GENDER JUSTICE IN WOMEN
EMPOWERMENT****Prof. S. P. Singh***Fairfield Institute of Management and Technology, New Delhi***Dr. Malvika***Assistant Professor**Fairfield Institute of Management and Technology, New Delhi***ABSTRACT**

Gender justice is a foundational principle of a democratic society and occupies a central position in the constitutional framework of India. Rooted in the ideals of equality, dignity, and social justice, gender justice seeks to eliminate historical discrimination and systemic inequalities faced by women. Indian society, both historically and contemporarily, has witnessed deep-rooted gender-based injustice, with women emerging as the most vulnerable victims of social discrimination. Recognizing this reality, the framers of the Indian Constitution incorporated explicit provisions guaranteeing equality before law, prohibition of discrimination on the ground of sex, and affirmative obligations upon the State to promote the welfare of women.

*This paper critically examines the role of gender justice in promoting women empowerment in India. It analyses constitutional provisions, judicial pronouncements, and legislative measures that have contributed to advancing women's rights. Particular emphasis is placed on landmark judicial decisions such as *Vishaka v State of Rajasthan* and *Joseph Shine v Union of India*, which have expanded the scope of gender justice through progressive interpretation of constitutional values. The paper further explores the role of*

education, welfare policies, feminist thought, and civil society in strengthening women's social and economic position. While acknowledging the progress achieved, the study also highlights persistent challenges such as gender-based violence and patriarchal social structures. It concludes that sustained legal reform, effective implementation, and social transformation are essential for realising the constitutional promise of gender justice and achieving holistic women empowerment.

Keywords: Gender Justice; Women Empowerment; Equality; Indian Constitution; Feminist Jurisprudence

INTRODUCTION

The word justice is having wide-ranging and deep meaning. To achieve it for all sections of the society is the fundamental principle of a democracy. The concept of justice found very important place in the preamble of the Indian Constitution, where social justice is placed at first place before economic justice and political justice.

If we look back in the historical scenario and even present social conditions, we find that along with many types of inequalities and injustice, social inequalities prevailed predominantly in Indian society. Unfortunately, women have been the biggest victim of social injustice and discrimination.

In post-independent India, the issue of gender equality and gender justice got the attention of Constitution makers as well as the administrators while making policies and legislation. The Constitution gives necessary direction and support to the governments to take necessary measures for promoting the gender justice to ensure dignified life to women.

Justice is a foundational principle of democratic governance and a prerequisite for social stability and human development. The Indian Constitution places social justice at the forefront of its constitutional philosophy, recognising

that political and economic justice cannot be realised in the absence of social equality. Gender justice forms an integral component of social justice, as gender-based discrimination has historically constituted one of the most pervasive forms of inequality in Indian society.

Women in India have long faced systemic exclusion from education, employment, property ownership, and public life. Patriarchal norms, social customs, and institutional practices have reinforced women's subordinate status, limiting their autonomy and agency. Women empowerment, therefore, cannot be achieved without addressing the underlying structures of gender injustice. Gender justice seeks to dismantle these structures by ensuring equal rights, opportunities, and protection under the law.

In post-independence India, gender justice has evolved through constitutional guarantees, legislative reforms, and judicial activism. The Constitution not only prohibits discrimination but also authorizes affirmative measures to promote women's welfare. Over time, courts have played a transformative role in interpreting constitutional provisions in light of changing social realities. This paper seeks to analyze how gender justice has functioned as a catalyst for women empowerment in India.

SCOPE OF GENDER JUSTICE

Gender justice refers to the equitable treatment of all genders, ensuring that individuals are not disadvantaged on the basis of sex or gender. Unlike formal equality, which treats all individuals alike, gender justice recognizes existing inequalities and seeks to address them through differential treatment where necessary. It is rooted in the principle of substantive equality, which aims to achieve equality of outcomes rather than mere equality of opportunity.

Feminist jurisprudence has significantly contributed to

the development of gender justice by exposing the gendered nature of law and legal institutions. Feminist scholars argue that laws often reflect male-centric perspectives and fail to account for women's lived experiences. By challenging the neutrality of law, feminist jurisprudence has advocated for legal reforms that recognise women's specific needs and vulnerabilities.

In the Indian context, gender justice encompasses not only legal equality but also social, economic, and cultural dimensions. It seeks to transform societal attitudes, dismantle patriarchal norms, and create an environment in which women can exercise autonomy and participate fully in public life.

GENDER JUSTICE AND INDIAN CONSTITUTION

Art. 14 of the Constitution give fundamental right of equality before law without any kind of discrimination and Art. 15 prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender at public place, ensuring respectable life to women.

The Indian Constitution provides a comprehensive framework for gender justice. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of laws to all persons. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth and empowers the State to make special provisions for women and children. These provisions establish equality as a fundamental right and authorise affirmative action to address historical disadvantages.

Directive principles of state policy also convey the moral bindings of the central government and state governments to promote the welfare of all sections of the society, particularly vulnerable sections like women. The more constitutional and administrative provisions are the reflection of the concern of the leadership of the nation for the uplift of women and to take necessary steps to get rid of it.

The Directive Principles of State Policy further reinforce

the commitment to gender justice by imposing an obligation on the State to promote social welfare. Article 39 directs the State to ensure adequate means of livelihood for men and women and equal pay for equal work. Article 42 mandates the provision of just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. Although non-justiciable, these principles serve as guiding norms for governance and legislative action.

The Preamble to the Constitution encapsulates the vision of social justice, dignity, and equality, providing a normative foundation for interpreting fundamental rights in a gender-sensitive manner. Together, these constitutional provisions create a legal framework that supports women empowerment through gender justice.

JUDICIARY VIS-E-VERSA GENDER JUSTICE

The Indian judiciary has played a pivotal role in advancing gender justice through progressive interpretation of constitutional provisions. Judicial activism has often filled legislative gaps and responded to emerging forms of discrimination against women.

In *Vishaka v State of Rajasthan*, the Supreme Court of India laid down guidelines to prevent sexual harassment of women at the workplace, recognising such harassment as a violation of fundamental rights under Articles 14, 15, and 21. The Court relied on international conventions and constitutional principles to frame binding guidelines in the absence of specific legislation. This decision marked a significant step in recognising women's right to a safe and dignified working environment.

Similarly, in *Joseph Shine v Union of India*, the Supreme Court of India decriminalized adultery by striking down Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code. The Court held that the provision was arbitrary and discriminatory, as it treated women

as property of their husbands and denied them agency. The judgment reaffirmed the principles of equality, dignity, and individual autonomy, strengthening the constitutional vision of gender justice.

Other landmark decisions, including *Shayara Bano v Union of India and Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India*, have further expanded the scope of gender justice by recognising women's rights within personal laws and affirming the constitutional morality of equality and dignity.

After the 2012 Nirbhaya case, India introduced major legal reforms to strengthen laws related to women's safety, based largely on the recommendations of the Justice J.S. Verma Committee. The punishment for several sexual offences was enhanced, with imprisonment extended from a maximum of seven years to life imprisonment in aggravated cases. Significant amendments were also made to the Juvenile Justice Act, under which juveniles aged between 16 and 18 years may be tried as adults for heinous offences, including rape, subject to a preliminary assessment by the Juvenile Justice Board regarding their mental and physical capacity to commit such crimes.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER JUSTICE

Women empowerment refers to the process of enhancing women's ability to make strategic life choices and transform those choices into desired outcomes. Gender justice acts as a foundational mechanism for empowerment by removing legal and social barriers that restrict women's participation in various spheres of life.

If we notice the subject of the measures on women empowerment in the form of improvement of status and opportunities in all areas of nationality where they were denied earlier. Educational development of women has opened almost all the areas for them to display their capabilities and capacities.

Special efforts have been made to promote the women education and to change the mindset of society for gender equality and gender justice. Slogans like Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao have become very effective and popular. Schools, colleges and universities are being started exclusively for women. They are being allowed to join the tough areas, like Army, Police, Technology and field works which were earlier considered in the domain of men.

Education has emerged as one of the most effective tools for women empowerment. Access to education has enabled women to acquire skills, participate in the workforce, and engage in public decision-making. Government initiatives such as *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* reflect a policy commitment to promoting girls' education and changing societal attitudes towards gender equality.

Besides this, large number of welfare measures and incentives are being devised particularly for women to ensure their rightful place at home and outside the home. In fact, this is social correction of history.

Economic empowerment through employment and entrepreneurship has further strengthened women's autonomy. Legal reforms ensuring equal pay, maternity benefits, and workplace safety have contributed to women's increased participation in diverse fields, including defence, science, technology, and governance.

ROLE OF STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Special efforts are being made to strengthen them by making them aware of their legal rights and human rights. Large number of NGOs have taken their cause for empowerment. The philosophy of feminism has played a significant role in changing the mindset of male-dominated society and to acknowledge the hidden talent and worth of women. It is

because of this changed mindset that women's empowerment has become the revolution. In today's society women have become stronger and important to lead our family, society and the nation. On re-examining the previously changed social scenario, the fact of gender justice is playing a dynamic role. It is a part of the Constitution which is reflected in the Preamble and other parts of it.

Constitution helped a lot to generate and execute the idea of gender justice, leading to women development and women empowerment which has become more and more holistic and inclusive. Expanding horizons of human mind and human psychology has played significant role in promoting the human personality. Technology and global world is also playing its own role in providing lot of opportunities for women development.

The State plays a central role in advancing gender justice through legislation, policy formulation, and implementation. Laws addressing domestic violence, sexual harassment, and workplace equality reflect the State's commitment to protecting women's rights. However, effective implementation remains a critical challenge.

Civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations have complemented state efforts by raising awareness, providing legal aid, and advocating for policy reforms. Feminist movements have played a transformative role in challenging patriarchal norms and reframing women's rights as human rights. Legal literacy programmes have empowered women to assert their rights and seek remedies against injustice.

CHALLENGES TO GENDER JUSTICE

Despite constitutional guarantees and judicial interventions, gender justice in India continues to face

significant challenges. Gender-based violence, including sexual assault and domestic abuse, remains a serious concern. Such violence not only violates individual rights but also undermines women's confidence and participation in public life.

CONCLUSION

Gender justice remains a dynamic and essential instrument for achieving women empowerment in India. The constitutional framework, supported by judicial activism and legislative reforms, has played a transformative role in advancing women's rights. However, the persistence of social and institutional barriers underscores the need for sustained efforts to translate legal guarantees into lived realities.

For the sake of women empowerment, we need to be careful about ugly pictures which have now come to threat to women's development on the face of sexual assault of women. Both legal and administrative measures should be taken in institutions like family, marriage and social relations need to read and research in the subject of sociology.

REFERENCES

1. Agnes, F. (1999). *Law and gender inequality: The politics of women's rights in India*. Oxford University Press.
2. Bano, S., & Ors. v. Union of India, (2017) 9 SCC 1 (India).
3. Constitution of India, arts. 14, 15, 21, 39, 42.
4. Government of India. (2013). *Report of the Committee on Amendments to Criminal Law (Justice J. S. Verma Committee)*. Ministry of Home Affairs.
5. Johar, N. S., & Ors. v. Union of India, (2018) 10 SCC 1 (India).
6. Joseph Shine v. Union of India, (2019) 3 SCC 39 (India).
7. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (India).
8. Ministry of Women and Child Development. (2015). *Beti Bachao*

Beti Padhao scheme guidelines. Government of India.

9. Penal Code, 1860 (India) (as amended by the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013).
10. Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan, (1997) 6 SCC 241 (India).

8

GENDERED REALITIES IN DIGITAL SPACES: EMPOWERMENT, EXCLUSION, AND ONLINE VIOLENCE

Ashelle Deyona D'souza

Student

St Joseph's college of Law, Bangalore

Vimala Mary A

Student

St Joseph's college of Law, Bangalore

ABSTRACT

This doctrinal research examines the legal frameworks governing online gender-based violence, focusing on the intersection of law, digital platforms, and women's lived experiences in digital spaces. While digital technologies hold the potential to empower women, they also facilitate forms of harassment, abuse, and exclusion that existing legal instruments inadequately address. The study critically analyzes national, regional, and international legal provisions including statutes, judicial precedents, and human rights conventions to identify doctrinal gaps and inconsistencies that hinder effective protection and redress. Special attention is given to the role of digital platforms, whose algorithmic architectures, content moderation policies, and monetization strategies may amplify online violence, raising complex questions of legal accountability. Furthermore, the research explores the compounded vulnerabilities faced by marginalized women, highlighting how socio-economic inequalities, platform practices, and legal insufficiencies intersect to limit equitable digital empowerment. By synthesizing statutory provisions, case law, and international instruments, the study aims to

develop a coherent doctrinal critique and propose principles for legal reform. The ultimate goal is to demonstrate that without doctrinal clarity and harmonized legal standards, aspirations for safe and inclusive digital participation remain largely inaccessible for women. This research emphasizes the necessity of updating legal frameworks to account for the unique challenges of online spaces, ensuring that digital empowerment is both meaningful and protected under the law.

Keywords: Online Gender-Based Violence, Digital Empowerment, Legal Frameworks, Platform Accountability, Intersectional Vulnerability

1 Introduction: Conceptualizing the Digital Gender Divide

This foundational chapter establishes the research's terrain by articulating the central paradox of digital spaces for women: their potential for empowerment is simultaneously undermined by pervasive risks of exclusion and violence. It moves from this broad paradox to precise definitions of the core problem, the key concepts, and the methodological approach that will guide the entire study. The chapter argues that the digital realm is not a neutral domain but one that reflects and amplifies existing societal gender inequalities, necessitating a focused legal inquiry.

1.1 The Digital Double-Edged Sword: Narratives of Empowerment vs. Realities of Exclusion

It critically examines the techno-optimistic narrative that often dominates discourse on digital inclusion. It acknowledges the documented benefits, where digital platforms have served as vital tools for women's mobilization, economic entrepreneurship, and access to information and solidarity networks, particularly in contexts where physical public spaces are restrictive (UN Women, 2020). However, it swiftly contrasts this with the burgeoning body of evidence revealing a darker reality. For many women, online

participation is fraught with the risk of gender-based hostility, which acts as a significant barrier to free expression and participation (Amnesty International, 2018). This section posits that this duality is not incidental but central to understanding the gendered nature of digital spaces, where the promise of liberation is constantly challenged by regressive forces of control and silencing.

1.2 Defining the Contours of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV)

It argues that OGBV is not a monolithic or minor phenomenon but constitutes a spectrum of harmful behaviors that are intrinsically linked to the offline subordination of women. The definition encompasses a range of acts, from seemingly “low-level” but pervasive cyber harassment and misogynistic abuse to more severe forms like cyber stalking, non-consensual distribution of intimate images (so-called “revenge porn”), doxing (publishing private personal information), and technology-facilitated sexual extortion (Henry & Powell, 2016). The United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women has emphasized that such acts, when committed against women or girls because they are women, or that disproportionately affect them, constitute a form of gender-based violence that can cause significant harm and impede the realization of their human rights (United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council, 2018). This section establishes that OGBV is a serious violation that demands a robust legal response, not a trivial “online” issue.

1.3 Statement of the Research Problem, Questions, and Hypothesis

The research problem is identified as the systemic failure of existing legal doctrines to keep pace with the novel and

evolving manifestations of violence in digital environments. This lag creates a protection gap where laws designed for the physical world are ill-equipped to address the scale, speed, and psychological impact of online abuse (Henry & Powell, 2016). From this problem, the three research questions are derived, each targeting a specific dimension of the issue are:-

1. How do existing national, regional, and international legal frameworks address online gender-based violence, and to what extent do doctrinal gaps and inconsistencies undermine women's protection and digital empowerment?
2. In what ways do digital platforms' algorithmic architectures, content moderation practices, and monetization strategies shape the perpetuation of online gender-based violence, and how effectively does the law hold these platforms accountable?
3. How do the combined effects of inadequate legal protection, platform practices, and socio-economic inequalities affect marginalized women's experiences online, and what doctrinal reforms are needed to ensure equitable protection and empowerment?

The central hypothesis is presented as a direct response to this problem: existing legal frameworks are insufficient, thereby actively limiting women's protection and digital empowerment. This hypothesis serves as the thesis's guiding claim, which the subsequent chapters will systematically test and substantiate.

1.4 Research Methodology and Scope

This approach is deemed most appropriate for a study aimed at a critical internal analysis of the law itself its rules, principles, gaps, and inconsistencies. The methodology involves a systematic review and synthesis of primary sources,

including international treaties like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), regional legislation like the European Union's Digital Services Act and national laws from illustrative jurisdictions such as India's Information Technology Act, 2000 and Germany's Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG). The scope is deliberately comparative, drawing lessons from diverse legal systems to build a more robust doctrinal critique. The chapter concludes with a brief "Chapterization Scheme," providing the reader with a roadmap of the analytical journey ahead, from diagnosis to critique and, finally, to prescription.

2 Doctrinal Mapping: A Critical Analysis of Legal Frameworks on OGBV

This chapter constitutes the doctrinal core of the research, providing a systematic and critical analysis of the legal frameworks designed to combat OGBV. It operates on multiple levels international, regional, and national to identify consistencies, contradictions, and, most importantly, the doctrinal gaps that hinder effective protection. The chapter's trajectory moves from the broad principles of international law to the specific mechanics of national enforcement, building a comprehensive case for the hypothesis of legal insufficiency.

2.1 The International Human Rights Framework: CEDAW and Beyond.

Here, the focus is on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as the cornerstone of international women's rights law. The section critically examines whether the treaty's provisions, drafted in a pre-digital era, can be effectively interpreted to

encompass OGBV. It explores the reasoning of the CEDAW Committee in its General Recommendation No. 35, which explicitly states that gender-based violence against women “includes acts inflicted through information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as online harassment, cyber bullying and violation of privacy” (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2017, para. 20). However, the non-binding nature of General Recommendations and the lack of explicit mention of digital contexts in the treaty text itself represent a significant doctrinal limitation. The analysis extends to reports from UN Special Rapporteurs who have consistently argued that states have a due diligence obligation to prevent, investigate, and punish acts of OGBV as a form of discrimination (United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council, 2018). This section concludes that while the international framework provides a crucial normative foundation, its translation into enforceable, specific legal obligations at the national level remains weak and inconsistent.

2.2 The Regional Blueprint: The Istanbul Convention and the EU’s Digital Services Act.

The Council of Europe’s Istanbul Convention is hailed as the most advanced legal instrument for combating violence against women and is pioneering in its explicit recognition of digital forms of violence. Article 40 of the Istanbul Convention requires parties to criminalize the “unauthorized recording and sharing of intimate images,” a direct response to a prevalent form of OGBV (Council of Europe, 2011, Article 40). This represents a significant doctrinal advancement. Concurrently, the European Union’s Digital Services Act (DSA) introduces a modern, comprehensive framework for platform accountability. The DSA’s provisions for systemic risk assessment and mitigation, which now explicitly require

Very Large Online Platforms to assess and address specific risks to fundamental rights, including those “related to gender-based violence,” mark a paradigm shift (European Union, 2022, Article 34). This section analyzes the potential of this regional duo, the Istanbul Convention creating substantive obligations and the DSA creating procedural and systemic enforcement mechanisms to serve as a model for other jurisdictions.

2.3 National Legal Responses: A Comparative Study, focusing on India and Germany as two distinct legal approaches.

The analysis of India’s legal framework centers on the Information Technology Act, 2000. While sections like 66E (punishment for violation of privacy), 67 (punishment for publishing obscene material), and 67A (punishment for publishing sexually explicit material) have been invoked in cases of OGBV, their application has been fraught with challenges (Government of India, 2000). The case of *Ritu Kohli v. Facebook* was a landmark in recognizing cyber harassment, but the subsequent legal journey revealed the procedural inefficiencies and narrow definitions that plague the IT Act. The law’s primary focus on obscenity rather than gendered harassment and its weak intermediary liability rules under Section 79 create a substantial protection gap. In contrast, Germany’s Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) represents a bold, if controversial, attempt to force platform action. It mandates social networks to remove “manifestly unlawful” content within 24 hours of receipt of a complaint (Article 19, 2017). While this has led to increased content removal, critics argue it incentivizes over-removal (the “overblocking” effect) and places quasi-judicial powers in the hands of private companies without sufficient due process safeguards for all users (Klonick, 2018).

2.4 Identifying Doctrinal Gaps and Inconsistencies

It highlights several critical gaps: the definitional misalignment where laws on obscenity or defamation are clumsily applied to gendered abuse, failing to capture its discriminatory nature; the jurisdictional nightmare of cross-border enforcement, where a victim in one country faces an abuser and a platform server in others; and the unresolved tension in intermediary liability, oscillating between broad immunity that fosters impunity and strict liability that threatens free expression. This section powerfully demonstrates that the law is not merely lagging but is often conceptually ill-suited to address the architecture of online harm, thereby providing robust, multi-level evidence for the research's central hypothesis of legal insufficiency.

3. The Architecture of Complicity: Digital Platforms, Algorithmic Systems, and Legal Accountability

This chapter shifts the analytical lens from state-made law to the private ordering of digital platforms, arguing that their very design and operational logic are central to the perpetuation of OGBV. It investigates the triad of platform policies, algorithmic systems, and business models as key factors, and critically assesses the legal doctrines that struggle to hold these powerful non-state actors accountable.

3.1 Platform Power: Content Moderation Policies and Gendered Enforcement

This argues that the Community Standards or Terms of Service of major platforms like Meta (Facebook, Instagram) and X (Twitter) function as a form of private law, yet their formulation and application are often inconsistent and non-transparent. The problem is not merely the existence of harmful content but the platforms' erratic enforcement of their own rules against such content (Gillespie, 2018). This section

introduces the critical concept of “gendered censorship,” where women, particularly those speaking on controversial topics, may find their content wrongly removed for violating policies on nudity or hate speech, while the targeted abuse against them remains online (Jurasz & Barker, 2020). For instance, a post raising awareness about misogyny might be flagged and removed for using strong language, while the violent threats sent to the user in private messages go unmoderated. This creates a chilling effect, silencing women’s voices under the guise of platform safety.

3.2 Algorithmic Amplification: How Code Fuels Abuse.

It moves beyond the notion of platforms as neutral conduits to argue that their algorithmic architectures actively shape user experience in ways that can exacerbate OGBV. Recommendation algorithms, designed to maximize user engagement, often inadvertently promote controversial, polarizing, and hateful content because it generates strong reactions (O’Neil, 2016). This can lead to the rapid amplification of misogynistic hashtags, the formation of “anti-publics” where harassers congregate and coordinate attacks, and the algorithmic “grooming” of users by pushing them toward increasingly extreme content (Siapera & Viejo-Otero, 2021). When a woman is targeted by a coordinated mob, the algorithms can ensure that the abusive posts reach a far wider audience than her original message, multiplying the psychological harm and social damage.

3.3 The Monetization of Misogyny: Economic Incentives and Inaction

It posits that the dominant, advertising-driven revenue model of social media platforms creates a fundamental misalignment of incentives. Engagement is the currency of profit, and conflict drives engagement (Zuboff, 2019). Therefore, while OGBV is a societal harm, it is not necessarily

a business cost; in fact, the “activity” it generates can be monetizable. This section examines the inadequacy of tools like demonetization, which may strip an individual abuser of ad revenue but does nothing to dismantle the systemic structures that incentivize such behavior. The platform’s overarching financial interest lies in keeping users on the site, which can create a perverse disincentive to aggressively curb the very behaviors that, for a segment of users, make the platform engaging.

3.4 Doctrinal Challenges in Platform Accountability

It critically analyzes the cornerstone of platform liability in many jurisdictions: safe harbor provisions. In India, Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, 2000, provides intermediaries with immunity from liability for third-party content, conditional upon due diligence and compliance with takedown notices (Government of India, 2000). This doctrine, borrowed from the U.S. Communications Decency Act’s Section 230, has been criticized for creating an accountability vacuum, where platforms have limited legal incentive to proactively design safer systems (Citron & Wittes, 2017). The chapter then evaluates newer legal models like Germany’s NetzDG and the EU’s DSA as attempts to pierce this veil of immunity. The DSA, in particular, with its mandatory risk assessments and independent audit requirements for systemic issues like gender-based violence, represents a significant doctrinal evolution from a purely reactive “notice-and-takedown” model to a proactive “duty-of-care” model (European Union, 2022). However, this section concludes by questioning the effectiveness and enforcement of these new models, highlighting that the legal doctrine of intermediary liability remains a contested and unstable frontier, struggling to impose meaningful accountability on the architectural and economic drivers of OGBV.

4 Intersectional Vulnerabilities: The Compounded Digital Marginalization of Women

This chapter introduces a crucial layer of complexity to the analysis by applying an intersectional lens. It argues that the experiences of OGBV and the failures of legal and platform responses are not uniform for all women. Instead, women at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities such as race, caste, religion, sexual orientation, and disability face uniquely virulent and compounded forms of abuse that existing frameworks are particularly ill-equipped to address.

4.1 Beyond a Universal Category: Theorizing Intersectionality in Digital Spaces.

It draws upon the seminal work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term “intersectionality” to describe how overlapping systems of discrimination create distinct and intensified experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). The section argues that digital spaces are not post-identity utopias but are permeated by the same racist, casteist, homophobic, and ableist structures that exist offline. An intersectional analysis is therefore not optional but essential for a complete understanding of OGBV. It moves beyond treating “women” as a monolithic category to examine how the matrix of domination operates online, creating specific vulnerabilities for women who are Black, Dalit, Muslim, transgender, or belong to other marginalized groups (Sobieraj, 2020). The next section, “The Compounding Effect: Socio-Economic Status, Digital Access, and Legal Recourse,” examines how structural inequalities directly impact the ability to prevent and respond to OGBV. A woman’s capacity to secure her online presence through privacy tools, her digital literacy to navigate platform reporting systems, and her financial resources to seek legal counsel or take time off work to pursue a complaint are not equally distributed (Mantilla, 2015). For a woman living in

poverty or with limited formal education, the barriers to justice are exponentially higher. The digital divide is not merely about access to a smartphone but about the resources time, money, knowledge, and social capital required to use digital spaces safely and to seek redress when that safety is violated. This creates a stratified digital citizenship where the most vulnerable are also the least protected.

4.2 Case Studies in Compounded Vulnerability.

It analyzes specific, documented forms of OGBV that target women based on their intersecting identities. For example, it examines how Black women online face a specific cocktail of misogyny and racism, often described as “misogynoir,” which includes tropes and stereotypes distinct from the harassment faced by white women (Bailey, 2021). Similarly, in the Indian context, Dalit women activists and scholars are frequently targeted with caste-based slurs, rape threats that invoke their caste status, and coordinated attacks intended to silence their dissent. The case of transgender women facing “trans-trolling” and organized campaigns of dead naming and transphobic abuse provides another potent example. These case studies demonstrate that the abuse is not generic; it is precisely tailored to inflict maximum psychological and social harm by attacking the core of a person’s identity.

4.3 Doctrinal Invisibility: The Failure of Law to Recognize Intersectional Harm.

This section presents a powerful critique of the legal frameworks analyzed in Chapter 2, arguing that their primary failure is their inability to see and remedy intersectional injury. Most criminal laws and anti-discrimination statutes are structured around single-axis categories either gender-based or race-based or caste-based discrimination (Fredman,

2016). A Dalit woman facing casteist and misogynistic abuse may find that the law can only recognize one dimension of the attack, if any, thereby failing to capture the full scope of the harm and providing incomplete justice. Platform content moderation systems, with their binary and context-blind categories for reporting abuse, replicate this failure. This doctrinal invisibility means that the women who are most severely impacted by OGBV are the least likely to find solace in the very systems designed to protect them, thereby rendering aspirations of universal digital empowerment a hollow promise for marginalized communities.

5 Conclusion & Doctrinal Synthesis: Towards a Coherent Framework for Digital Empowerment

This conclusive chapter synthesizes the research findings to affirm the central thesis and propose a principled path for legal reform. It consolidates the evidence of systemic failure across legal doctrines, platform governance, and societal structures, demonstrating an irrefutable need for doctrinal evolution to secure women's safe digital participation.

5.1 Consolidated Findings and Affirmed Hypothesis

The analysis unequivocally confirms the hypothesis that existing legal frameworks are insufficient to combat online gender-based violence (OGBV) and facilitate digital empowerment. This insufficiency is tripartite. Firstly, a conceptual inadequacy persists, where laws predating the digital era, such as India's Information Technology Act, 2000, fail to properly define and criminalize the unique nature of gendered online abuse (Government of India, 2000). Secondly, a structural failure is evident in the inability of outdated intermediary liability regimes to hold digital platforms accountable for harms amplified by their algorithmic architectures and content moderation policies (Citron & Wittes,

2017). Thirdly, a distributive injustice is clear, as documented by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, wherein the compounded vulnerabilities faced by marginalized women are rendered invisible by single-axis legal approaches (United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council, 2018). This trifecta of failure conceptual, structural, and distributive leaves a pervasive protection gap that the current doctrine is ill-equipped to bridge.

5.2 Principles for a Doctrinally Sound Framework

To rectify these failures, this research proposes a foundational shift guided by five core principles. The first is Doctrinal Harmonization, advocating for the explicit incorporation of OGBV definitions from advanced instruments like the Istanbul Convention into domestic laws to create legal coherence (Council of Europe, 2011). The second is a Rights-Based, Gender-Sensitive Approach, mandating that the interpretation of all digital laws be informed by the state's human rights obligations under CEDAW to eliminate discrimination. (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2017). The third principle is Robust Platform Accountability, which necessitates moving beyond passive safe harbor models towards a proactive duty of care, as nascent in the EU's Digital Services Act (European Union, 2022), requiring platforms to mitigate systemic risks. The fourth, Embedding Intersectionality, demands that legal definitions, data collection, and remedies be designed to recognize and redress compounded vulnerabilities (Fredman, 2016). Finally, Victim-Centric Redress requires legal procedures to be accessible, affordable, and trauma-informed to prevent the justice process from becoming a secondary violation. Without this paradigm shift, the digital public square will remain a site of exclusion, fundamentally reneging on its promise as a platform for equitable empowerment.

5.3 Recommendations and a Collective Path Forward

Beyond legal doctrine, realizing safe digital spaces demands a collective societal effort. From a human perspective, the following actionable recommendations are proposed. For Civil Society and Educators, the imperative is to champion comprehensive digital literacy programs that extend beyond technical skills to encompass digital citizenship, ethical online behavior, and critical awareness of OGBV, starting from an early age in school curricula. For Technology Companies, a fundamental reorientation of corporate ethics is non-negotiable. This includes conducting and publishing independent, third-party audits of their algorithms for gendered bias, establishing transparent and equitable user appeal processes, and prioritizing user safety over engagement metrics in their core product design. For Individuals and Communities, the power of collective action must be harnessed. This involves actively supporting survivors by believing their accounts and directing them to resources, while also using our collective voice to demand corporate accountability and robust legal reform from our elected representatives. Ultimately, the digital world is a human creation; its toxicity is not inevitable. Through concerted action across law, technology, and culture, we can forge a digital future where empowerment is not a promise but a protected reality for everyone.

REFERENCES

1. Amnesty International. (2018). *Toxic Twitter - A toxic place for women*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1/>
2. Article 19. (2017). *Legal analysis: German Network Enforcement Act*. <https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/170901-Legal-Analysis-German-NetzDG-Act.pdf>
3. Bailey, M. (2021). Misogynoir in Digital Spaces: The Visual and Vernacular Rhetoric of Black Women's Resistance. *Feminist*

- Media Studies*, 21(4), 551–566. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1916776>
4. Citron, D. K., & Wittes, B. (2017). The Internet will not break: Denying bad samaritans § 230 immunity. *Fordham Law Review*, 86(2), 401–423.
 5. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. (2017). General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19 (CEDAW/C/GC/35). United Nations. https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/CEDAW_C_GC_35_8267_E.pdf
 6. Council of Europe. (2011). *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*. Treaty Series, No. 210. <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>
 7. Council of Europe. (2018). Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries.
 8. Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167.
 9. European Union. (2022, October 19). Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Single Market For Digital Services (Digital Services Act). Official Journal of the European Union, L 277/1. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022R2065>
 10. Fredman, S. (2016). *Intersectional discrimination in EU gender equality and non-discrimination law*. European Commission. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8e9d6f55-4e7e-11e6-89bd-01aa75ed71a1>
 11. Gillespie, T. (2018). *Custodians of the internet: Platforms, content moderation, and the hidden decisions that shape social media*. Yale University Press.
 12. Government of India. (2000). The Information Technology Act, 2000. Act No. 21.
 13. Henry, N., & Powell, A. (2016). Technology-facilitated sexual violence: A literature review of empirical research. *Trauma*,

- Violence, & Abuse*, 19(2), 195–208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838016650189>
14. Hutchinson, T. (2018). The Doctrinal Method: Incorporating Interdisciplinary Methods in Reforming the Law. *Erasmus Law Review*, 11(1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.5553/ELR.000097>
 15. Jurasz, O., & Barker, K. (2020). The law of the platform: Gendered censorship and private ordering. In A. Powell, & R. M. Henry (Eds.), *Feminant cyberlaw*. Oxford University Press.
 16. Klonick, K. (2018). The new governors: The people, rules, and processes governing online speech. *Harvard Law Review*, 131(6), 1598–1670.
 17. Mantilla, K. (2015). *Gender trolling: How Misogyny Went Viral*. Praeger.
 18. O’Neil, C. (2016). *Weapons of math destruction: How big data increases inequality and threatens democracy*. Crown Publishing Group.
 19. *Ritu Kohli v. Facebook* (High Court of Delhi 2021).
 20. Siapera, E., & Viejo-Otero, P. (2021). Gendered Hate Speech in the Online Algorithmic Ecosystem. *Feminist Media Studies*, 21(5), 741-758. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2021.1928259>
 21. Sobieraj, S. (2020). *Credible threat: Attacks against women online and the future of democracy*. Oxford University Press.
 22. United Nations. (1979). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. Treaty Series, 1249, 13.
 23. United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council. (2018). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective (A/HRC/38/47)*. <https://documents.un.org/>
 24. UN Women. (2020). *The digital revolution: Implications for gender equality and women’s rights* 25. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/The-digital-revolution-implications-for-gender-equality-and-womens-rights-en.pdf>
 25. Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. PublicAffairs.

9

GENDER, SOCIETY, AND SUSTAINABILITY: ADDRESSING SOCIO- ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN NORTHEAST INDIA

Pooja

Assistant Professor

Fairfield Institute of Management and Technology

GGSIPO, New Delhi

Nisha Sehrawat

Assistant Professor

Fairfield Institute of Management and Technology

GGSIPO, New Delhi

ABSTRACT

This research utilizes various metrics from secondary sources to examine gender disparity in Northeast India, highlighting both progress and persistent challenges in the region, with a particular focus on women and the third gender (transgender individuals). While the Northeast fares better than the national average in gender equality, significant disparities still exist, impacting the status and opportunities of women and the third gender across health, education, and employment sectors. Despite the predominance of ethnic groups in the region that generally oppose gender discrimination, societal structures continue to reflect significant gender imbalances. Women and transgender individuals in Northeast India often hold a lower social status and have comparatively less influence than men, especially in decision-making roles and positions of power. The study reveals considerable gender gaps in key areas. In education, both women and transgender individuals face barriers that limit their access to higher learning and skill

development, directly affecting their economic participation. Health disparities persist, with limited access to healthcare resources impacting the well-being and life outcomes of women and the third gender. Employment presents additional challenges, as their participation in the workforce is often constrained by traditional roles, societal discrimination, and limited job opportunities in both rural and urban settings. Political engagement further underscores this imbalance, with women and transgender individuals remaining underrepresented in state and national governance. Notably, states like Meghalaya, Manipur, and Mizoram exhibit relatively lower gender disparity, showing improved metrics in areas such as sex ratio, infant mortality, literacy, and labor force participation. However, Sikkim, Assam, and Tripura face greater gender-related challenges, with significant gaps across these indicators, particularly for the third gender.

The study concludes that while access to work, healthcare, and education is vital, these factors alone cannot fully address gender inequality. Achieving gender equity in Northeast India requires not only improved access but also a shift in societal attitudes and mindsets to create a more inclusive environment that supports sustainable development for women, transgender individuals, and all marginalized genders.

Keywords: gender disparity, Northeast India, gender equality, transgender, socio-economic factors, education, healthcare, ethnic diversity, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality remains a critical global challenge affecting social and economic development worldwide (UN Women, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2024). In India, persistent disparities continue to limit access to rights and opportunities for women and the third gender despite constitutional guarantees and governmental efforts

(Government of India, 2022; NITI Aayog, 2023). These inequalities are deeply rooted in cultural norms and are most visible in areas such as education, healthcare, employment, and political participation (Desai & Andrist, 2010; Gupta et al., 2019).

In Northeast India, the issue becomes more complex due to the region's cultural diversity, tribal communities, and unique social structures (Baruah, 2003; Misra, 2014). States like Meghalaya, Manipur, and Mizoram have shown relatively progressive gender indicators, supported by matrilineal traditions and stronger community-based institutions (Reddy, 2018; Nongbri, 2019). Conversely, states such as Assam, Sikkim, and Tripura still struggle with entrenched gender disparities due to traditional norms, weak policy implementation, and resource limitations (Deka, 2021; Sharma & Das, 2020).

Addressing these challenges requires multidimensional strategies that include education, healthcare access, economic empowerment, and political participation (World Bank, 2022; Saikia, 2020). Sustainable development in the region depends not only on improving resources but also on transforming societal attitudes and cultural expectations (Kikon, 2015; Joshi, 2019). Collaborative approaches involving government, communities, and civil society are essential to support gender equity for women and the third gender (UNDP, 2023).

Objective

1. Investigate gender disparities in Northeast India, with a specific focus on women and transgender individuals, by analysing data from various secondary sources.
2. Highlight ongoing challenges in critical areas such as health, education, and employment, despite the region's relative progress in gender equality.

3. Examine the role of societal structures and traditional gender norms that restrict opportunities and influence for women and transgender individuals, particularly in decision-making roles.
4. Compare gender inequality across different states in Northeast India, emphasizing disparities in key areas like sex ratio, literacy, and workforce participation.
5. Promote the need for a shift in societal perceptions along with better access to essential resources, to achieve long-term gender equity for marginalized groups in the region.

Literature Review

Gender Disparity in India

Despite concerted efforts to promote gender equity through constitutional mandates and policy interventions, gender inequality remains a pervasive and multifaceted issue in India. According to the *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, India ranks 140th out of 156 countries, highlighting persistent inequalities in political empowerment, economic participation, education, and health (World Economic Forum, 2021). Although regions such as Northeast India demonstrate progress in areas like sex ratio and literacy rates, the overall national picture remains complex and uneven (NITI Aayog, 2023).

Northeast India is often recognized for its diverse socio-cultural fabric and unique matrilineal practices among communities such as the Khasi and Garo, which traditionally afford women specific social privileges (Nongbri, 2019). However, deeper structural issues—such as traditional gender roles, economic disparities, and unequal access to resources—continue to perpetuate gender inequality across the region (Joshi, 2019; Misra, 2014). Moreover, higher literacy levels do not automatically translate into economic empowerment or leadership opportunities for women, indicating gaps between educational outcomes and real-world agency (Saikia, 2020).

The persistence of patriarchal norms also exacerbates the marginalization of the third gender. Despite the landmark *NALSA judgment* of 2014, which legally recognized transgender individuals, and subsequent protections through the *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019*, societal acceptance and equal opportunity remain limited (Supreme Court of India, 2014; Government of India, 2019). Research highlights that the third gender continues to face discrimination, exclusion from education and healthcare, and widespread socio-economic vulnerability (Chakrapani, 2018; UNDP, 2017). Deep-rooted social stigma and gender norms further restrict their participation in mainstream society, reinforcing overlapping inequalities faced by both women and the third gender (Gupta et al., 2019).

Thus, while certain matrilineal traditions in Northeast India offer glimpses of progress, broader structural reforms are necessary to address gender inequality holistically. True equality demands inclusive interventions that prioritize the rights and opportunities of women and the third gender alike, while transforming societal attitudes and improving access to education, healthcare, and economic resources (UN Women, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

Education and Gender

Education remains a key driver of gender equality. While literacy rates among women in states like Mizoram and Meghalaya exceed the national average, significant disparities persist for women and the third gender, especially in rural regions (National Statistical Office, 2021; Deka, 2021). Barriers such as poverty, early marriage, and the burden of domestic responsibilities contribute to higher dropout rates among girls and transgender youth (Desai & Andrist, 2010; UNESCO, 2020).

Underrepresentation in STEM fields further reflects

unequal access to technical and vocational education (Das, 2020). The lack of gender-sensitive educational policies, inadequate sanitation, and limited female teaching staff in rural schools widen the divide (Joshi, 2019). Addressing these issues requires targeted investments, inclusive curricula, and programs that promote STEM participation for disadvantaged gender groups (UNDP, 2023).

Gender and Healthcare

Healthcare disparities remain a major concern in several Northeastern states. While Meghalaya and Mizoram show relatively strong maternal health indicators, access to essential services remains limited in remote and rural areas due to infrastructural constraints (Chakraborty, 2019; Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, 2021).

Cultural taboos surrounding reproductive and sexual health further restrict access to family planning services for women and the third gender (Baruah, 2020). Discriminatory practices in healthcare settings, combined with the absence of targeted initiatives for marginalized gender groups, worsen health inequities (World Bank, 2022). Gender-sensitive healthcare training and community awareness programs are essential for improving equitable access across the region (UN Women, 2023).

Economic Participation and Employment

Women and the third gender contribute significantly to Northeast India's workforce, particularly in informal sectors such as agriculture and handicrafts (Saikia, 2020). However, their contributions often go unrecognized due to undervaluation of informal labor and persistent discrimination (ILO, 2020). The third gender remains largely excluded from formal employment and is often confined to stigmatized or low-wage sectors due to social prejudice (UNDP, 2017).

Traditional gender roles impose disproportionate caregiving responsibilities on women and transgender individuals, limiting their access to full-time or higher-paying jobs (Gupta et al., 2019). Financial barriers—including limited access to credit, loans, and entrepreneurial support—further restrict economic mobility (Das, 2020). Inclusive employment policies, equal pay initiatives, and wider access to social protection programs are essential for improving their economic participation (World Bank, 2022).

Political Empowerment and Representation

Despite matrilineal structures in regions like Meghalaya, political representation of women and the third gender remains limited across Northeast India. Deep-rooted patriarchal norms, limited political mentorship, and financial constraints hinder participation in leadership roles (Misra, 2014; Ghosh, 2021). Women and transgender individuals continue to remain underrepresented in legislative bodies despite increased advocacy for gender quotas (Election Commission of India, 2022).

Introducing political reservations, leadership development programs, and financial support mechanisms can play a critical role in improving representation (UN Women, 2023).

Gender Roles and Cultural Diversity

The gender landscape of Northeast India is shaped by diverse cultural practices and social structures. Matrilineal communities such as the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo grant women certain privileges, yet patriarchal influences continue to dominate political and institutional spheres, limiting women's and the third gender's decision-making power (Nongbri, 2019; Kikon, 2015).

In many tribal communities, cultural norms restrict

mobility and leadership for marginalized gender groups, highlighting the need for nuanced, culturally sensitive reform approaches (Reddy, 2018; Joshi, 2019). Strengthening gender-sensitive education, promoting community engagement, and encouraging civil-society partnerships can help shift deep-rooted norms and enhance gender equity across the region (UNDP, 2023).

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore the issue of gender inequality in Northeast India, with a particular emphasis on the challenges faced by transgender individuals, alongside women. Drawing from a comprehensive range of secondary data, the research aims to uncover insights into the region's intricate socio-cultural and economic landscape, while highlighting the inclusion of marginalized gender identities. Key data sources include government reports, academic journals, policy documents, and national surveys such as the Census of India, National Family Health Surveys (NFHS), and State Development Reports. These data sources enable an evidence-based analysis of gender dynamics, focusing on the intersection of gender identity and social, economic, and cultural factors.

The study employs a comparative case study approach, examining states that have demonstrated progressive trends in gender equality, specifically Meghalaya, Manipur, and Mizoram, and contrasting them with states facing more significant challenges, such as Assam, Sikkim, and Tripura. These states were selected for their variation in socio-economic indicators, healthcare infrastructure, cultural practices, and policy implementation, providing a deeper understanding of the gender disparities, including those affecting transgender individuals.

Several key indicators of gender disparity are explored,

with the analysis broadened to include the experiences of transgender people in various domains:

1. **Literacy Rates:** The study investigates the educational attainment of women and transgender individuals, particularly focusing on the barriers faced by transgender people in accessing education. These barriers include societal stigma, discrimination, and the lack of safe and inclusive educational spaces.
2. **Healthcare Access:** The research analyses maternal and reproductive healthcare services, alongside the unique healthcare challenges faced by transgender individuals. These challenges include access to gender-affirming treatments, mental health support, and the availability of inclusive healthcare infrastructure.
3. **Workforce Participation:** The study examines the participation of women and transgender individuals in both formal and informal sectors of employment, focusing on wage disparities, access to financial resources, discrimination in hiring practices, and the economic effects of traditional gender roles on transgender people's economic involvement.
4. **Political Representation:** The research assesses the involvement of women and transgender individuals in governance, leadership, and decision-making at the local, state, and national levels, particularly the representation of transgender individuals in political spheres and their influence on policy-making.

In addition to statistical analysis, the study integrates qualitative insights drawn from case studies and regional ethnographies, providing a nuanced view of the lived experiences of both women and transgender people across different ethnic communities. For example, it explores how the matrilineal cultures of the Khasi and Garo communities

in Meghalaya may offer different experiences for transgender individuals compared to more patriarchal systems in other parts of the region. This approach helps highlight the intersection of traditional gender roles, cultural practices, and evolving gender identities, offering a comprehensive understanding of the region's socio-cultural dynamics.

The study also evaluates the effectiveness of existing policy interventions aimed at addressing gender disparities, with a particular focus on transgender inclusion. For instance, the Indian government's **"SMILE" scheme**, implemented by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, provides a sub-scheme for the comprehensive rehabilitation of transgender persons. This initiative offers scholarships and skill development training to support transgender individuals' education and livelihood, playing a crucial role in improving their socio-economic conditions. By analyzing the implementation and outcomes of such initiatives, including programs like **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**, **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh**, and **state-specific schemes**, the study identifies gaps in policy execution, particularly concerning the needs of transgender people, and offers recommendations for enhancing inclusivity and effectiveness.

The qualitative methodology ensures that the voices of women and transgender individuals, particularly those from marginalized communities, are central to the study. By synthesizing data from multiple perspectives and sources, the research aims to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, academics, and civil society organizations working to promote gender equity and inclusivity in the region, especially for individuals whose gender identities transcend the binary framework.

Findings and Analysis

Education

Education serves as a foundational pillar for gender

equality and long-term social transformation. In Northeast India, certain states such as Mizoram and Meghalaya report high female literacy rates, with some regions surpassing 90%, aligning with broader national findings on educational progress in select areas (NITI Aayog, 2023; National Statistical Office, 2021). However, transgender individuals continue to face systemic exclusion, reflecting barriers observed at the national level regarding marginalized gender groups' educational access (Dutta, 2012; Government of India, 2019).

Socio-economic constraints such as poverty and the need for household labour often result in curtailed educational opportunities, particularly for transgender youth and girls in rural communities (Gupta et al., 2019; Chakraborty, 2019). Early marriage, which disrupts educational continuity, remains prevalent in several Northeastern states and mirrors national gendered patterns documented across India (Desai & Andrist, 2010; Kumar & Singh, 2020). In remote tribal regions, limited educational infrastructure, poor transportation, and safety concerns further restrict access for marginalized gender groups (Reddy, 2018; MacDonald, 1996).

Addressing these disparities requires interventions such as financial support schemes, safe school environments, stigma-reduction programs, and tailored vocational initiatives for transgender individuals, consistent with national recommendations for inclusive capacity-building (UNDP, 2021; UN Women, 2023).

Healthcare

Healthcare outcomes reveal significant gendered disparities across Northeast India, reflecting patterns identified in national and regional health assessments (National Health Mission, 2021; World Bank, 2022). While states like Meghalaya and Mizoram demonstrate improvements in maternal and reproductive health indicators, states such as

Assam struggle with infrastructural gaps, lack of medical specialists, and persistent taboos around women's health (Deka, 2021; Misra, 2014; Chakraborty, 2019).

For transgender individuals, discrimination in healthcare settings and the absence of trained professionals in gender-affirming care exacerbate these challenges, aligning with national evidence on transgender health exclusion (Dutta, 2012; Supreme Court of India, 2014). Barriers such as long-distance travel to healthcare centres, high treatment costs, and cultural stigma limit access to crucial services including reproductive health, mental healthcare, and gender-affirming treatments (Baruah, 2020; Nongbri, 2019).

Comprehensive reforms—such as expanding rural health infrastructure, gender-sensitive training for medical staff, mobile health services, and inclusion of transgender-specific healthcare—are urgently needed, reflecting recommendations made by UNDP (2023) and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Employment

The economic participation of women and transgender individuals in Northeast India mirrors broader labour inequities documented across India (ILO, 2020; Chakraborty, 2019). While women play a central role in agriculture, weaving, and small-scale enterprises, their contributions remain undervalued, particularly in rural and tribal communities (Saikia, 2020; Sarkar, 2020). Initiatives in states like Manipur and Mizoram have fostered women-led microenterprises and enhanced women's participation in MSMEs, aligning with national empowerment strategies (Sharma & Das, 2020; Ghosh, 2021).

In contrast, transgender individuals face severe economic marginalization, exclusion from formal employment, and lack

of access to financial systems—issues widely documented in national reports and legal reviews (Government of India, 2019; Borker, 2021). Discrimination in hiring, absence of workplace protections, and deeply entrenched stigma limit their capacity for economic independence.

Creating inclusive economies requires enforcing anti-discrimination laws, promoting equitable wages, expanding microfinance and skill development schemes, and encouraging transgender entrepreneurship, consistent with national gender equality frameworks (Government of India, 2022; UNDP, 2020).

Political Representation

Political representation remains one of the most persistent gaps in gender equality across Northeast India. Despite matrilineal traditions in Meghalaya that grant women greater social status, both women and transgender individuals remain significantly underrepresented in political leadership, echoing nationwide patterns of political exclusion (Nongbri, 2019; Sharma, 2018).

Patriarchal norms, limited political mentorship, and lack of institutional support continue to hinder women's entry into politics, while transgender individuals face structural and social barriers preventing their political participation (Reddy, 2018; Nayak, 2013). Even in states that exhibit progress in education or health indicators—such as Mizoram, Manipur, and Meghalaya—political leadership remains predominantly male (Baruah, 2003; Joshi, 2019).

Addressing this gap requires policy reforms such as gender and transgender quotas, leadership development programs, financial support for marginalized gender candidates, and gender-inclusive governance practices, in line with recommendations from UN Women (2023) and the World Economic Forum (2024).

Discussion

The gender landscape of Northeast India reflects a dynamic interplay between cultural diversity, economic inequalities, and systemic discrimination. While some states have showcased significant progress in literacy, health indicators, and women's economic participation, persistent challenges remain for both women and transgender individuals (Misra, 2014; NITI Aayog, 2023). Transgender individuals, in particular, face multilayered exclusion—social, economic, and political—highlighted in both regional research and national legal frameworks (Supreme Court of India, 2014; Dutta, 2012).

Achieving equitable outcomes requires targeted interventions across education, healthcare, employment, and political participation, supported by inclusive policies and a shift in cultural attitudes, as emphasized in national and international gender development reports (UNDP, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

Conclusion

Gender inequality in Northeast India reveals the challenges of balancing cultural traditions, socio-economic barriers, and systemic discrimination. Despite meaningful progress in several states, significant disparities remain, especially for transgender individuals who continue to experience exclusion in education, healthcare, employment, and political representation (Baruah, 2020; Saikia, 2020).

Sustainable and inclusive development requires comprehensive gender-responsive policies, structural reforms, and societal transformation toward fairness and acceptance. Aligning with national frameworks and global gender equality standards (Government of India, 2022; UN Women, 2023), Northeast India must foster an environment where all genders—

including transgender individuals—can realize their full potential and contribute to the region’s long-term development.

Bibliography

1. Agarwal, B. (1994). *A Field of One’s Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Baruah, S. (2003). *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
3. Baruah, S. (2020). *Gender and Women’s Health in Northeast India: Challenges and Progress*.
4. Borker, G. (2021). *Safety First: Perceived Risk of Street Harassment and Educational Choices of Women*. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper.
5. Census of India. (2011). *Primary Census Abstracts*. Government of India.
6. Chakraborty, P. (2019). Gender inequality and women’s participation in India’s labour market. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 54(8), 45–52.
7. Chakraborty, S. (2019). Healthcare challenges and gender disparities in Northeast India. *Indian Journal of Public Health Research*.
8. Das, P. (2020). Women’s economic participation and gender equality in rural India.
9. Deka, P. (2021). Gender inequality and socio-economic development in Assam. *Journal of Northeast Studies*, 12(3), 45–59.
10. Desai, S., & Andrist, L. (2010). Gender scripts and age at marriage in India. *Demography*, 47(3), 667–687.
11. Dutta, A. (2012). Legible identities and legitimate citizens: The globalisation of transgender and hijra identities. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 14(3), 334–354.
12. Ghosh, A. (2021). *Gender and Governance in Northeast India*.
13. Government of India. (2019). *The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019*. Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
14. Government of India. (2022). *Annual Report on Women and Child Development*. Ministry of Women and Child Development.

15. Government of India. (2022). *National Gender Policy Framework*.
16. Gupta, A., Singh, R., & Patel, K. (2019). Barriers to women's empowerment in India. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 7(2), 25–38.
17. International Labour Organization (ILO). (2020). *Women in the World of Work: India Country Report*. ILO Publications.
18. Joshi, M. (2019). Culture, gender norms, and development in the Northeast. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 26(1), 89–104.
19. Kikon, D. (2015). *Life and Dignity: Women in Northeast India*. Zubaan.
20. Kumar, A., & Singh, M. (2020). Gender disparities in access to education: Evidence from rural India. *Journal of Educational Development*, 74, 101–112.
21. MacDonald, M. (1996). Gender and social change in Northeast India. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 55(4), 904–919.
22. Ministry of Women and Child Development. (2020). *Statewise Gender Disparity Index*.
23. Misra, T. (2014). Challenges of gender equity in the Northeast. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(17), 52–60.
24. National Health Mission (NHM). (2021). *Annual Health Report*. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
25. National Statistical Office. (2021). *Annual Report on Gendered Literacy and Employment*.
26. Nayak, B. (2013). Women's empowerment and Northeast India: Issues and challenges. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 20(2), 263–278.
27. NITI Aayog. (2021). *NFHS-5 (National Family Health Survey) Fact Sheets for Northeastern States*. Government of India.
28. NITI Aayog. (2023). *Gender Index: India Report*. Government of India.
29. Nongbri, T. (2019). Matriliney and gender relations in Meghalaya. *Sociological Bulletin*, 68(1), 34–50.
30. Nongbri, T. (2019). Matrilineal societies in Northeast India: Gender myths and realities. *Cultural Anthropology Quarterly*.
31. Reddy, R. (2018). Gender relations in tribal communities of Northeast India. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 46(4), 432–450.

32. Saikia, D. (2020). Women's empowerment and sustainable development in Northeast India. *Development Review*, 18(2), 76–92.
33. Sarkar, S. (2020). Gender roles and labour distribution in tribal communities of Northeast India. *Social Change*, 50(1), 67–84.
34. Sen, A. (2001). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press.
35. Sharma, A., & Das, R. (2021). Gender and ethnicity in Northeast India. *Journal of Regional Studies*.
36. Sharma, J. (2018). The politics of gender representation in Northeast India. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 26(3), 378–396.
37. Sharma, K., & Das, R. (2020). Gender disparities in Tripura: A critical assessment. *Social Change Review*, 15(2), 101–118.
38. Supreme Court of India. (2014). *National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) vs. Union of India*.
39. UNDP. (2020). *Human Development Report 2020*. United Nations Development Programme.
40. UNDP. (2021). *Gender Development Report*. United Nations Development Programme.
41. UNDP. (2023). *Inclusive Development Report*. United Nations Development Programme.
42. UN Women. (2023). *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: Gender Snapshot*.
43. World Bank. (2022). *Gender and Development Report*.
44. World Economic Forum. (2021). *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*.
45. World Economic Forum. (2024). *Global Gender Gap Report*.

10

**DIGITAL DISEMPOWERMENT: EXPLICIT
CONTENT AND WOMEN'S DIGNITY IN
INDIA****Aryabhatt Sah***Junior Consultant**Chelson Gordon Consultancy, Udaipur, Rajasthan***ABSTRACT**

Multiple generations of human beings have undergone substantial alterations due to the widespread use of the internet. However, the ubiquitous availability and consumption of explicit content are among the most inconsequential effects on the disempowerment of women. This article explores the numerous adverse effects of such content, circulating online, as a perilous tool that affects the dignity of females individually, in relationships, and the society as a whole. Furthermore, the article also looks at the psychological, social, and ethical aspects of its impact, illuminating how it may skew ideas about relationships, encourage addiction, and reinforce negative stereotypes. The article also looks at how regulations, technological interventions, and human behavior interact to lessen the negative impacts of explicit content on the internet. This article seeks to raise awareness and encourage discussion about the critical need for informed measures for solving the problems caused by online explicit content in modern society by clarifying the complex processes at play and reflecting light on the historical contexts of love-making in India.

Key Words: Explicit Content, Women's Dignity, Negative Stereotypes, and Love-Making

1. Introduction

“In today’s world, advancements in technology and the internet have led to repercussions, one of which is the emergence and rapid expansion of online adult content platforms”.

A few years ago, the internet was a new and largely uncharted realm primarily utilized for educational purposes. However, the revolution granted widespread access to materials, introducing previously elusive things. Material availability skyrocketed based on the demand, and it eventually propagated into living spaces. The widespread availability of computer databases has made explicit content easily accessible to both adults and minors. This surge in pornography has been linked adversely to social issues such as child exploitation, violence against women, sexual assault, unhealthy relationships, family discord, juvenile delinquency, and sexually transmitted diseases. Nowadays, parents are rightfully concerned about their children’s exposure to adult content and the potential harm it can inflict. Predators view the internet as a haven due to the anonymity it provides them.

2. Historical Contexts of Making Love in India

The 21st-century generation must learn the pure meaning of lovemaking from our history and customs. Throughout history, there have always been different forms of texts, literature, and imagery discussing sex and intimacy. The first known guide on love, “**Kamasutra**”, was written around 300 AD. It detailed acts of love and related topics. By definition, it might be considered pornography. Yet this book remains a respected reference on the topic. It has numerous translations into many languages. It would be a mistake to label it obscene or crude, as it is widely regarded as an exceptional work on this delicate topic.

The statues in the famous temples of **Khajuraho**¹ depict the lovemaking scenes in explicit detail and are places of not only art and culture but worship too. The statues of the “**Yakshi**” in the National Museum² These are a few examples which go on to prove that love in its pure form has not been taboo in India.

India’s history shows that women were not shadows but were bold and empowered enough to raise their heads high in society to choose the way of love.

3. Impact of Explicit Content on the Wellbeing and Dignity of Women and Children

The couple from Punjab, Sehaj Arora and Gurpreet Kaur, who promoted their Kulhad Pizza venture, found themselves embroiled in a MMS controversy from which private videos of the two made their way into the digital world. While the couple stated at the outset that the videos were fake, made, they said, with the help of AI, to tarnish their reputations, the leak of the MMS caused heaven’s fury, harassment, death threats, and a massive impact on their business.

For Gurpreet, it was a time of extreme emotional distress. She was so overwhelmed that she locked herself in her room for a day and neglected eating, sometimes taking only a chapatti a day. The torrent of filthy messages, seduce threats, and lewd comments was nonetheless excruciatingly difficult since the abuse had come soon after she had given birth, causing the couple to finally leave India with their child and migrate to the UK.³

In an incident at a city’s boarding school, four twelfth-grade students were taken into custody while being accused of sexual assault on a tenth-grader from the same school. The alleged crime was committed after viewing explicit videos on their mobiles. One student, in his official statement, admitted

his actions were initiated by viewing porn movies. In another incident in Sahaspur, Dehradun, a young girl of 8 years fell victim to a group sexual assault. The act was committed by five underage boys who later admitted their motivation stemmed from having seen explicit content (i.e., Pornography) on a mobile device.⁴

In a country like India, pornography material which earlier used to be hidden in the nook and corners of shady book stalls on roadside pavements, bus stands, and railway stations, is now not more than three clicks away from any place which has an internet connection which sometimes instigates people to commit heinous crimes such as sexual assault, obscene acts out of desperation, sexual harassment, and rape impacting the dignity of women.

The most recent event that proves the internet and pornography as a dangerous weapon occurred when a teenager in Kasaganj, Uttar Pradesh, aged 19, was taken into custody. He faced charges of rape and murder of his younger sister, aged 17. His actions followed viewing porn on his mobile.

The tragic event occurred on 3rd February 2024. The young girl and her brother were the only ones at home. Police shared that the premeditated attack happened while the young girl was sleeping. Her brother had been watching explicit videos. Fearful that she would reveal the truth, he took her life and ran away.

The lad was not on the run for long and confessed after being caught. His mobile, a significant piece of evidence, was seized. The Superintendent of Police (SP) at Kasaganj stated that explicit videos were found on the mobile during the investigation.⁵

Every, as well as adults, must consider the impact of individuals involved in pornographic films and images, with a significant number being pressured into participating.

Additionally, there is harm stemming from sex crimes that might not occur if not for the presence of pornography. Furthermore, there is harm, which may be less apparent compared to the two but exists. It raises questions about the trajectory of cyber pornography in fulfilling fantasies over time. In the above-mentioned report, a 17-year-old girl lost her life, her family faced a great loss, and many other impacts just because of her brother being addicted to pornography, which ultimately led him to rape and murder his sister in fear. One must understand the consequences of the misuse of the internet.

4. Law Governing Explicit Content in India

In India, watching porn privately is not illegal. The Indian Constitution's Article 21⁶ grants citizens the right to life and personal liberty. In 2015, the Indian Supreme Court suggested that viewing porn in private is part of the personal freedom rights vested in the Constitution. Therefore, this right cannot be violated unless it is covered by established law. However, it's worth mentioning that none of the Fundamental Rights in India are absolute, and all of them have related restrictions. For example, a person's exercise of a fundamental right can be limited based on 'decency and morality'. In Indian Law, three acts primarily cover the subject of pornography: Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000, the India Penal Code (IPC), and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012. The government, further, on the grounds of "decency and morality," banned pornographic content in 2015, which was a failed step, and again in 2018, which was also unsuccessful. The nature of the internet has always made the regulation of pornography difficult.

5. Initiatives and Legal Measures against Explicit Content taken by the Government of India⁷

The penalties for publishing or conveying content that is obscene or represents sexually explicit conduct in electronic

form, and the conditions that provide for the most severe punishments for content representing children engaged in sexual acts are laid under the Information Technology Act, 2000.

The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, provided for intermediaries, including social media platforms, to adopt due diligence. Significant social media intermediaries engaged in messaging services are also required to trace out the first originator of the information regarding rape and sexual abuse or child exploitation. They are also required within 24 hours to take down content showing or depicting nudity or sexual acts. Besides, grievance appellate committees have also been set up under these rules for redressing complaints from users against decisions made by the grievance officer from such intermediaries.

The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) issues a certificate under the Cinematograph Act, 1952, for the public exhibition of films with an objective to provide healthy entertainment, whereas films not considered suitable for children are to be certified as adult-only. The IT Rules, 2021, provide a code of ethics for the OTT platforms requiring the classification of content based on age, restricting access to adult content, and implementing age-verification mechanisms.

The government has also launched several initiatives against cybercrime, especially crimes against children. Home Affairs manages the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal in conjunction with the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C). Under this scheme, financial assistance is allocated by the states and union territories for cyber forensic labs and capacity training of field enforcement personnel at the Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children Scheme. Child Sexual Abusive Material (CSAM)-bearing

websites are blocked based on inputs from Interpol, and ISPs have been ordered to implement dynamic blocking lists from the Internet Watch Foundation (UK) and Project Arachnid (Canada). Besides, they are encouraged to use the means of parental control filters for safer surfing on the Internet.

6. Judicial Pronouncements

In the case of *Abida v/s State of Haryana and others*⁸, it was claimed that the father-in-law of the petitioner committed rape upon her and also made an explicit video, which later went viral. In the case of *Suraj vs State on 10 December 2021*,⁹ the victim was a minor when Suraj initially assaulted her. The victim alleged that Suraj had recorded a video and consistently threatened her, saying he would circulate the video if she did not comply with his requests. According to the statement under Section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code, Suraj raped the victim and recorded the incident on video. The next day, four of Suraj's friends - Atul, Sachin, Anurag, and Rohit - went to the Inderpuri forest. Suraj showed the video to the victim and threatened to upload it on the internet if she did not comply with his demands. The victim was subjected to constant threats from that point onwards. The victim has experienced ongoing psychological distress from the age of 13 until she turned 16. The victim was also pregnant.

In the current scenario, it is quite easy to create viral content based on nude or obscene pictures and videos through online platforms with the help of the internet, which also leads to the major issue of blackmail. The content in pornographic films provides wicked ideas, such as blackmailing women by stalking them and collecting obscene pictures. The rise of artificial intelligence, such as deepfaceswap.ai and other AI, which can be used to manipulate facial appearances, has led to a new problem. The use of such AI rapidly increased after

the deepfake video of the actress Rasmika Mandanna went viral.¹⁰

7. Recommendations and Suggestions for Digital Empowerment

In response to the extensive influence of internet pornography in India, supervising and controlling it presents a multifaceted challenge that requires a wide-ranging approach involving legal, technological, and educational strategies.

7.1. Legal Measures

Authorities can focus on limiting minors access and addressing potential societal effects. To tackle this, the government can enact laws to regulate internet pornography and safeguard vulnerable groups. Measures should be aimed at restricting explicit content while upholding individual rights and freedoms. The issue requires a balanced approach, considering its diverse perspectives and ethical concerns.

Policymakers need to work together with professionals in psychology and technology to create successful tactics that balance the protection of minors with upholding freedom of expression. By involving experts, policymakers can design thorough approaches that tackle the intricate issues surrounding internet pornography.

7.2. Technological Measures

A comprehensive approach to address the increasing prevalence of internet pornography, such as policies including implementing content filters, age verification tools, safe search options, and parental control. Advanced content filtering systems, keyword-based filters, and URL blacklists could be potentially used to limit access to explicit material. Age restrictions are in place on online platforms to prevent minors from viewing adult content, and harsh penalties could be imposed on platforms and content providers that do not adhere

to age verification rules. Safe search filters and parental controls should be made available on search engines as well.

It is important to have safe search filters and parental controls available on search engines, web browsers, and platforms that provide such explicit content. This way, parents can make sure that minors are protected when they're online. The idea for tech companies to work together to create guidelines for dealing with internet pornography also involves working on new tools, like algorithms that use AI to find and delete inappropriate content. Using all of these strategies, along with laws, campaigns, and educational programs, we can make the Internet a safer place for everyone in India.

7.3. Educational Measures

The idea should be to organize and include nationwide campaigns in the plan of action, where parents, teachers, and students could be familiarized with pornography's adverse effects on mental health and relationships. School curricula could also be asked to incorporate digital literacy programs.

Workshops for parents and teachers on internet use, as well as tools to block adult site access, could be conducted. Support services for those struggling with pornography addiction could be extended. Other measures could be focused on creating community groups and mental health partnerships for full treatment programs. These plans could promote digital literacy and good internet use, especially for underage users. Programs could be aimed at helping people who struggle with pornography addiction. A relatively comfortable space could be generated by lending support to the needy. These plans would encourage people to think carefully about their online activities and digital footprint. Therefore, by addressing any pornography-related issues publicly by teaching, taking precautionary measures, and supporting all together, we can make the internet safer for everyone.

8. Conclusion

In the current scenario, the internet has provided its users easy access to explicit and adult content, which sometimes instigates the users into committing heinous crimes. Throughout the history of India, adult content has been featured in numerous books, sculptures, paintings, and other artistic works, which explain and display the true sense of lovemaking and sex education.

However, sexual harassment or sexual assault poses grave risks to women, causes bodily injuries, degrades, and defiles women, thereby dehumanizing the female gender. Although courts are aware of the impacts on women, they have hesitated to punish people involved, claiming inadequate proof linking the accused to violence against women. Attempts to control crimes have been made by the Indian Judiciary and legislative system multiple times without significant success.

Furthermore, the article also suggests methods for dealing with the widespread impact of explicit content on the internet, which is a complex task that necessitates a comprehensive strategy encompassing legal, technological, and educational measures to monitor and regulate it effectively.

LIST OF REFERENCES:

1. Khajuraho Erotic Temples: Sacred union of the Divine. (n.d.). RavenousLegs. <https://www.ravenouslegs.com/blog/khajuraho-temples-symbolism-of-sacred-union-of-the-divine-feminine-energy-masculine-consciousness>
2. Ministry of Culture, Government of India. (n.d.). *Yakshi* [Terracotta sculpture 5th century CE, Ahichchhatra, U.P., India]. Indian Culture Portal. <https://indianculture.gov.in/artefacts-museums/yakshi-6>
3. LatestLY. (2024, August 26). Kulhad pizza couple on leaked MMS viral video: Sehaj Arora and wife Gurpreet say scandal was not a. LatestLY. <https://www.latestly.com/social-viral/>

- kulhad-pizza-couple-on-leaked-mms-viral-video-sehaj-arora-and-wife-gurpreet-say-scandal-was-not-a-publicity-stunt-share-complete-true-story-on-podcast-watch-6216583.html
4. Talwar, G. (2018, September 21). Accused boys watched porn before raping student in Dehradun school: Police. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/dehradun/accused-boys-watched-porn-before-rapeing-student-in-dehradun-school-police/articleshow/65891584.cms>
 5. NDTV. (2023, October 19). UP teen rapes minor sister after watching porn, flees after strangling her. NDTV. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/up-teen-rape-minor-sister-after-watching-porn-flees-after-strangling-her-5010539>
 6. The Constitution of India, 1950, ARTICLE.21
 7. Government of India taking measures against online pornography. (n.d.). <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2113098>
 8. Abida v. State of Haryana and Others, CRM-M-559-2021 (Punjab & Haryana High Court, 2021).
 9. Suraj vs State on 10 December, 2021, High Court of Delhi at New Delhi, BAIL APPLN. 2542/2021.
 10. TIMESOFINDIA.COM. (2023, November 24). Got vital clues in Rashmika Mandanna's DEEPFAKE video case; accused will be arrested soon: Delhi Police. The Times of India. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/videos/etimes/bollywood/got-vital-clues-in-rashmika-mandannas-deepfake-video-case-accused-will-be-arrested-soon-delhi-police/videoshow/105468543.cms>

11

**SILENT BURDENS AND RESILIENT
VOICES: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY ON
THE MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AND
WELL-BEING OF WOMEN IN
CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

Pratibha

Assistant Professor
Pratap University, Jaipur

ABSTRACT

Women's mental health in the twenty-first century stands at the crossroads of progress and persistent inequality. While modern society has opened new spaces for women in education, employment, leadership, and digital participation, these advancements often coexist with heightened psychological pressures. The dual demands of professional ambition and traditional family expectations, coupled with the invisible burden of emotional and caregiving labour, create conditions of chronic stress and emotional fatigue for many women. Contemporary challenges such as rising domestic violence, workplace bias, reproductive health anxieties, and the expanding sphere of cyber harassment further deepen mental health vulnerabilities. The digital age, though empowering, introduces new forms of comparison, surveillance, and social scrutiny that amplify feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and diminished self-worth. Young women, in particular, navigate an environment shaped by unrealistic beauty norms and continuous online exposure, contributing to increased rates of depression and body image distress. Despite growing recognition of these issues, stigma surrounding mental illness

and limited access to affordable, gender-sensitive mental healthcare continue to hinder early intervention. However, the twenty-first century also brings unprecedented opportunities—expanded mental health discourse, enhanced policy focus, and digital therapeutic platforms—that have the potential to reshape women’s psychological well-being. This study explores the evolving landscape of women’s mental health by analysing the interplay of social structures, cultural expectations, technological influences, and institutional responses. It underscores the urgent need for holistic, intersectional, and gender-responsive mental health strategies that address both long-standing disparities and emerging stressors. By highlighting contemporary challenges alongside evolving opportunities, the research aims to contribute to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of women’s mental health in an era of rapid societal transformation.

Keywords: Mental Health, Gender Inequality, Psychological Well-being, Digital Age Challenges, Work–Life Balance

Introduction: Every human being, whether man or woman, aspires to maintain a healthy body and a sound mind, for true well-being rests on the harmony between the two. Just as physical health requires care and protection, mental health also demands constant attention, resilience, and emotional balance. Yet, life’s pressures, responsibilities, and unforeseen challenges can disturb this equilibrium. When a woman’s mental health is disrupted, it affects not only her personal well-being but also her ability to carry out her social, familial, and professional roles with confidence and stability. This disturbance weakens the broader processes of socialization and cultural development, ultimately influencing the creation of a rational and progressive society. Global research repeatedly shows that women are disproportionately affected by mental health disorders. Findings from the Anxiety and Depression

Association of America reveal that nearly 6.8 million individuals in the United States live with generalized anxiety disorder, but only 43 percent receive adequate treatment. Women account for almost double the number of cases compared to men. Many studies further highlight that women often experience two or more mental health conditions simultaneously, intensifying their vulnerability. Such patterns have been identified as major contributors to the rising global burden of disability in recent decades. These alarming trends make it clear that women's mental health is not merely a personal concern but a pressing public health priority that demands deeper understanding, timely intervention, and sustained societal support

Research Methodology: The present study is based solely on secondary data and adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach to analyse the subject in depth. The research draws upon a wide range of credible sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, policy documents, judicial decisions, and publications of national and international organizations. Data has been collected through an extensive documentary review of printed and digital materials, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of existing literature and established viewpoints. The analysis relies on content analysis, doctrinal interpretation, comparative examination of different perspectives, and critical evaluation to identify patterns, gaps, and areas requiring further attention. As the study is limited to published material, it may not fully reflect real-time experiences or primary field evidence; however, it provides a strong and reliable theoretical foundation for understanding the issue.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the key mental health challenges faced by women in contemporary society, with particular attention to social, biological, and psychological factors.

2. To analyze how workplace conditions—such as discrimination, workload, harassment, and lack of support—affect the mental well-being of women.
3. To examine the impact of life-course events, including adolescence, pregnancy, motherhood, and menopause, on women’s mental health.
4. To study the influence of modern stressors, including digital pressures, cyber harassment, and shifting family expectations, on women’s emotional well-being.
5. To assess the gaps in mental health services, workplace policies, and institutional support systems available to women.
6. To identify effective strategies and interventions that can promote mental health, ensure workplace safety, and strengthen support systems for women.
7. To highlight the need for gender-responsive, inclusive, and culturally sensitive mental health policies across all stages of a woman’s life.

Effects of Stress on Women’s Psychology

Stress has become an inescapable feature of modern life, arising from situations that test an individual’s emotional strength, psychological stability, and physical endurance. Although the human body is designed to withstand occasional stress, prolonged exposure can disrupt overall well-being. For women, the psychological impact of stress is particularly intricate. Their life journey includes unique phases—such as pregnancy, childbirth, menopause, and the continuous effort to balance professional aspirations with familial duties—which together create a wide and complex range of stress triggers. Research shows that a significant proportion of women—nearly 64 percent—experience high levels of stress either in the workplace or at home. Such stress does not merely influence

mood or behaviour; it interferes with core biological systems. Chronic activation of the body's stress response elevates cortisol levels for extended periods, weakening the immune system and disturbing hormonal functioning. These disruptions increase susceptibility to mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, irritability, and persistent emotional exhaustion. The cumulative effect of these stressors can gradually erode a woman's psychological resilience, influencing her decision-making, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life. Recognising these patterns underscores the need for holistic, gender-responsive approaches that prioritise mental well-being and provide women with the support required to navigate the growing pressures of contemporary society

“Gendered Realities and the Silent Crisis of Women’s Mental Health”

Mental health reflects an individual's emotional balance, resilience, and ability to cope with life's challenges. In contrast, mental disorders involve patterns of thoughts or behaviours that cause distress and impair day-to-day functioning. Gender plays a decisive role in shaping mental health outcomes, with women experiencing distinct vulnerabilities due to both biological and social realities. Globally, women report significantly higher rates of depression, anxiety, and common mental disorders, while men show higher prevalence of substance use and antisocial behaviours. Studies consistently reveal that women face a two- to three-fold greater risk of depression and anxiety. These differences arise not only from hormonal influences but also from gender-linked disadvantages such as poverty, limited autonomy, domestic violence, and unequal access to resources. Women's mental health is further affected by life-cycle events—menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum changes, and menopause—each

accompanied by biological shifts and social expectations. Conditions like postpartum depression, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, and perinatal anxiety highlight this intersection. In India, additional pressures such as preference for male children, strained marital relationships, and lack of support intensify these vulnerabilities. Severe mental illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder affect both genders similarly, but women often face harsher social consequences: abandonment, homelessness, stigma, and risk of abuse. Suicide patterns also reflect gendered distress, with young women frequently driven by interpersonal conflicts, dowry pressures, and violence. Violence—physical, sexual, and emotional—remains one of the most damaging determinants of women’s mental health, leaving long-lasting scars including depression, PTSD, and suicidal behaviour. Substance use among women, often linked to trauma or abuse, is rising, yet support services remain scarce. Ultimately, a woman’s mental health is shaped by a lifetime of layered vulnerabilities. Biological sensitivities intersect with unequal social status, heavy caregiving burdens, discrimination, and gender-based violence. These factors combine to create a cycle where emotional distress becomes both a consequence and a reflection of broader gender inequalities

Challenges to Mental Health and Well-Being Faced by Women at Work

Women in the workplace continue to shoulder multiple pressures arising from their professional roles and the expectations placed on them within the family and society. These overlapping demands contribute to a range of mental health concerns that are often overlooked or inadequately addressed.

Work–Life Imbalance

For many women—especially working mothers—the

struggle to balance professional commitments with family responsibilities becomes a major source of stress. The constant pressure to excel in the workplace while fulfilling caregiving duties at home creates emotional fatigue. The lack of supportive measures such as flexible schedules, hybrid work options, or adequate parental leave further aggravates this imbalance, often leading to burnout.

Gender Discrimination and Workplace Bias

Despite significant progress, gender-based disparities persist in many organizations. Unequal pay, slower career advancement, and stereotypical assumptions about women's capabilities continue to hinder their growth. These discriminatory experiences foster a sense of isolation, lower morale, and undermine self-confidence, ultimately affecting mental well-being.

Sexual Harassment and Safety Concerns

Sexual harassment remains one of the most damaging experiences for women at work. It creates an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, often resulting in anxiety, depression, loss of motivation, and in severe cases, post-traumatic stress. Such experiences not only harm individual well-being but also weaken women's ability to focus and perform effectively.

Burnout and Emotional Exhaustion

Women often find themselves juggling several roles at once—professional, domestic, and caregiving. This constant multitasking, combined with high expectations from both workplace and home, contributes to chronic exhaustion and emotional depletion. Over time, burnout leads to reduced productivity, loss of interest, and long-term mental health issues.

Limited Mental Health Support

Many workplaces do not provide tailored mental health

support for women. The absence of counseling services, stress-relief programs, or dedicated mental health days deprives women of the assistance they need to manage work-related pressures. Without such support, emotional difficulties remain unaddressed and may intensify over time.

Strategies to Improve Mental Health and Well-Being of Women at Work

Flexible Work Policies

Adopting flexible working hours, remote work options, and hybrid arrangements enables women to balance personal and professional responsibilities more effectively. Such measures are particularly valuable for mothers and caregivers.

Improved Parental Leave and Childcare Support

Extended parental leave for both parents and accessible childcare facilities at the workplace ease the burden on working mothers. These measures promote shared caregiving and reduce the disproportionate pressure placed on women.

Inclusive and Supportive Workplace Culture

Workplaces that actively encourage inclusion and respect help women feel valued. Mentorship programs, women's networks, and gender sensitivity training for employees and managers contribute to a culture where women can thrive.

Accessible Mental Health Services

Organizations should provide easily accessible counseling support, wellness programs, stress-relief workshops, and designated mental health days. Confidential Employee Assistance Programs can offer crucial help to women dealing with emotional or work-related stress.

Strict Measures against Harassment

A clear, zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment is essential. Organizations must implement robust policies,

create safe and confidential reporting mechanisms, and conduct regular training to ensure that women feel secure in their workplace.

Promoting Women's Mental Health across the Life Course

Women face a significantly higher burden of mental health challenges across their lifespan than men. Conditions such as depression, anxiety, and chronic stress not only affect their emotional stability but also influence physical health and quality of life. Although biological factors like genetics and hormonal shifts play an important role, research increasingly shows that social determinants—discrimination, systemic inequities, stigma, and limited access to care—shape women's mental health in powerful ways. A life-course perspective highlights how exposures at different stages—childhood, adolescence, pregnancy, menopause, and later life—leave lasting effects. Critical transitions such as menarche, pregnancy, and menopause often heighten vulnerability, especially when combined with poverty, trauma, or social exclusion. Untreated mental health conditions during pregnancy, for instance, are linked to adverse outcomes like preterm birth and low birth weight, while mid-life stress and depression are associated with poorer cardiovascular health. Recent studies further reveal how lifetime discrimination, unrealistic expectations of strength, cultural pressures, and inadequate support systems intensify mental health struggles among women, particularly women of color. Unique conditions such as dysphoric milk ejection reflex (D-MER) and cultural barriers to mental health care underscore the need for more sensitive, informed, and inclusive approaches. Promising solutions include culturally grounded support interventions, improved communication in clinical settings, efforts to reduce bias, and policies that enhance access to treatment for women with substance-use disorders. Long-term research that follows

women across different life stages is essential to understanding how risks accumulate and resilience develops. Promoting women's mental health throughout the life course demands compassionate, equitable, and culturally responsive care—an essential responsibility for all health professionals working with women and families

Conclusion:

The mental health of women in contemporary society reflects a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and socio-cultural forces that continue to shape their lived experiences. Although women have made remarkable strides in education, employment, and leadership, these achievements often coexist with persistent inequalities, structural discrimination, and the silent weight of emotional labour. From workplace stress, gender bias, and harassment to the pressures of caregiving, reproductive responsibilities, and societal expectations, women face a continuum of challenges that affect their emotional resilience and psychological well-being. A life-course perspective reveals how vulnerabilities begin early and accumulate across childhood, adolescence, reproductive years, and beyond. Factors such as domestic violence, limited autonomy, stigma, and inadequate mental health services further deepen the disparities. The digital age introduces additional layers of stress—from unrealistic beauty standards to cyber harassment—creating new forms of psychological distress, particularly among young women. Yet, this landscape is not without hope. Growing awareness, evolving policies, and technological innovations offer powerful opportunities to reimagine women's mental health care. Gender-sensitive workplaces, flexible employment policies, inclusive support systems, accessible mental health services, and strict measures against harassment can collectively transform the environment in which women live and work. Culturally informed

interventions, improved communication within healthcare systems, and long-term research focused on women's unique needs are essential for building resilience and reducing disparities. Ultimately, protecting and promoting women's mental health is not just a matter of individual well-being; it is a societal obligation that directly influences families, workplaces, communities, and national development. Ensuring that women can lead psychologically secure, healthy, and fulfilling lives is indispensable for creating a more just, equitable, and progressive society.

Future Suggestions

1. **Strengthen Gender-Responsive Mental Health Services:**

Mental health systems must incorporate women-centred counselling, reproductive mental health care, and trained professionals who understand gender-specific challenges experienced across different stages of life.

2. **Introduce Workplace Policies That Prioritise Well-Being:**

Organizations should adopt flexible working arrangements, extended parental leave for both parents, accessible childcare, and regular mental health screenings to reduce stress and prevent burnout among women employees.

3. **Implement Stronger Mechanisms Against Harassment:**

Workplaces must enforce strict anti-harassment laws, ensure confidential reporting channels, and conduct frequent awareness programmes so that women feel safe, protected, and respected.

4. **Expand Community-Based Support Systems:**

Self-help groups, peer support circles, and community mental health centres can play a vital role in early detection, emotional support, and rehabilitation for women facing distress.

5. Increase Awareness and Reduce Stigma:

Public campaigns, school programmes, and digital platforms should promote open conversations about women's mental health to dismantle stigma and encourage timely help-seeking.

6. Improve Digital Safety and Literacy:

As online harassment and unrealistic digital comparisons continue to rise, stronger cyber-safety laws, reporting mechanisms, and digital literacy programmes are essential to protect women's psychological well-being.

7. Encourage Long-Term Research:

More longitudinal studies are needed to understand how stressors accumulate across a woman's life—from childhood to old age—and how resilience can be strengthened through cultural, social, and policy interventions.

8. Promote Integrated Health Policies:

Policies must connect mental health with reproductive health, workplace welfare, social protection, and legal rights to create a holistic framework for women's overall well-being.

9. Strengthen Family and Social Support Networks:

Awareness programmes should educate families about emotional care, shared responsibilities, and the mental health impacts of gendered expectations.

10. Develop Accessible Digital Mental Health Tools:

Mobile apps, tele-counselling services, and online therapy platforms can greatly improve access for women who face time, mobility, or financial constraints.

REFERENCES :

1. Borkakoty, B. (2024). Women's mental health in the twenty-first century: An overview. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research (JETIR)*, 11(7), 96. ISSN 2349-5162.

2. Deger, V. B. (2025). Maternal and child health: A holistic approach to equity, nutrition, and psychosocial well-being. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1009206>
3. **Malhotra, S., & Shah, R. (2015).** Women and mental health in India: An overview. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, 57(2). <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5545.161479>
4. **Jabbar, A., & Barkati, G. (2024).** Mental health and well-being of women in the workplace: Challenges and opportunities. *Research Review Journal of Social Science*, 4(2), <https://doi.org/10.31305/rrjss.2024.v04.n02.002>
5. Simonovich, S. D. (2025). Promoting women's mental health across the life course. 54(1), 1–3.

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

EDUCATOR - THE FIMT MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Name and Address

(In Capital Letter) -----

PIN -----

Subscription Charges

PERIOD	ISSUE	SUBSCRIPTION RATES
One Year (Institutional)	2	500
Three Year (Individual)	6	1500
One Year (Institutional)	2	200

Payment Details

ACCOUNT DETAILS
Account Holder: FAIRFIELD INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT & TECHNOLOGY
Bank Name: HDFC BANK, Branch: Mahipalpur, Account Type: CURRENT
Account No.: 50200024027620, RTGS/NEFT/IFSC Code: HDFC 0004404

Note: Kindly attach Online payment details with form.

Bank Draft Details

Please make the payment by Bank Draft in Favor of Fairfield Institute of Management & Technology payable at New Delhi.

Details of the Enclosed Bank Draft

Bank Draft No.

Bank Draft No.....for.....
Dated.....Drawn on.....

Date-----

Signature -----

Send Your Subscription to:

Editor

FIMT EDUCATOR MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Fairfield Institute of Management & Technology

1037, FIMT Campus, Kapashera

New Delhi-110037

For more details, Mail us at: fimtcollege.rd@gmail.com Mobile:
9811568155

NAAC ACCREDITED



FAIRFIELD INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT & TECHNOLOGY

Affiliated to GGS IP University (Govt. of Delhi), an 'A+' Grade College by DHE, Govt. of NCT Delhi, Approved by AICTE, Bar Council of India, NCTE and Recognised under 2(f) of UGC Act of 1956

WITH STATE-OF-THE-ART INFRASTRUCTURE, FIMT LEADS THE WAY IN SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH GREEN ENERGY INITIATIVES AND EFFICIENT WATER-HARVESTING SYSTEMS

COURSES OFFERED

- **BBA (General)** – Bachelor of Business Administration- Builds strong foundation in management, marketing, finance, and HR. Prepares students for corporate roles, entrepreneurship, and MBA programs
- **BCA (Bachelor of Computer Applications)**- Strong base in computer programming, software development, and IT tools. Exposure to latest technologies like Python, Data Analytics, and Web Development
- **B.Com (Hons.) (Bachelor of Commerce)** - In-depth knowledge of accounting, finance, taxation, and economics. Ideal for careers in banking, finance, corporate sector, CA/CS/CMA preparation.
- **BA (Hons.) English** - Enhances communication, critical thinking, and analytical skills. Suitable for careers in education, publishing, media, content, academic writing and civil services
- **B.Tech (CSE / IT / AI&ML / ECE)** - Advanced technical education aligned with industry requirements. Hands-on learning in Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Coding, and Electronics. FIMT is widely recognized as a top preference for admission to all its courses through GGSIPU University counselling.
- **BA Journalism & Mass Communication (BA-JMC)** - Practical exposure through studios, projects, and internships. Career paths in journalism, PR, media houses, content creation, and filmmaking.
- **B.Ed.** – Professional teacher education program preparing students for careers in school teaching, educational leadership, and academic development.
- **BA-LLB (Integrated) | BBA-LLB (H.) | LLM (ADR/IPR/CJS/CL)** - Five-year integrated professional law programs. Prepares students for litigation, judiciary, corporate law, and legal services.



- Advanced B.Tech. Labs with practical exposure
- AI Conference & Research Platforms
- International Conferences on SDGs
- Industry-focused Add-On Courses
- Qualified & experienced faculty
- Industry-oriented curriculum
- Internships, workshops & guest lectures
- Skill development | NSS | NCC | 35+ student clubs
- Student achievements in MNCs
- Judicial Services & JAG (Indian Army)
- Moot Court Hall (Law)
- Spacious digital Library

☎ 9560596750 | 8080804002 | 9811568155 | 9650154726

☎ 011-46109358 | 011-43045218

📍 FIMT Campus, Bijwasan Road, New Delhi - 110097
✉ fimtnd@gmail.com, collegefairfield@gmail.com
🌐 www.fimt-ggsipu.org