

# Government Initiatives to Improve Gender Equality In India

The idea of gender equality aims to eliminate the idea that people in a community or a country are either male or female. Gender equality handles societal problems without making distinctions between the sexes of its constituents. Equal opportunity is another benefit of gender equality, which applies to all aspects of life. In his 1976 book *The History of Sexuality*, philosopher Michel Foucault introduced the phrase “gender neutrality” for the first time. The significance of gender equality has recently come to light due to its contribution to the general advancement of society, not only by its constituents but also by its administrators or regulators. Every development area—educational, social, economic, religious, and political—is impacted by gender equality, which is the fundamental tenet of a just society. Inequality is a problem that not only impedes economic development but has also become the source of many social ills.



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## INTRODUCTION

The outcomes of the numerous efforts made by the various governments in India to safeguard and preserve the interests of women and minimize levels of inequality among its citizens to speed up development by guaranteeing the best possible use of all of its human resources are not adequate. Gender discrimination in India is a severe problem that affects both men and women on the one hand and the entire country on the other hand. We have gender inequality in the workplace, health, social, educational, and political matters.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To comprehend the significance of the concept of gender equality
2. To determine the most recent initiatives for gender equality in India.
3. To list the several laws' provisions for gender equality in India.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study's primary data came from secondary sources exclusively, including papers, websites, and other sources.

Statistics for the period under consideration ranged from January 2014 to December 2022.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

2023 (Prachi Dube) Says that it is time for politicians to include transgender individuals in these laws because the bulk of Indian legislation is designed for both men and women only. The rape laws, however, surprisingly favor women. There is no longer any justification for gender-specific rules against sexual harassment. There is no reason to believe that sexual assault frequently occurs outside the established system. The only way to effectively broaden the scope of coverage for these offences is through creating and implementing gender-neutral legislation. Sexual assault must be defined according to the many degrees of harm it might inflict, the legal definition of rape must be revised, and each must always be described in full.

(NFHS 5, 2019-2021) The fifth survey in the series, the National Family Health Survey 2019–21 (NFHS-5), offers data on India's population, health, and nutrition for each state and union territory (UT). Similar to NFHS-4, NFHS-5 provides district-level estimates of several significant metrics. This poll offers insightful data on the metrics guaranteeing women's empowerment, safety, and advancement.

According to (Kumud Rana and Archana Kumari (2018), authors argue that normative heteronormativity is a significant barrier to gender equality in India and that efforts to challenge these norms are essential for achieving a more equitable society. They call for a more intersectional approach to gender equality that recognizes the interconnectedness of different forms of discrimination and seeks to address them holistically.

Anshu and Nitin Gupta (2019), the authors argue that gender equality in India remains a myth for many women, particularly those in marginalized communities. They call for more comprehensive and intersectional approaches to addressing gender inequality, including managing the root causes of patriarchal attitudes and social norms and promoting women's empowerment and participation in all areas of society.

Gender equality is crucial for achieving the objective of women's empowerment (Sundar, 2017). It has been noted that women in India experience numerous forms of discrimination

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and obstructions to taking advantage of development gains due to their disempowerment. So, achieving gender equality may make it feasible for women to feel more empowered.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is mainly based on secondary data. The data for this study has been collected from sources like research papers published in journals, government websites and other authenticated sources.

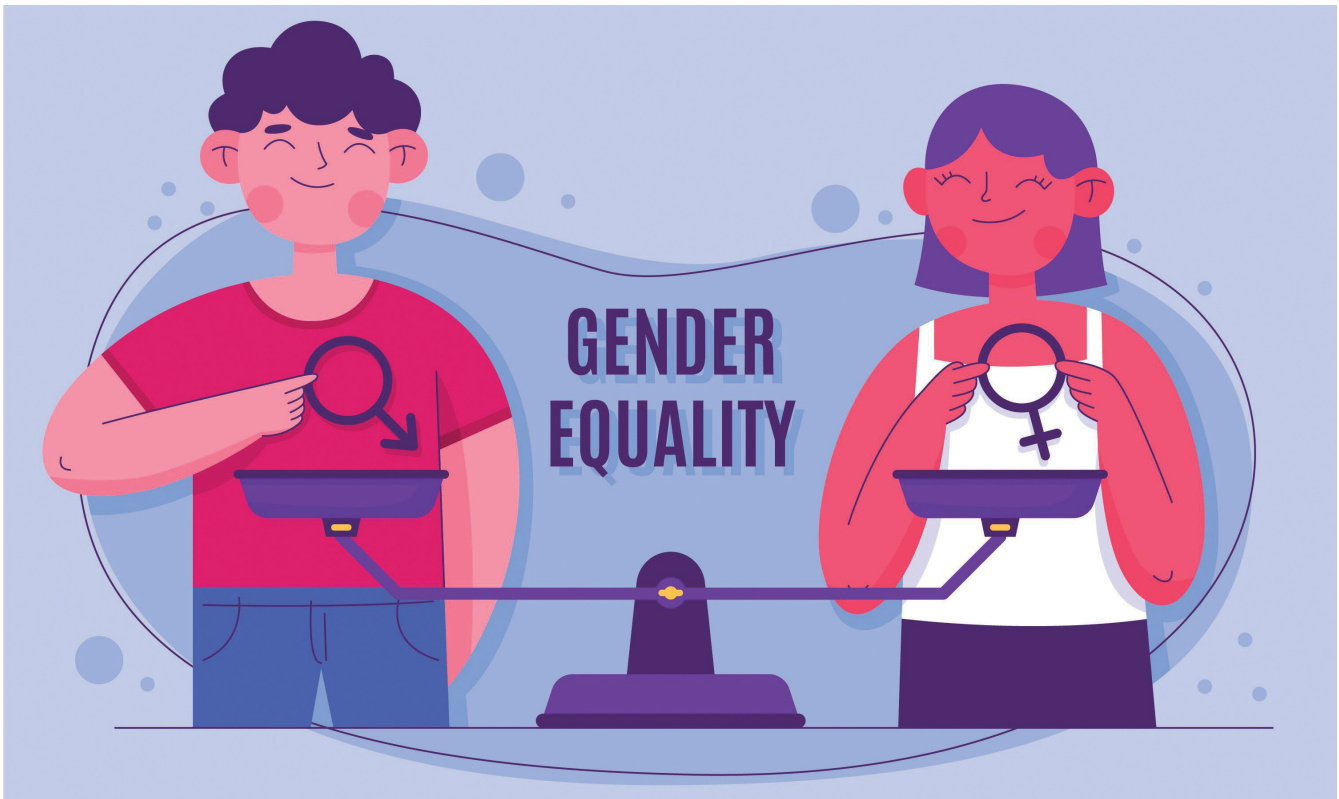
### NEW INITIATIVES TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

Since 2014, the Indian government has adopted several measures to support women to ensure their economic stability and provide them with better opportunities to advance in all areas of life.

At the United Nations on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the international conference on women, Smt. Smriti Irani, the Minister for Women and Child Development of the Government of India, declared that our administration understands the significance of gender equality and women's empowerment in all areas of development. The current NDA administration has launched several initiatives to help women and raise their level of awareness. Details of the latest government measures to promote women's political, social, and economic empowerment since 2014 are provided below:-

1. **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) campaign:** Launched in 2015, this campaign aims to address the issue of female feticide and promote the education and empowerment of girls. The campaign includes various activities, such as awareness-raising campaigns, financial incentives for families to educate their daughters, and initiatives to address gender-based violence.
2. **One Stop Centre (OSC) Scheme:** Launched in 2015, this scheme aims to support and assist women affected by violence. The OSCs offer various services, including medical, legal, and counseling support and temporary shelter for needy women.
3. **Mahila E-Haat: Launched in 2016,** this online platform aims to promote women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment by providing a marketplace for women to sell their products and services.
4. **Sukanya Samridhi Yojana:** Launched in 2015, this scheme encourages parents to save for their daughters' education and marriage expenses. The scheme provides tax benefits and a high-interest rate on savings deposited in the account.
5. **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):** Launched in 2017, this scheme provides financial assistance to pregnant and lactating women to help meet their nutritional needs and promote the health and well-being of mothers and children.
6. **Women's Safety:** The Government of India has taken various measures to enhance women's safety, such as setting up dedicated women's helplines (such as 181 and 1091), establishing all-women police stations, and launching a mobile application called "Himmat" to assist in case of emergency.
7. **National Nutrition Mission (Poshan Abhiyaan):** Launched in 2018, this mission aims to reduce malnutrition and improve maternal and child health. The task includes a range of activities, including awareness campaigns, nutrition education, and the provision of nutritional supplements to pregnant and lactating women and children under the age of 6.d
8. **Gender Champions:** Launched in 2019, this initiative aims to engage men as allies in promoting gender equality. The program encourages male leaders to publicly commit to taking action to promote gender equality and to serve as role models for others.
9. **Women in Science:** The Government of India has launched several initiatives to encourage women's participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. For example, the Vigyan Jyoti program aims to provide exposure and mentorship to girls in STEM. In contrast, the KIRAN scheme offers opportunities for women scientists to advance their careers through fellowship and training programs.
10. **Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan (Clean India Mission):** Launched in 2014, this mission aims to promote cleanliness and hygiene across the country. The task includes improving sanitation and hygiene facilities for women, such as constructing separate toilets for girls in schools.
11. **Digital India:** The Digital India program aims to promote digital literacy and access to technology, particularly in rural areas. The program encourages women's digital literacy and entrepreneurship with initiatives such as the Women Entrepreneurship Platform and the Digital Sakhi program.
12. **The women's Hotline Programme,** also introduced in 2015, aims to offer 24/7 emergency support to women subjected to abuse in public and private situations. A toll-free hotline was established for this purpose to provide prompt support.
13. **The Mahila Police Volunteers Program** was implemented in all states and UTs in 2016 by the Ministries of Women and Child Development and Home Affairs. This major government-sponsored initiative seeks to create a link between police authorities and local communities to ensure police outreach on criminal cases.
14. **SWADHAR Greh,** a programme that aims to improve women's social, economic, and health security, was implemented in 2018. By providing women who lack these

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essentials—a home, food, and clothing—this programme also emphasized women’s empowerment.

15. **STEP (Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women)**, This programme was amended in 2014, and under it, funding is given to groups who work to teach women.
16. **Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK)**, a programme launched in 2017, aims to provide convergent support services in a single place so that participants may develop, advance their skills, and find employment independently. Women are to have access to services through this initiative, such as high-quality medical treatment, education, employment possibilities, and counseling.

### BENEFITS OF GOVERNMENT NEW INITIATIVES

The Indian government recognizes the significance of women’s contributions to the country’s economic growth and is constantly working on to increase women’s engagement in economic activities. The government made several announcements in light of this that promote and guarantee their involvement in economic activity. For assisting women in starting their businesses, there are programmes including Skill India, Made in India, Startup India, Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, Stand Up India, and Prime Minister’s Employment Generation Plan (PMEGP). The government has also developed enabling regulations that permit women to work in unconventional fields like fighter pilots in the Indian Air Force, Commandos, The following are the results of the efforts implemented by the current Government of India:-

1. **Economic growth:** By promoting women’s entrepreneurship and economic empowerment, initiatives such as the Mahila E-Haat and the Women Entrepreneurship Platform can help to increase women’s participation in the formal economy,

leading to overall economic growth. The GOI has ensured fictionalization of 450 Working Women Hostels which has aided 74666 working women and 11018 children in daycare centers.

2. **Improved health outcomes:** Initiatives such as the National Nutrition Mission and the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana can help improve women’s and children’s health and well-being, reducing the burden of illness and improving overall health outcomes. The financial aid provide to more than 2.6 crore pregnant and lactating mothers during the financial year 2022-23.
3. **Reduced gender-based violence:** The One Stop Centre scheme and the women’s helplines can help support and assist women affected by violence, reducing the prevalence of gender-based violence and promoting women’s safety. Provide support to 5.40 lakh women with the help of. 708 OSCs. With the help of WHL across 34 States and UTs, has handled more than 70 lakh calls.
4. **Increased gender equality:** Through initiatives such as the Gender Champions program and the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign, the Indian government is working to promote gender equality and shift societal attitudes towards gender roles and norms. The effect of this resulted as the Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB) increased from 918 to 937 as per the latest national family health survey report (2019-2021).
5. **Increased participation in education:** The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao campaign and the Sukanya Samridhi Yojana can help encourage parents to invest in their daughters’ education, leading to increased girls’ participation in formal education and improved overall educational outcomes.



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6. **Reduced poverty:** Women's economic empowerment can help to reduce poverty and improve the standard of living for families, particularly in rural areas where women often face more barriers to employment and income generation.
7. **Improved political participation:** Through initiatives such as the Mahila Shakti Kendra and the National Rural Livelihood Mission, the Indian government is working to increase women's participation in local governance and decision-making, promoting gender equality in political representation.
8. **Improved child development:** The Integrated Child Development Services scheme, which provides early childhood care and education, health, and nutrition services to children under the age of six, can help to improve the development and well-being of young children, particularly those from marginalized communities. As per the present report presented by Mrs. Smriti Irani, Honorable Minister for Women and Child Development, GOI, there is a rise in the number of females enrolled in elementary and secondary school, which is now virtually equal to that of boys,
9. **Enhanced social cohesion:** By promoting gender equality and reducing gender-based violence, the Indian government is working to create a more cohesive and inclusive society where all individuals can live with dignity and respect. The GOI implemented the gender budgeting through forty one ministries and departments and allocated Rs. 1.71 lakh crore for the fiscal year 2022-2023.
10. **Improved disaster resilience:** Women are often disproportionately affected by natural disasters due to existing gender inequalities and their caregiving responsibilities. Through initiatives such as the National Disaster Management Plan, which includes provisions for women's safety and empowerment in disaster situations, the Indian government is working to promote disaster resilience and reduce the impact of disasters on women and marginalized communities.

### GENDER EQUALITY SCENARIO IN INDIA

The World Economic Forum (WEF) uses the annual Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR) or Index to illustrate where various nations stand on gender parity about their positions in the preceding year. The study examines whether gender equality has improved or declined in countries which are part of survey.

In the most recent survey, India is ranked 135<sup>th</sup> out of 146 countries. India's status had marginally improved from the previous year when we were placed 140 out of 156. India improved their score from 0.625 last year to 0.629 this year, a difference of 0.003. As per the report, if India go by the same pace than it will take more than 150 years to achieve the fuller gender equality.

According to the most recent National Family Health Survey – 5 (NFHS-5, 2019–2021), women's status has improved in several ways over the previous five years (compared to NFHS-4). More than 78.6% of women have bank accounts that they use personally shows 25% increase over the status five years ahead. This suggests that three out of four women have personal bank accounts. In India, 54% of women, or one in two, now own mobile phones that they use personally, it up from 46% five years ago. In India, the status of women own a home or a piece of land individually or jointly, up from 38% five years ago. The sex ratio has improved from 918 to 937, according to NFHS-5 data. Nowadays, women

are the founders and CEOs of one out of every five non-farm companies.

The NFHS-5 survey also shows that our culture is changing, with males starting to appreciate women as partners in the home and contributors to society. Today, more women take part in essential home choices. According to NFHS-5 data, 88.7% of women now, compared to 84% five years ago, are involved in crucial household decisions. In the last ten years, there has been a significant decline in the frequency of domestic violence. According to NFHS-5 statistics, only 29% of married women report having experienced marital abuse, down from 39% ten years ago and 33% five years ago.

Despite the reports cited above, gender inequality in India is still a reality and affects women in every sphere of life. It starts in the womb and lasts throughout life. There are 25 women in the Rajya Sabha and 78 women in the Lok Sabha in India, respectively. There are 787 members in present parliament in India out of which only 103 women, the presence of female member is nearly 13%, which shows a very dismal state of female participation in politics in India. In 2021, Indian women's participation as part of the labour force was 22%, while that of men's participation was 78%, this also indicates that the women involvement in economic activities is not sufficient or a large number of women either are limited to non-economic activities or not able to work due to gender inequality.

### CONCLUSION

Being one of the biggest democracies in the world, India has shown the rest of the world how to manage a democracy properly. The world is now looking on India not only for its stand on Gender equality but also on the way we will move forward to make the nation's position better in Global Index for gender equality, at present we are at 135 position out of 146. The primary document in the country that addresses not only gender equality but also ways to improve the status of women in society is India's constitution. It is now the responsibility of the states and the union government to put the Indian Constitution and any other laws that promote gender equality into practice.

Throughout the past ten years, India's gender equality situation has improved. Fewer females are coerced into early marriages, and more girls attend school. Today, women work in every sector in India, it can be defense, politics, business, and spiritual, social, economic or health, etc and are in positions of authority. The government of India has started to make appropriate legal change in the present laws for enhancing gender equality.

It is important to mention here that without women participation in economic activities or decision-making, our goal of becoming the next superpower would not be achieved. Gender equality is vital for political, economic, developmental, moral and ethical reasons. Without gender equality, progress cannot be inclusive or long-lasting.

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