

Empowering Indian Women Towards Gender Equality-Recent Legal and Welfare Measures

Dr. K. Ramesh

Dept. Of History, University college of
Arts & Social Sciences, Osmania
University, Hyd-7, Telangana

DOI:10.37648/ijrssh.v15i03.014

¹ Received: 20/09/2025; Accepted: 26/09/2025 Published: 28/09/2025

Abstract

Majority of women thought India becoming victims of gender inequality that they are facing social, cultural and economic discrimination at family and community level. Particularly, now, Indian women are facing the problem of rape by men, dowry death, domestic violence, caste-violence and casteism, patriarchal society, malnutrition, unequal payment for work of job, joblessness etc., Patriarchy is the root cause for gender inequality Indian constitution provide gender equality After Independence various legal and welfare measures have been launched by govts against gender inequality world pandemic covid-19 impacted poor women miserably. Despite various odds, the process for gender equality is going by the efforts of govt, NGOs and few individuals from civil society

Key words: *Gender inequality; social, cultural and economic discrimination; rape; dowry deaths; domestic violence; malnutrition; patriarchy; legal and welfare measures; NGOs.*

Introduction

Prof. Amartyasen says, "Turning to India, it must be acknowledged first that the frequency of assault on women is high in the country, to that terrible general recognition has to be added the special role of violence connected with particular social features, such as dowry and economic settlements. Even through the members involved in violent deaths are dwarfed by the large members that perish from neglect of health care and social attention, the crude and brutal nature of this form of gender inequality makes it a particularly severe manifestation of the deprivation of women."

Majority of women throughout India becoming victims of gender inequality that they are facing social, cultural and economic discrimination at family and community level. At this juncture, women can't get equal opportunity in society where male-dominance functions in various forms. Hence, it is needed to empower women as empowering other marginalized classes. It is necessary to build legal and institutional system to develop women who are suppressed and discriminated following their gender in the society of patriarchy. It is unfortunate that the vases of domestic violence, Intimate partner Violence (IPV), Sexual and Gender –Based Violence (SGBV), Withdraw of girl children from educational institutions, incidences of child/early marriage, economic, seclusion, job losses, men entering 'women's work spaces', balancing the double burden of extended work time with work-from-home and care and domestic work are raising.

¹ How to cite the article: Ramesh K.; (September, 2025); Empowering Indian Women Towards Gender Equality-Recent Legal and Welfare Measures; *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*; Vol 15, Issue 3; 131-137, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.37648/ijrssh.v15i03.014>

The Indian women's portion went under many changes in Indian history. In the times of Rigveda, women enjoyed high status and rights. After Rigvedic period slowly women has lost honor and rights and became victim of the male dominated society that maintained patriarchy successfully. Such suppression continued till the early modern period of British regime.

Reforms for women development were started by early nationalists such as Rajaram Mohan Roy, Eshwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Mahatma Phule and Colonial authorities who enacted Bengal Sati Regulation 1829, Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act 1856, Female Infanticide Prevention Act, 1870, and Age of consent Act, 1891. After Indian Independence, the constitution of India encouraged gender equality and prohibited gender discrimination through empowering the government to implement various initiative for the development of Indian females. Equality, dignity and freedom from discrimination were provided by the Indian Constitution under women's rights. Further, India has many statutes protecting women's rights. Violence against women and girls has been deeply rooted in stereotypes and social murder that accept violence. The prevention mechanism plays a vital role in eliminating the violence and maligning women/ girls aware and self-sufficient of avail support services and making decisions about their life gender equality in a fundamental right which leads to harmonious, peaceful and egalitarian society. Gender violence in the product of practice and discourse of patriarchy in the society that affect various institutions. Despite legal measures are being implemented by govt, the process of social reformation, in India, dangerously very slow. In the first phase of Indian national movement.

in 19th century, Indian leaders much emphasized on social reformation which was neglected in the freedom struggle. Therefore, after the immediate freedom, the Hindu code Bill was not accepted by the parliament. This is the failure of neglecting the social reform movement in the times of freedom. And It took long time to accept various women laws by the parliament. Hence, this situation again failed to control patriarchal society at cultural level. This led to the continuation of caste-bared arranged marriage system that created violence against inter-caste and love marriage system as the resistance for the process of modernizing India. Again, Indian women were suppressed so that women became the victims of dowry system, domestic violence and other evils. More welfare measure for women development cannot lead to the wholistic development of women. Since practice of women protecting law and cultural reform process towards gender equality is the imperative today.

Men's world has been blaming women for centuries that the many religious and knowledge systems suppressed the female world. The contemporary feminist movement rightly complains that women are hidden from history'. But it does not connect the invisibility with the class ideology of bourgeois historians from whom history in a record of the activities of ruling elites- kings, generals, prime ministers, popes, feudal lords, capitalists, great artists, scientists and philosophers. All- with the exception of a few queens, empresses and Joan of Arc-were men. Hence history is depicted as a male story but this story not only exclude all women, it also leaves out of sight practically most men who belong to the subordinate class. In similar vein, radical feminists mostly see women as objects of history, as victims of male oppression'. Therefore, we can understand that how women were suppressed in all realms of human life systematically through patriarchy.

Foundation of gender injustice in India:

Since post Rigveda period, gender inequality began in Indian society following the patriarchy and birth-based Varna and caste system. Vicious writings were written against women that led to various social evils. Despite such trends various social reform movements as part of religious systems also erupted in Indian subcontinent. Particularly Shaiva movement strived for the women emancipation. People have been worshipping mother goddesses since ancient times in India. But women were suppressed socially, economically and politically. The women history was suppressed miserably by the ruling class. Despite all odds and hardships, Rani Rudrama Devi, Razia Sultana, Chand Beebe emerged as rulers in the medieval times. Social evils such as Sati, pardah system, dowry systems, Kanya Shulkam (Selling bride), Devadasi systems, Child marriages polygamy, prostitution and other evils flourished in India. Women were also enclosed through literature created by men. The ruling class exploited women in all periods which led to

the suppression of common women even Suppression of women in India, led to the success of patriarchy, varna and caste system that killed national unity and made India victim of imperialism.

All this situation led various women's movements in 20th century that emerged as feminist movement. After Independence of India, various constitutional and welfare measure are being implemented by govt of India and many states of India.

Constitutional Safeguards in Recent Times:

Indian Constitutional guarantees to all women of Indian equality through Articles 14, equality of opportunity through Article 16, equal pay for equal work through article 39 (d) and article 42, special provisions to be made by the state in favor of women and children through Article 51 (A) (e) annihilating practices derogatory to the dignity of women through Article 51 (A) (e) and allowing for provisions by the state for providing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

After Independence of India, India achieved considerable development in various spheres. Unfortunately, women's representation in political institutions in very low. Governments launched affirmative action policies which are quotas to improve their representation in the realm of power. In recent times, government of India enacted the Bill called 'Naree Shakthi Vandan Adhiniyam' following 128th constitutional amendment providing 33 % of seats of reservation in Lok Sabha and state legislatures. This will be implemented from 2029 general elections. There are the reforms which include legislation

Social programs, and enlightening campaigns have been initiated by government in last ten years for the course of gender equality:

A). Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 (Nirbhaya Act), b) Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, c) The Protection of Children from Sexual offences (Amendment) Act 2019, d) The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019. e) Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013.

These legal measures are playing an important role in promoting women's right and their empowerment in India. This also endearing towards gender equality.

The Supreme Court has released Handbook on combating Gender Stereotypes which provides a dynamic impact for the quest leading to gender- just legal system in India. The National Commission for Women is working towards gender justice at every stage as part of the Government of India's vision and policy. This Commission strives for converting all do jure rights, guarantees, commitments and safeguards following Constitution of India for Indian women into de facto ones. The government of India established the Nirbhaya fund for the women's safety and empowerment leading to establish one-stop centers, women's helplines and infrastructures following the Nirbhaya Act, 2013. Maternity Benefit Act (2017) recognizes the need of facilitating sufficient times for maternal health and relating with the child. The Muslim Women Act (2019), provides the right of Indian Muslim women wither personal laws towards gender equality. All these acts as part of reforms are playing key role in protecting Indian women's rights and empowering leading to gender equality and sensitivity.

General Statistics:

- Maternal mortality: 112(oper 100,000)
- Women in Parliament: 14.5%
- Women over 25 with : 41.8% (M:53.6%) Secondary education
- Women in labor force: 27.2% (M: 78.8%)

Gender Inequality Index:

Value: 0.490 (2021)

Rank :122 out of 191

Global Gender Gap Index:

Value:0.629 (2022)

Rank:135TH out of 146

Recent Welfare Schemes:

Many Schemes of Government of India intended to welfare and empowerment of women women's health, education, security, economic growth are the same of the objectives of these schemes. The Schemes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK), Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) and Ujjwal Yojana became prominent examples for these welfare schemes. The scheme called 'Posh an Abhiyan' aimed at addressing malnutrition among women. This scheme follows ICT application, capacity building community mobilization. 'Posh an Abhiyan', 'Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana' (PMMVY), 'Mission Saksham Anganwadi & Poshan 2.0' aim at improving health and Nutrition of women.

Women are attaining maternity benefits through PMMVY. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) aimed at addressing the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR), abolish gender- based sex selective elimination and encouraging protection, survival and education of the girl child and emerged as the successful scheme by the Govt of India. Hence, this Scheme has been expanded which also includes 'Nari Adalat' offering an alternative grievance redressal strategy that solves problems such as harassment and violation of right. 'Samarthya' is the sub scheme of BBBP which empowers women establishing 'Shakti Sandans' homes providing relief and rehabilitation. The BBBP follows a multi-sectoral approach including education, health, child development and community consciousness.

Now, this scheme is being applied through collaborations among several ministries of Govt of India. The achievements of the BBBP are improvement in Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) from 918 in 2014-15 to 933 in 2022-23 (sources – HMIS, M-HFW), improvement in Girl's Enrolment in Secondary Education from 75.51% in 2014-15 to 79.4% in 2021-22 (source – U –DISE Plus, M.E), success of Awareness Campaigns and community activities such as 'Beti Janmottav', skilling and empowerment of women through collaboration of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. The Programme such as 'Khelo India' developing sports among girls the BBBP is a scheme sponsored with 100% funding by Govt of India in all districts under Sambal Vertical of Mission Shakti.

The Scheme called Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) facilitates financial help for pregnant women for institutional delivery towards controlling maternal and infant mortality. The PMMVY provides cash incentives to pregnant and lactating women protecting their health. For the cause of women's safety and security, One Stop Centre (OSC), Women Helpline (WHL) are being implemented. The Swadhar Greh Scheme (SGS) is providing institutional help for the rehabilitation of women in difficult conditions, while 'Ujjwal Scheme' aimed at the prevention for trafficking and the rescue

The Scheme- 'Support to Training and Employment Programme for women' (STEP) facilitating training for skill development and job opportunities the marginalized communities. Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY- NULM) emphasizes on poverty eradication and livelihood, development among urban poor women. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) offers micro – credit to women for income- generating tasks. Other initiatives such as Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK), National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW), National Credit Fund for Women provides empowerment of rural women following community participation and creating awareness, monitoring several empowerment programmes of women, financial support for women's self – help groups (SHGs) respectively. The Scheme- 'Gruha Lakshmi provides Rs 2,000 per month for 1 crore women heads of

households. 'Drone Didi Scheme' aims at training 15,000 workers of SHGs to become drone pilots towards several financial tasks. Mission Indradhanush is government initiative for Indian women's empowerment. This welfare scheme provides full immunization of pregnant women and children. The PMMY (Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana) facilitating collateral – free loans to small business owners up to Rs.20 lakh (limit extended in budget 24-25).

The STEP scheme provides empowerment for women and grants to institutions to conduct training activities for women. This programme aimed at ensuring employment for women. Mahila E – Haat Scheme Provides an e-market phase for women to showcase their products for attracting customers. Mahila Samman Savings Certificate (MSSC) Scheme provides 2- years FDs for women in the Post Offices depositing up to Rs. 2 lakhs through earning an interest of 7.5% p.a. following these deposits.

The Central Government of India has been implementing various schemes with specific objective since independence. These schemes benefit the poor women and women from the vulnerable sections. They adders social and economic welfare of the Indian women. The objective of these schemes are providing social security measures developing the equality of life of women, upliftment of poor women, developing of rural and urban poor women, reducing economic inequality between male and female providing employment opportunities, education and training to the women from weaker sections of the society, providing financial security to the women from vulnerable sections.

SHGs – led Women Empowerment:

The female role in the realms of economy and social development became an important aspect for policy makers and planners of India for gender equality. Hence to promote economic development among poor women, Government launched Self Help Groups (SHGs) as voluntary groups of poor women from marginalized sections. These group of women come together and solve their problems through SHGs. The objective of Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY – NRLM) the feeling of self – worth and the self-help. This scheme well recognized and under scored an unwavering and sustainable synergy between the poor people and the formal financial institutions. However, these SHGs are successful in creating women entrepreneurs, employment and reducing poverty. The Reserve Bank of Indian (RBI) recognized SHGs an alternate credit model flow model where SHGs were recognized as group clients of banks for both deposit and credit connective, leading to groups and collateral – free thinking.

Development of rural women:

In present times, women are playing key role in every sector and performing their efficiency women are becoming brilliant engineers and doctors. They are breaking evil traditional systems towards new India. Sex ratio has been improved significantly. Indian women occupy 48.6% in rural population. Govt of India has launched various programmes and initiatives to develop women, particularly for rural women of the nation. Govt of India has made significant impact in empowering rural women through economic inclusions, assuring social parity and case of living. Rate of rural women participation in workforce was estimated to be 24.8% and out of which 80% are engaged in agriculture and allied sector. Being an important demographic divided, rural women empowerment can be an important contributor for economic reforms in realizing an ambition target of USD 5 billion economy for India by 2024-25 and achieving UN- Millennium goals by 2030.

The Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaram Pariyojana (MKSP), has been launched by Govt of India, aimed at empowering women in agriculture and allied spheres through regular investment to improve their role in Agro Sector. Now, in India, in the startup ecosystem, there is the growth of number of women entrepreneurs from 10% to 14%. Niti Aayog Started the Women Entrepreneurship platform (WEP) Which aimed at making available several resources for women entrepreneurs. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (MGNREGA) Providing 1/3rd of jobs for rural women. Schemes such as Mahila Shakti Keudras (MSKs), Swadhar Greh (for women in difficult circumstances), Mahila Police Volunteers Missions Poshan 2.0, One Stop Centres (OSC), Women

Helplines (181-WHL), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP), along with new wing of Nari Adalats, Ujjawala, PMMVY, Mission Vatsalya, SHGs, etc. are enhancing empowering rural women of the nation.

The Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaram Pariyojana (MKSP) as part of Deendayal Atyodaya Yojana (National Rural Livelihood Mission) (DAY-NRLM), are helping women to familiarize women with the latest techniques in agriculture. Many Jan Dhan accounts are started for women to get direct transfer of money from the government. Women farmers are receiving benefits under PM-KISAN Scheme. According to NABARD Annual Report 2021-21, more than 112 lakh SHGs are working across the country for empowering rural women economically and socially.

Schemes like Jan – Dhan Yojana are very successful in rural India which is leading to modern and greener agro development. The onset of digitization enabling for rural development in rapid way. Under Aatma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, PM e- VIDYA has been started with combination of all – digital, on – air and online education facilitating multi- made access to education. These measures are @ DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for knowledge sharing and sharing, @ SWAYAM (Study Web of Active Learning for young Aspiring Minds).

Conclusion:

In India, Buddha, Basava Strived for women's upliftment in ancient and medieval periods respectively. In modern times, feminist movement established many leaders for the women's development in the world and India. In the same way, Marxist movement also strived for gender equality. Feminism recognizes in the institution of patriarchy the main social force which is responsible for the exploitation and degradation of women. The basic division in society is defined in terms of the gender identity. The cause of women's oppression is seen in men's desire to control and dominate the female sex. History is viewed as a succession of alternating but basically similar patriarchal social structures through which the male of the human species has dominated the female half of the population.

Since the independence, various women laws and welfare measures are being implemented by governments. Unfortunately, for the various reasons, the implementations of these initiatives are not being implemented in severe and sincere way. Hence, the task of gender equality became a show process in India. Through the practice of patriarchy, the larger population of Indian youth become helpless and weak. It is a great obstacle in the way of development of our nations. The contradiction of Indian culture is that one way it preaches to honor the women and the other way it accepts the dominance of patriarchy. Most of the evils, in present time, changed their forms and being practiced by the people through the help of elite of Indian society. Today, in India, a dangerous combination of Indian evils along with western evils are being practiced by society leading to antinationalism, terrorism and social injustice. Fortunately, the legal measure following Indian constitution, are enabling to control these dangerous evil systems to some extent. Hence, civil society and individuals must work towards the gender equality abolishing the various social evils of present Indian Society women. Khap-panchayats must be abolished Government should protect the women health in severe manner.

Nevertheless, majority of Indian women are facing various problems. The rates of malintest are high among adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating with repercussions for children health. Hence, it is imperative to protect health of all women through other schemes along with present schemes. Govt should implement all legal measures sincerely so that the common women could get the justice. Following the globalization, inequalities have been grown. This situation demanding more emphasize on the poverty of women and their development in urgent way. At the same time, the benefits of globalization should be provided the poor women and their children.

Achieving gender equality remains an important issue at global level that women are facing various forms of violence, limited opportunities. The same is applied for Indian women too. Particularly now Indian women in experiencing domestic violence, honor killings, casteism and caste violence, dowry deaths, child marriages, promoting political and economic empowerment, protecting reproductive and sexual health rights, land rights and implementing gender responsive budgeting must be implemented by government. For the success of gender equality governments,

civil society and individuals should strive together. Following caste inequalities, the women from the SC, ST and OBC must be prioritized in the process of gender equality under the affirmative action. The women Reservation Bill – 2023 should be amended so that it should provide reservation in Lok Sabha and state legislatures for OBC women.

Following NCRB Statistics, one dowry death is happening per hour and 7000 dowry death per year. In India, more sex-selected abortions are going on than any other country in Asia. All this reveals that the extent of patriarchy and misogyny in our country. Despite legal measures, the problem of rape by men creating a threat for gender justice. The women from working class and marginalized sections are becoming victims of all these evils.

However, in modern times, the reforms process is going on to achieve gender equality and sensitivity slowly. The present Union Govt of India under the premiership of Shri Narendra Modi, various legal and welfare measures are being implemented. Various NGOs and individuals from society also striving against the evil of gender inequality. Along with these efforts, feminist movement is going on for gender equality and sensitivity with various women's organizations.

References:

Cliff, T. (1984). *Class struggle and women's liberation: 1640 to the present day*. Bookmarks.

Kumar, A. (2019, March 8). *Women's empowerment under Modi government*. OpIndia. <https://myvoice.opindia.com/2019/03/womens-empowerment-under-modi-government/>

Lytle, S. H. (1955). The second sex (September 1793). *The Journal of Modern History*, 27(1), 14–26.

Millett, K. (1972). *Sexual politics*. Abacus.

Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare. (2021, August 6). *Schemes for women farmers: Creating sustainable livelihoods for rural women*. Press Information Bureau, Government of India. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1743360>

Ministry of Rural Development. (2022, February 9). *Entrepreneurial culture in rural India*. Press Information Bureau, Government of India. <https://www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1796885>

Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. (2017). *Participation in economy*. In *Women and men in India 2017* (Chap. 4). Government of India.

Ministry of Women and Child Development. (2021, December 15). *Schemes for the development of women and children*. Press Information Bureau, Government of India. <https://www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1781686>

Misra, K. K., & Iyengar, K. M. (1988). *Modern political theory*. S. Chand & Company.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2014). *Women, government and policy making in OECD countries: Fostering diversity for inclusive growth*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264210745-en>