

EMPOWERING WOMEN: CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES IN INDIA'S TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL SECTORS

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ABSTRACT

This paper comprehensively examines the prevalent gender stereotype and the nature and extent of women's employment in traditional and non-traditional professions in India. Through the integration of perspectives from the Sanskrit texts and modern-day post-colonial feminism, it constructively lays bare the progressive evolution of the social construct that sought to confine women to particular roles. This itinerary focuses on the valuable work of Indian post-colonial and feminist scholars and on the impact of the English language on the development of feminism in India. Moreover, this work qualitatively explores women's participation in NTLs with the aim of providing insights into the structural barriers and complex realities that women face in their working lives with a special focus on the intersectionality approach. Thus, in an attempt to compare the conventional and atypical roles, the paper aims to identify factors that either enhance or hinder women's statuses in the labour market. Furthermore, it explains how various governmental initiatives, constitutional provisions, legislation, and judgements have contributed to the emerging discourse of women's emancipation in India. In an attempt to synthesize the analysis of the past, the present, and the potential future of women in India, this paper aims to outline practical and visionary approaches to making the environment of 21st-century India safer and more liberal for women.

Keywords: Gender Stereotypes, Women's Empowerment, Traditional Sectors, Non-Traditional Sectors, Feminism in India, Intersectionality, Government Schemes, Constitutional Measures, Legislative Interventions, Judiciary Roles.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Empower woman, empower the human community. The base on which the world stands is a women.” – Malala Yousafzai.

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Discrimination and Stereotypes in employment are some of the most overt and extensive forms of discrimination in this country. Women are disproportionately represented in low-salaried, sex-stereotyped jobs and underrepresented in career-oriented positions compared to men with similar education. This is rooted in cultural myths that persist despite evidence to the contrary, such as the belief that women are emotionally unstable or incapable of leadership. Women face various stereotypes and prejudices, such as being perceived as unsuitable for responsibility, promotions, or supervisory roles. They are often seen as working only for supplementary income and are believed to have higher absenteeism and special job privileges. Consequently, many women are funnelled into low-wage, traditional roles such as secretaries, clerical workers, and salesgirls, with limited opportunities for advancement.¹

Statistically, women are underrepresented in higher education and professional fields. For instance, in 1972, women earned only 43% of bachelor's degrees and even lower percentages in higher degrees and professional fields such as engineering, law, and business. This imbalance starts early, as girls are steered towards traditional roles through societal expectations and educational counselling. Despite some women breaking these barriers and entering non-traditional fields, they still face significant opposition and discrimination in hiring and promotions. For example, in education, although women make up a majority of the teaching staff, few hold decision-making roles such as school principals or superintendents. In business and industry, women are rarely found in high executive positions, and similar trends are observed in government and law.²

To overcome these challenges, women must assert themselves in seeking career-oriented education, demanding equal opportunities, and challenging stereotypes. They must advocate for fair representation and support other women in professional growth. As John Stuart Mill highlighted over a century ago, society loses immense talent by not fully utilizing women's capabilities. Women must lead in ensuring their talents are recognized and rewarded equitably, taking the "road less travelled" to make a significant difference in the fight for equality. This study focuses on identifying enablers and barriers to transformative work, shaped by

¹ Robertson W, 'The Ten Highest-Ranking Women in Big Business' (1973) 81-89 Fortune.

² Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, *Opportunities for Women in Higher Education; Their Current Participation, Prospects for the Future, and Recommendations for Action* (McGraw-Hill 1973).

entrenched gender roles dictating the division of labor between productive and reproductive spheres.³

2. Myths and stereotypes surrounding women

The poem by *William Walden*⁴ draws attention to prevalent stereotypes surrounding women, showcasing how they are often portrayed as delicate, emotional, and subordinate to men. Throughout the poem, women are depicted as having less physical strength ("dainty damsels"), communicating in a less assertive manner ("shrieking" instead of "roaring"), and being relegated to traditional roles such as homemakers and shoppers ("squaws"). Their actions like 'dipping' instead of 'plunging' or 'sipping' instead of 'gulping' are presented in a more polite or passive manner than that of man. For instance, even in leadership positions, women are depicted as mere supervisors while men are depicted as bosses, such representations give a clear message to women on how they should behave and what roles they should play in society. In general, the poem reflects the gender roles that have been typical for the female character as weak, sensitive, and dependent on a man. These stereotypes are not without an impact, particularly in that they reduce the chances of women being considered for leadership positions and perpetuate the culture of dominance in relationships. In order to encourage equality between genders and have a society where people do not have to conform to a gender stereotype, it is vital to challenge these images. Myths about women range from claims of physiological inferiority based on hormonal peculiarities to personal prejudices against women bosses. These myths persist in statements such as⁵:

- Women are subject to mental aberrations during menstrual periods and menopause.
- Women are ruled by feelings, moods, and attitudes, not by facts, reason, or logic.
- Women do not have orderly minds.
- Women are emotional and unstable.
- Women do not want responsibility on the job or promotions.

³ Dale CT, 'Women Are Still Missing Persons in Administrative and Supervisory Jobs' (1973) 123-124 Educational Leadership (National Council of Administrative Women in Education 1973).

⁴ Bemm S and Bemm DJ, Training the Woman to Know Her Place: The Social Antecedents of Women in the World of Work (Division of Personnel Services, Bureau of Instructional Support Services, Pennsylvania Department of Education 1973).

⁵ 'Two Hundred Faces for the Future' (1974) 320-321 Time, 15 July 1974.

- Women cannot handle jobs where they must supervise others.
- Women don't have executive ability or leadership skills.
- Women who strive to achieve are unfeminine and aggressive.
- Feminine women are not interested in getting ahead.
- Women's place is in the home. Family and career do not mix; one always suffers.
- Women work only for pin money and are not interested in being a permanent part of the labour force. Hiring them results in excessive job turnover and costs the company extra money.
- Women have a higher rate of absenteeism than men.
- Women want special privileges on the job.
- Traditional women's jobs are geared to their peculiar nature.
- Neither men nor women like to work for women bosses.

As a result of the perpetuation of these myths, women are still engineered into sex-stereotyped jobs that are at the lowest end of the wage scale. Forty to fifty percent of all women between the ages of eighteen and sixty-four are in the labour force. They must work to survive because they are single, widowed, divorced, or separated; to improve the economic status of their families because their husbands do not earn enough to support the family above the poverty level; or to help educate their children. Most of these women can expect to be gainfully employed for twenty-five to thirty years of their lives. However, the overwhelming majority of them are employed as secretaries, librarians, in the lowest paid white-collar jobs as keypunch operators, telephone operators, clerical workers, salesgirls, and bank tellers, on assembly lines, as waitresses, and in occupations related to homemaking, teaching, and nursing. Their earnings do not increase appreciably as they continue in employment.⁶

⁶ Delury G (ed), World Almanac and Book of Facts, 1974 (Doubleday & Co, Inc 1974).

3. Philosophy of Women Empowerment: Evolution of Feminism through Three Waves

According to the Oxford Dictionary, feminism is defined as a doctrine advocating for social and political rights for women equal to those possessed by men, embodying a movement aimed at acquiring such rights amidst the presence of feminine characteristics. It encompasses an intense awareness of female identity and an interest in addressing feminine issues, rooted in the historical subjugation of women, which is considered a fundamental cause of societal psychological disorders. Feminism comprises a range of movements striving for equal opportunities for women in education, politics, economics, social rights, and employment. Caroline Doxy-sten, in her article, traces the roots of feminism back to ancient Greece, highlighting its evolution through three waves.⁷

3.1. The First Wave (1830s-early 1900s)

The First Wave primarily focused on women's fight for equal contract and property rights, marking a period when political power, including the right to vote, was recognized as essential for effecting change. This wave addressed issues related to sexuality, reproduction, and economics, facing societal opposition but garnering support from modern thinkers. Despite initial challenges and lack of coordination, the First Wave demonstrated women's potential contributions, laying the groundwork for subsequent feminist movements aiming to combat social, cultural, and political inequalities.⁸

3.2. The Second Wave (1960s-1980s)

Building upon the struggles of the first phase, the Second Wave expanded the discourse initiated by its predecessor. This period addressed a broader spectrum of issues, encompassing workplace dynamics, sexuality, family structures, and reproductive rights. While the United States was undergoing societal restructuring, it became apparent that despite some advancements, such as increased political participation, women still faced significant challenges, notably the failure to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. Figures like Simone De Beauvoir and Betty Friedan profoundly influenced contemporary feminism during this era.

⁷ Srivastav, Sarika, "The Voice of Protest in the Novels of Manju Kapur" in *Novels of Manju Kapur: A Feminist Study*, edited by Ashok Kumar (New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2010), p. 88.

⁸ Id.

3.3.The Third Wave (1990s-present)

The Third Wave of feminism emerged as a response to the perceived shortcomings of its predecessor and aimed to advance the feminist legacy with new ideas. Unlike earlier waves, the term "feminism" is now more widely accepted, reflecting diverse feminist perspectives. Third-wave feminism or third-wave feminists focus on 'micro-politics' – the detailed, specific issues that women face today, such as intersectionality and individual experiences affected by race. Some of the early feminist views that were noticeable in this period included eco-cultural feminism, radical feminism, liberal reforms, electoral feminism, as well as academic feminism. Due to the progressivism of the previous waves, third-wave feminism is still grappling with issues like gender pay gaps and reproductive rights, while stressing the need to involve every voice in the process.

3.4.Contributions of Key Philosophers to Feminism

One of the most prominent male writers who advocate for the women's cause is John Stuart Mills, who takes a closer look at the issues raised by Wollstonecraft. This period saw the appearance of great philosophers, writers, authors, and feminists with concern for the welfare of feminism such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone De Beauvoir, Virginia Woolf, Juliet Mitchell, and Kate Millet. Their works paved the way for change and steering away from tradition by proving that women are not a minority or weak section of society that needs to be protected but capable of growth and development in feminism. Simone De Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" challenged the conventional images of womanhood and demanded the rights of women. Juliet Mitchell analyzed the processes of the female psyche and focused on the issue of women's emancipation. Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" highlighted social disadvantages hindering women's success and proposed remedies for empowerment. Kate Millet's "Sexual Politics" urged an end to discrimination based on gender. Writers like Germaine Greer, Elaine Show Walter, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar further contributed to feminist discourse, expanding the scope of women's studies and challenging patriarchal norms. Feminism evolved into different philosophies, including Radical Feminism, Liberal Feminism, and Rational Feminism, fostering a deeper understanding of gender dynamics. The movement witnessed a shift towards representing biological differences and enhancing women's experiences, furthering the trajectory of female empowerment worldwide, including in India,

where the women's movement began as a social reform movement in the nineteenth century, advocating for liberty, equality, and fraternity.⁹

3.5.Tracing the Roots of Indian Feminism

Indian feminism finds its origins in ancient Indian literature, where women often lacked equal rights. Epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, revolving around characters like Sita and Draupadi, highlighted the complexities and challenges faced by women. Draupadi, in particular, challenged the male ego, earning her the title of the first feminist in Indian mythology. Balram Das, a poet of the 16th century from Orissa, had anticipated Western feminism by centuries as he had written the "Lakshmi Purana" and had enlightened the society to liberate women and introduced the concept of feminism. The Indian women novelists in English have come into the mainstream of the contemporary world as the major writers who have dealt with themes like the conflict between tradition and modernity, women's search for identity, and the identity crises of male-dominated societies. There are Anita Desai, Kamla Markendaya, Ruth Praver Jhabwala, and others, who present heroines who struggle against the conventions and fight for women's rights. In the post-1980s, women's writing in English by Indian women began to receive more attention, and writers like Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur, and Anita Nair offered complex depictions of women in their societies, discussing women's existence in dreadful conditions. The Indian writer Githa Hariharan in her novels "The Thousand Faces of Night" and "When Dreams Travel" describes women's dreams and struggles for their individuality in male-dominated societies. Kapur's works, such as A Married Woman, Home, and Custody contain bold female characters who struggle with the question of freedom and identity in the modern world. Novels by Anita Nair including "Ladies Coupe" and "Mistress" show social rebellion by women in their search for their own identity and freedom.¹⁰

3.5.1. Writers contribution to the feminist discourse in India, addressing issues of social justice and gender equality

The selection of Indian feminist writings reveals a rich tapestry of female voices and concerns to address gender issues and women's emancipation in specific social settings. Nonetheless, the latest generation of Indian feminine writers such as Arundhati Roy and Shobha De do not cease to explore the limits and break stereotypes and present more liberal views on the roles of women and men in society. Their works reflect the subject matter as

⁹ Miller, Jean Baker, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976).

¹⁰ Beauvoir, Simon de, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.H. Parshley (London: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 543.

they depict women's struggles and gender issues, and call for change. Indian feminism can therefore be described as an ever-advancing movement that has its origin in the Indian cultural and literary society. It remains a beacon of hope for women and provides a voice to women and a platform to air their issues at the national and international levels.

3.5.2. **The Progressive Mission of Feminism**

- i. **Feminism stands as a progressive ideology, a mission, and a movement advocating for gender equality:** It is not merely about opposing family and marriage but seeks to transform these institutions to eradicate all forms of oppression, including gender-based domination. In the context of India, feminism strives to create a future where women receive equal respect as men, are unburdened by the weight of familial responsibilities, and are free to express themselves effectively in society.
- ii. **The research on the waves and development of feminism in India illuminates the work of three novelists:** The above writers portray modern women who defy traditional stereotypes of self-sacrifice and submission. Instead, their protagonists exhibit self-assurance, assertiveness, education, and ambition, challenging societal norms and asserting their identities. These women navigate the complexities of blending traditional values with modern aspirations, striving to find balance and solace.
- iii. **The introduction of the English language and literature by British rulers played a pivotal role in India's intellectual transformation:** Initially met with suspicion and resistance, English gradually gained acceptance for its advantages in accessing knowledge. Visionaries like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee advocated for English, recognizing its potential to disseminate Renaissance ideas and foster intellectual growth. The translation of revered Indian texts into English marked the beginning of a new era, facilitating a deeper understanding of feminist ideals. While Western philosophy influenced Indian writers, they were not mere imitators. Indian novelists in English inherit dual traditions—one rooted in native culture and the other influenced by Western exposure. This fusion of traditions presents a challenging yet enriching landscape for writers, characterized by experimentation and the articulation of unique perspectives.¹¹
- iv. **The feminist movements from the West sparked a revolution in Indian society, challenging the notion of women as property:** Nayantara Sahgal, an Indian novelist,

¹¹ An Interview with Manju Kapur, Faber book club guides, <http://media.faber.co.uk/reading-list/a-married-woman.pdf> (2002), accessed on 27th May, 2024.

vehemently rejects the idea of women as possessions, advocating for their autonomy and dignity. This awareness among women writers contributes to shaping the image of the "New Women of India," who strive to break free from conventional roles and embrace radical change. Feminism in Indian writing in English serves as a modest attempt to explore various feminist concepts. The diverse social dimensions of India, including its multicultural, multilingual, and multireligious landscape, contribute to a nuanced understanding of women's issues among middle-class and upper-class women.¹²

4. Women's Participation in non-traditional Occupations

4.1. Non-Traditional Livelihoods: Bridging Gendered Divides in Work

The significance of Non-Traditional Livelihoods (NTLs) emerges from a concerted effort to dismantle barriers hindering women's access to, and sustenance in, various occupations within the Indian economy. These livelihoods aim to challenge gender stereotypes by introducing women into typically male-dominated roles such as e-rickshaw drivers, mechanics, and masons. Despite efforts primarily focused on training women for these roles, the operationalization of NTLs varies across organizations, with definitions emphasizing the need to break stereotypes and empower women economically, socially, and politically. However, these efforts often fall short of addressing systemic gender biases inherent in market demand, supply systems, and policy mechanisms. The historical essentialization of women's roles within the domestic sphere and low-productivity roles in the labour economy underscores the need for transformative approaches. While training programs equip women with technical and life skills, they also challenge prevailing gender norms, fostering self-confidence and questioning gender-based binaries.

¹² Chaman, Nahal, "Feminism in English Fiction: Forms and Variations" in *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English*, edited by Sushila Singh (New Delhi: Prestige Books, 2013), p. 17.

4.2. Women are increasingly pursuing non-traditional occupations, seeking to overcome longstanding cultural, discriminatory, contractual, and legal barriers that have excluded or marginalized them from certain fields.

Often attracted by better pay and a desire to follow their interests or challenge societal norms, women are entering roles where they comprise 25 percent or less of total employment, as defined by the US Dept. of Labor Women's Bureau. However, this categorization masks significant challenges, as many women in manual "blue-collar" jobs, as well as managerial, scientific, and professional positions, find themselves in the minority and face various forms of adversity, from lack of training to harassment and isolation. The literature on non-traditional jobs encompasses diverse disciplines, exploring factors such as economic organization, gender stereotyping, intersectionality, labour policies, and empowerment. Addressing the persistently low representation of women in these fields requires dismantling racial and gender barriers, which are deeply ingrained in the organization and regulation of employment on national and global scales.¹³

4.3. Segmented employment

It refers to a structural arrangement where work in the secondary sector is characterized by its temporary nature, lower wages, and diminished social status compared to the primary sector. Furthermore, each of these sectors is internally subdivided into upper and lower categories. Together, the primary and secondary sectors constitute the formal economy, subject to nominal state regulation and enforcement. In contrast, the informal sector operates under looser regulatory frameworks. In the global South, the formal sector employs a relatively small percentage of workers compared to the global North, where it is more expansive. However, even in the global North, a significant underground economy exists, often relying on migrant labor.¹⁴

4.4. The term "nontraditional" job takes on a distinct meaning in the global South, where labor-intensive economies and large informal sectors are prevalent.

It is common for women to engage in male-dominated occupations beyond 25 percent, echoing historical practices such as women and children working alongside men in coal mines during Great Britain's preindustrial era. Throughout impoverished communities worldwide, women

¹³ Adubra, A. L. (2005) *Non-traditional Occupations, Empowerment, and Women: A Case of Togolese Women*. Routledge

¹⁴ Id.

and children often undertake physically demanding labor. Status, influenced by factors like gender, nationality, race, and caste, plays a crucial role in controlling and organizing employment. Gender stereotypes are frequently exploited by employers to justify paying women less, while male workers use them to uphold their entitlement to higher-paying skilled jobs. In regions like East and South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, a significant portion of the population engages in family-based agriculture, with many seeking temporary work in construction and mining during the fallow season. Women in countries like India, Pakistan, and China have historically participated in construction and related activities, performing tasks like carrying headloads since the 16th century. However, despite their substantial contribution to artisanal mining, women are often relegated to secondary roles, with men receiving higher pay for primary tasks.¹⁵

4.5. The demand for low-paid labor in labor-intensive economies

- i. This situation coupled with labor shortages in the global North, drives the employment of women in traditionally male-dominated occupations.

Historical events like World War I and II saw women in the US taking on skilled roles in defense plants and shipyards, but such opportunities often diminished post-conflict. Paradoxically, the rise of industries like the prison and military complex has created nontraditional job opportunities for women, particularly women of color. International bodies, such as the UN, have played a role in promoting gender equality in nontraditional fields through initiatives like the Decade for Women.¹⁶

- ii. States can influence gender and racial equality in employment through ideological campaigns and government funding initiatives

Marxist-based countries like the former Soviet Union and China used state power to integrate women into male-dominated fields. However, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of international migration, state support for gender inclusion has waned in post-socialist economies. Scholarly research emphasizes the importance of political will in achieving gender equality in employment. Studies comparing efforts in Eastern

¹⁵ Byrne, J., Clarke, L., & Van Der Meer, M. (2005) Gender and ethnic minority exclusion from skilled occupations in construction: a Western European comparison. *Construction Management and Economics*, 23(10), 1025-1034.

¹⁶ Clarke, L., Pedersen, E. F., Michielsens, E., Susman, B., & Wall, C. (2004) Women in construction pp. 8-22. CLR/Reed Business Information.

Europe with those in Northern Europe highlight the role of stable, unionized work environments in facilitating women's inclusion in nontraditional jobs. Similarly, in the United States, legal battles and social movements have led to legislative interventions aimed at breaking down barriers to gender and racial equality in employment.¹⁷

- iii. Organized labor has been ambivalent about women and minorities entering male-dominated fields, often reflecting entrenched biases.

While some progress has been made through the efforts of social movements and legislative actions, challenges persist in achieving true gender and racial equality in employment. Understanding the intersectionality of class consciousness with constructions of masculinity and racial identity is essential for developing effective strategies to address gender and racial stereotyping in the organization of work. By analyzing traditional and non-traditional roles through the lens of household, market, and state institutions, the study aims to identify factors that improve or impede women's positions in the labor market. Departing from binary categorizations, the study reframes NTLs within the broader economy, emphasizing women's paid work in relation to household dynamics, market forces, and state policies. Employing an intersectional approach, the study recognizes the influence of social identities such as class, caste, and geographical location on women's choices and opportunities in the workforce. While acknowledging the influence of caste and class hierarchies on job accessibility, the study focuses on unraveling the pervasive impact of harmful gender norms across diverse socio-economic contexts, ultimately aiming to inform transformative interventions that empower women economically and socially.¹⁸

5. Empowering Women in 21st Century India: A Multi-dimensional Challenge

In the fast-emerging global power that is 21st-century India, the struggle for dignity persists among half of its population: women. Despite constitutional guarantees, legislative safeguards, and policy initiatives, gender disparity remains entrenched in various spheres, from employment to healthcare and property rights. The attention given to women's issues is still insufficient, reflecting a gap between constitutional ideals and ground realities. Discrimination

¹⁷ Chin, C. B. (2008) *Cruising in the global economy: Profits, pleasure and work at sea*. Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

¹⁸ Amott, T., & Mattaei, J. A. (1991) *Race, gender, and work: A multicultural economic history of women in the United States*. Black Rose Books Ltd.

against women is evident from birth, with a declining sex ratio underscoring societal biases. Women encounter harassment and violence daily, including domestic abuse, rape, and dowry-related crimes, exacerbated by cultural portrayals in media. Despite international recognition and national efforts, such as UN declarations and legislative measures, the situation for women remains challenging. While constitutional and legal provisions aim to ensure equality and protection, implementation gaps persist, necessitating a more robust response. Government policies, spanning education, health, economics, and the legal system, seek to address these challenges, promoting women's participation and empowerment across sectors. Initiatives like reservations in local governance, laws against domestic violence, and the creation of specialized ministries underscore India's commitment to women's advancement. However, progress requires concerted efforts to bridge gaps in education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and legal rights. Institutional mechanisms at central and state levels play a crucial role in implementation, requiring adequate resources and capacity-building. Special initiatives, including statistical improvements and dedicated action plans, demonstrate ongoing efforts to address gender disparities comprehensively. Women are the wealth of India and have contributed to almost every field, making the country proud on numerous occasions. They lead the country, achieve milestones, and serve as a source of inspiration for many. In various domains like politics, bureaucracy, socio-cultural activities, sports, and business, Indian women have excelled and continue to make significant contributions. The leaders who have set benchmarks in political leadership include President Pratibha Patil, Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar, UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Chief Ministers Mayawati and Sheila Dixit. On the socio-cultural front, some people who have made notable contributions are Medha Patkar, Arundhati Roy, Lata Mangeshkar, Rekha and others. In sports, there are many talented players like Sania Mirza in Tennis and Saina Nehwal in Badminton who have given a good name to the nation. Moreover, in the business and corporate world, women like Kiran Mazumdar, Naina Lal Kidwai, and Indra Nooyi have emerged as great icons and had great success. It is not only at the grassroots level that women are active but also in the decision-making processes. Jyoti Naik, Kiran Mazumdar, Naina Lal Kidwai, Ritu Kumar are some of the most inspiring leaders and social icons who are working in their respective fields and actively contributing towards the overall growth and development of the nation through their corporate initiatives. Nevertheless, these successes are accompanied by the cold realities of a society that discriminates and neglects women in India right from the time they are born. This discrimination is evident in, for instance, poor diet, restricted education and health, and property rights, and other problems such as child labor and domestic violence. This fear of

being sexually violated is another factor that limits women's freedom and how they conduct themselves. Solving these problems involves confronting the underlying causes of gender discrimination in societies that are prejudiced against women. The former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stressed the importance of women's roles and rights for economic development and focused on the fact that women have to be considered as active agents and equal players. Despite strides made, the following current perspectives despite technological advancement, reveal a continuing struggle for women's rights and dignity, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the challenge and the imperative for sustained action towards true gender equality in India:

5.1. *The patriarchal social framework, reinforced by practices like son preference, dowry, and the tag of 'Parayadhan' (translated as "someone else's wealth"), perpetuates the subordinate status of women*

Consequently, women are not only entitled to survival but also to a life with dignity, grace, and equal opportunities to reach their full potential. In response to these challenges, various laws and initiatives have been implemented to protect women's rights in India which aimed at safeguarding women's rights and promoting gender equality. Moreover, political initiatives like the reservation of one-third of seats for women in local elected bodies through the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts have aimed to enhance women's political participation and empowerment. However, despite progress, women remain underrepresented in governance and decision-making processes.

5.2. *In the realm of media, particularly in films, women are often depicted through stereotypical lenses that do not reflect real-life experiences*

This portrayal perpetuates damaging stereotypes and undermines women's true capabilities and agency. It's crucial for future films to break away from these stereotypes and depict women as independent thinkers capable of choosing their own paths and careers. Gender equality should be emphasized, with women portrayed as equal partners in economic management and decision-making within households, rather than mere objects of worship or pleasure. Mainstream school curricula should also include material addressing prevalent gender misconceptions and promoting gender equality. Government initiatives are essential in promoting women's dignity and rights, as gender equality is not just a goal but a prerequisite for reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development, and fostering good governance, as

emphasized by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Women are increasingly organizing themselves to overcome societal challenges and realize their full potential. To support this progress, new institutions with updated norms and rules are needed to foster equal and respectful relations between women and men in all spheres of life.¹⁹

5.3. Female athletes encounter various issues that hinder their participation and success in sports

These include inadequate funding compared to male athletics, pervasive sexism in both professional and personal spheres, and disparities in access to sports facilities and equipment. Safety concerns, social attitudes, and limited media coverage further compound these challenges, along with the balancing act required between motherhood and sports careers. However, increasing women's participation in sports is crucial for promoting physical and mental health, achieving gender parity, and fostering economic empowerment. To address these issues and promote gender equality in sports, safeguard measures against sexual harassment have been implemented, including legislative acts and support mechanisms. Moving forward, concerted efforts are needed to overcome cultural and societal barriers, improve infrastructure, identify talent, and raise awareness at the grassroots level to accelerate the development of sports in India and achieve greater gender equality in the field. In India, a notable proportion of both men and women engage in sports viewership, with almost two-thirds of men (64%) and nearly half of women (45%) tuning in to watch professional men's sports. Interestingly, women in India show comparable interest to men in watching professional women's sports, with 37% of women and 35% of men participating in this aspect of sports viewership. Conversely, in Singapore, there is a pronounced gender gap in sports viewership, particularly in professional men's sports, where two-fifths of men (41%) contrast sharply with just over a tenth of women (15%). Similarly, only a small percentage of women in Singapore report watching women's professional sports (11%), compared to 18% of men. Additionally, men in Singapore are twice as likely as women to participate in sports activities. In Denmark, while there is a smaller disparity between men and women watching professional men's sports (60% vs 40%), men still lead in this aspect. Moreover, men are nine points more likely than women to watch professional women's sports (34% v. 23%). These findings collectively

¹⁹ Nupur Kumari, "Portrayal of gender inequality in Bollywood Cinema" (unpublished academic paper, Academia.edu, accessed on [26th May'24]), [https://www.academia.edu/12314094/Portrayal_of_gender_inequality_in_Bollywood_Cinema].

indicate that despite recent advancements in women's sports globally, there remains a significant opportunity for growth in sports engagement among women.²⁰

5.4. Addressing Gender Disparities in the Real Estate and Construction Sector

Women are significantly underrepresented in the real estate and construction sector, particularly in managerial and technical roles, resulting in a lack of diversity in the workforce. Despite women forming the backbone of the construction workforce, there persists a perception of male domination in the real estate industry, hindering women's progress. The presence of a glass ceiling further restricts women's advancement to leadership positions. Limited skilling opportunities, engagement in the informal economy, and a gender pay gap in fields like architecture exacerbate challenges for women in the sector. Moreover, their representation in technical roles remains low, with many employed as casual laborers facing unstable employment conditions. To address these disparities, concerted efforts are needed to provide skilling opportunities, promote diversity, and create an inclusive environment. The report by the World Trade Center and Primus Partners underscores the importance of recognizing women's contributions, tackling wage inequality, and implementing reforms for a more diverse workforce. Recommendations include launching national campaigns, involving men in solutions, and collaborating with the government and major organizations to dispel the notion of male dominance. Additionally, initiatives like the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act 2016 (RERA) are crucial for promoting transparency and professionalism in the sector.²¹

5.5. From the perspective of the judiciary and police, the presence and impact of women in the judiciary

Understanding the role of women in the judiciary necessitates grasping the judiciary's function as the interpreter and enforcer of the law, ensuring fair and impartial application. Historically, women's representation in the judiciary has been minimal due to socio-cultural barriers and systemic biases within the legal system, resulting in a lack of diversity and inclusion. Efforts to increase diversity in the judiciary are imperative to address this underrepresentation and ensure a more equitable court system. Statistical analyses reveal stark disparities in the

²⁰ The Great Divide: Exploring the Gender Gap in Sports Viewership (YouGov, n.d.)

<<https://business.yougov.com/content/46311-the-great-divide-exploring-gender-gap-in-sports-viewership>> accessed 26 May 2024.

²¹ <https://www.primuspartners.in/docs/documents/Pink%20collar%20Thought%20Leadership%205%20Jan.pdf> accessed 22 May 2024.

representation of women in the judiciary, highlighting the need for proactive measures to enhance female participation. Research indicates that a higher presence of women in the judiciary correlates with positive outcomes, such as better protection for victims of domestic violence, reduced gender-related pay gaps, and enhanced prosecution of corruption cases. Therefore, prioritizing the appointment and hiring of more women in the judiciary is crucial to fostering a fairer and more balanced legal system, ultimately contributing to a more equitable society. Justice to women cannot always be served without women. Further, there is pressing need to empower women within Indian policing, spurred by recent legislative strides such as the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act 2023, which aims to reserve one-third of legislative seats for women. Despite this, the representation of women in the police force remains alarmingly low, standing at only 11.7% of the total State police force as of January 2022. This underlines the importance of enhancing female representation within law enforcement, given their crucial roles in legal mandates, specialized tasks, and addressing crimes against women effectively. However, numerous challenges hinder women's entry and progression in the police force, ranging from recruitment hurdles to poor implementation of reservation policies. To address this, the editorial proposes various solutions, including creating a supportive work environment, preventing sexual harassment, providing basic infrastructure, and launching special recruitment drives. Ultimately, tackling societal perceptions and stereotypes is essential to encourage more women to pursue careers in law enforcement, thereby fostering a more inclusive and effective police force.²²

5.6. Women Entrepreneurs in India's MSME Sector

Experts have identified social norms and stereotyping as some of the factors that limit women's economic mobility. More so, the issue of credit, loans and financial services remains a challenge to women entrepreneurs in urban areas because they lack property, assets and collateral to secure loans and experience high levels of discrimination in credit facilities. Despite the current attempts to push for women's representation, only 20% of women are involved in MSMEs in India, as revealed by the NSSO 73rd Round. This is due to the present culture, gender stereotyping, and lack of an enabling environment for women and girls. However, limited availability of education and training opportunities are some of the challenges that hinder women entrepreneurs. In order to meet these challenges, specific training

²² Newslaundry, 'Women in the Police Force: Numbers and Beyond' (Newslaundry, 20 August 2015) <https://www.newslaundry.com/2015/08/20/women-in-the-police-force-numbers-and-beyond> accessed 22 May 2024.

interventions that provide business management skills, technical training and or/ and mentorship should be implemented. Other key factors that cannot be overlooked include networking and mentorship programs for the growth and sustenance of women-led MSMEs. Additionally, studies highlight significant obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs in accessing capital, loans, and financial services, attributed to limited property ownership, lack of collateral, and discriminatory lending practices. Lakshmi Venkataraman Venkatesan, Founding and Managing Trustee of BYST, reports that around 85% of women entrepreneurs encounter difficulties in obtaining loan services from nationalized banks, underscoring the urgency to eliminate systemic barriers and support women's entrepreneurial endeavors effectively.²³

6. Constitutional and Legal Provisions for Women's Empowerment in India

6.1. Following are the constitutional provisions reflect India's commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, addressing challenges across various sectors and striving towards inclusive development²⁴:-

1. **Equality before Law (Article 14):** The Indian Constitution ensures equal treatment under the law for all citizens, irrespective of gender, laying the foundation for gender equality.
2. **Non-discrimination (Article 15):** Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, empowering the state to make special provisions for women and children.
3. **Equality of Opportunity in Employment (Article 16):** This article mandates equal opportunities in matters of employment or appointment to any office under the state, prohibiting discrimination based on gender.

²³ Economic Times, 'Unlocking Potential: Why Women's Participation Remains Low Among MSMEs and What Can Be Done About It' (The Economic Times, 15 May 2023) <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/small-biz/sme-sector/unlocking-potential-why-womens-participation-remains-low-among-msmes-and-what-can-be-done-about-it/articleshow/105463763.cms?from=mdr> accessed 22 May 2024.

²⁴ C. J. Nair, "Women empowerment in India, still a distant dream", <http://www.merineews.com/article/women-empowerment-in-india-still-a-distant-dream/124708.shtml>, published on 10 April 2007, Accessed on 15 May'24.

4. **Right to Livelihood (Article 39(a)):** The state is directed to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally, the right to an adequate means of livelihood, ensuring economic empowerment.
5. **Equal Pay for Equal Work (Article 39(d)):** The Constitution mandates equal pay for equal work for both men and women, ensuring gender parity in remuneration.
6. **Protection from Exploitation (Article 42):** The state is directed to make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief, safeguarding women's rights in the workplace.
7. **Promotion of Educational and Economic Interests (Article 46):** The state is mandated to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of weaker sections of society, including women, protecting them from social injustice and exploitation.
8. **Health and Public Hygiene (Article 47):** The state is tasked with raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living and improving public health, addressing women's health needs and ensuring access to healthcare.
9. **Dignity of Women (Article 51(A)(e)):** The Constitution calls for renouncing practices derogatory to the dignity of women, promoting gender sensitivity and respect.

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6.2. The following are the legislative provisions reflect India's commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, addressing challenges across various sectors and striving towards inclusive development²⁵:-

1. **The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005:** This law aims to protect women from domestic violence by providing for the issuance of protection orders, residence orders, and monetary reliefs, among other provisions. It covers physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, and economic abuse within domestic relationships.
2. **The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013:** This legislation mandates the prevention and redressal of sexual

²⁵ Id.

harassment at workplaces, requiring employers to establish Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) and providing for redressal mechanisms for victims.

3. **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961:** This law prohibits the giving or taking of dowry before, during, or after marriage. It aims to prevent the practice of dowry, which often leads to harassment, abuse, and violence against women.
4. **The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005:** This law aims to protect women from domestic violence by providing for the issuance of protection orders, residence orders, and monetary reliefs, among other provisions. It covers physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, and economic abuse within domestic relationships.
5. **The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986:** This legislation prohibits the indecent representation of women in advertisements, publications, or any form of media that portrays women in a derogatory or exploitative manner.
6. **The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006:** This act prohibits the solemnization of child marriages and makes it a punishable offense. It aims to protect the rights of girls and prevent early marriage, which often leads to adverse health and social consequences.
7. **The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961:** This law regulates the employment of women during and after childbirth, providing maternity leave, maternity benefits, and other protections to ensure the health and well-being of mothers and their children.
8. **The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013:** Enacted in response to the Nirbhaya case, this law introduced amendments to the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), and the Indian Evidence Act to strengthen laws related to sexual offenses against women, including rape and sexual assault.
9. **Overview of Provisions for Women Workers in Indian Labour Laws-** The provisions of the labour laws of India are very extensive to protect the rights and welfare of women workers in different sectors. Welfare measures provided under other enactments like the Factories Act, 1948 include the facility of canteen, washing rooms and crèche for women employees in factories to meet their health, hygiene and childcare requirements. Measures required under the Factories Act and Maternity

Benefit Act, 1961 ensure the health and well-being of women during and after pregnancy, including time for breaks to nurse and medical amenities. The Factories Act and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013, are measures that ensure the provision of a safe workplace environment and the absence of sexual harassment, encouraging gender equality. Laws such as the Employee State Insurance Act, 1948, and the Employees' Provident Funds Act, 1952, provide for women employees and ensure social security measures of financial support and pensions. Laws like the Trade Unions Act of 1926 and the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947 uphold the rights of workers and allow for the settlement of disputes, including the protection of women as outlined below. Additional provisions made under the Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, 2020 help in improving the safety measures at the workplace and in the employment of women, the Code on Wages, 2019 lays stress on wages for equal work. In sum, all these provisions aim at creating protective and safe working conditions for women, acknowledging, and combating the difficulties women face in the labor market, while employers have the major responsibility to enforce the existing legal requirements and contribute to the elimination of discrimination.

10. International Cooperation: The Policy will aim at the implementation of international obligations/commitments in all sectors on the empowerment of women such as the Convention on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD+5) and other such instruments. International, regional and sub-regional cooperation towards the empowerment of women will continue to be encouraged through the sharing of experiences, exchange of ideas and technology, networking with institutions and organizations and through bilateral and multi-lateral partnerships.

These laws, along with others related to property rights, inheritance, and equal pay, form a comprehensive legal framework aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of women in India. However, effective implementation and enforcement remain crucial to ensure their efficacy in addressing gender-based violence and discrimination.²⁶

²⁶ Rehana Ghadijally (ed), *Women in Indian Society: A Reader* (Sage Publications, 1988) 12-17.

7. Unpacking Barriers to Women's Work: Understanding Gendered Assumptions and Economic Realities

7.1. The world of work for women is not neatly divided into traditional and non-traditional sectors but is intricately shaped by prevailing gender norms across households, markets, and the state

Barriers to women's entry into non-traditional domains of work are manifold, with limited social support and sanctions hindering progress. Conversely, enablers for such transitions are scarce, exacerbating existing challenges. Definitions of non-traditional work are context-dependent, influenced by women's social positioning, further complicating their access to opportunities. To comprehend the transformative potential of work in women's lives, a comprehensive inquiry is necessary, amplifying their voices and narratives. Understanding gender assumptions and stereotypical expectations is crucial for grasping societal roles and their reflection in the economy. Gender equality yields improved social and economic outcomes, necessitating concerted efforts to dismantle gender-related barriers. Despite efforts, women's workforce participation rates in India continue to decline, attributed to various factors including educational pursuits, household mobility, and limited job availability suitable for women. Mechanization also contributes to women exiting traditional sectors.²⁷

7.2. Understanding Factors Influencing Women's Employment

Various factors exist shaping women's participation in the workforce, including rising household incomes, educational opportunities, patriarchal norms, and the burden of unpaid care work. This includes both common points of friction and congruence across the household, the state, and the market. The following sections dissect the enablers and barriers faced by women at the individual and household levels, drawing from narratives and experiences gathered during the study²⁸:-

1. **Entering the Workforce:** Women's journey from households to the labor market involves a complex interplay of factors. Graduates, in particular, often undergo specialized skills training to enhance their employability. Enrollment in skilling institutes, facilitated by central and state initiatives or private colleges, offers avenues

²⁷ Braundy, M. (Summer, 2004). Dewey's technological literacy: Past, present, and future. *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2.

²⁸ Bharati Ray, *Women of India: Colonial and Post-colonial Periods (History of Science, Philosophy, and Culture in Indian Civilization, Part 3*, Sage Publications, 2005).

for job search and access to market opportunities. Despite variations in educational quality, these initiatives bridge the gap between job seekers and employers, increasing the likelihood of employment post-graduation. However, women's choices in education and employment are frequently influenced and controlled by male household members, underscoring the power dynamics within households.

2. **Graduate Level Education followed by Skills Training:** Many women pursued graduate-level education before enrolling in skills training programs. These initiatives, ranging from government schemes to private courses, equip women with job-search strategies and access to employment opportunities. The decision to enroll in skilling institutes is often influenced by male family members, reflecting control over women's educational and career choices. Additionally, women in distress-driven employment, such as Anganwadi workers, join the workforce to support their families financially.
3. **Need for Additional Income at Home:** Anganwadi workers, for instance, join the workforce without any skills to do a specific job, due to the demand for an additional source of income in the household. In matters concerning education and employment, women's autonomy is somewhat restricted by male family members' decisions. Marital status further compounds these dynamics, as women give up control of their marital families. Thus, male breadwinner discourse continues to shape the gendered division of labor and decision-making in households.
4. **Gender Dynamics in Workforce Participation:** Women's involvement in skilling institutions or employment also undergoes influence from male members in the home, thereby limiting their options. For example, the Anganwadi workers, due to poverty, enter the job market without any training, which can be explained by the gendered nature of poverty. Moreover, class differences play a role in education and training opportunities as well as resource utilization in women's skills.
5. **Gendered Division of Labor and Household Responsibilities:** Family obligations, especially in marriage and childbearing, affect women's employment status, as most women are left with the responsibility of providing care to the family. This is because women are usually left with the responsibility of performing most of the house chores and thus they are forced to juggle between paid work and house work in a very complex way. However, the roles of women and men have changed over the years, but male-dominated gender stereotypes still limit women's opportunities in the labor market and strengthen occupational segregation.

6. **Women's Income and Household Bargaining Power:** While women's earnings increase the amount of income available to the household, it may not improve their bargaining power within the household. Economic activity reduces the cost of domestic work, but the employment of women does not necessarily lead to increased independence in resource allocation. Women's income can be used to perform various tasks to negotiate different aspects of household relations and showcase the relationship between women's economic roles and household power relations. When the woman earns the same or even more than the man, she gets to be more in charge of how the money is spent. This increase in autonomy is often linked with substantive benefits to the family, for example, in the areas of asset acquisition and education.
7. **Desirable Workplace Conditions for Women:** The macroeconomic data evidence the increasing number of women seeking formal paid employment, especially in the urban areas. However, due to a lack of white-collar job vacancies, the number of qualified females has not been met by the available opportunities and, therefore, the female labor force participation rate has been declining. Hence, although income is an important determinant of employment and women's status, they also gain value from the recognition and identity that work affords them. The articles reveal that employment provides people with the chance for self-fulfillment, social relationships, and purpose in life besides the aspect of being paid for work. Women want positions that will give them socially acceptable status and occupational respectability. Employment and career advancement, as well as adherence to such professional standards as formal working environment, provide women with a higher status at home and in the community.
8. **Gender segregation in employment persists due to cultural assumptions and biases:** The gender gap widens as women are limited to low-skill and low-wage occupations while men take charge of core business positions. While the government has launched various programs to reverse the declining trend in women's workforce participation by developing skills and promoting entrepreneurship, issues such as the absence of gender-sensitive policies, integration issues, and difficulties in preserving progressive policies still remain. The Internet is revolutionizing work and creating new sources of freelance work for women in the gig economy, but these positions have risks that endanger the lives of women and do not entitle them to social security, especially if they are immigrants. To promote and increase employment opportunities for both genders, it is crucial for the policymaker to look at structural barriers to employment, educational attainment, cross-cutting of government departments, and the formalization

of legislations that provide for women's safety as well as the implementation of progressive policies in the labour market which help in making the labour markets more gender sensitive.

These narratives underscore the intersectionality of class, gender, and household dynamics in shaping women's access to education, training, and employment opportunities. While initiatives like skills training programs aim to enhance women's employability, structural barriers and patriarchal norms continue to hinder their participation in the labor markets.

8. Government schemes and other initiatives for Women's Empowerment

8.1. In India, where there are over 15.7 million women-owned enterprises and women are driving the start-up ecosystem, female entrepreneurship is gaining ground with an anticipated rise of 90% in the next five years

Despite this growing zeal, women entrepreneurs still face challenges such as gender bias, lack of funding, and inadequate support. In response to these difficulties, the Indian government has introduced several programs to assist female entrepreneurs. These include the Mudra Yojana, aimed at providing financial support with a special focus on women entrepreneurs, offering loans on easy terms and lower interest rates. The Stand-Up India Scheme promotes entrepreneurship among marginalized communities, providing bank loans specifically to women entrepreneurs. The Mahila Coir Yojana empowers women by subsidizing spinning equipment and providing skill development training. The Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) offers collateral-free financing, with a higher extent of guarantee cover for women-owned enterprises. The Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) and the Udyam Shakti Portal assist in business planning and provide mentorship for women entrepreneurs. The Economic Empowerment of Women Enterprises and Start-up by Women scheme and the Trade-Related Entrepreneurship Assistance and Development (TREAD) initiative further support female micro-entrepreneurs with incubation programs and financial assistance. Through these schemes, the government aims to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in business across India.²⁹

²⁹ ResearchGate, 'Government Schemes: A Tool for Women Empowerment' (ResearchGate) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/376312677_Government_Schemes_A_tool_for_Women_Empowerment accessed 22 May 2024.

8.2. The National Crèche Scheme, a centrally sponsored initiative, aims to facilitate women's participation in the workforce by providing a safe environment for their children

Despite disruptions due to COVID-19, the scheme has resumed operations following widespread vaccination and economic reopening, now included under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). Particularly beneficial for the construction sector, on-site crèches promote female employment by alleviating childcare responsibilities. Inspired by global models like Japan, mobile crèches have been introduced in Delhi for construction workers' children. Additionally, the E-Shram Portal responds to the pandemic's impact on vulnerable workers, particularly women in low-skill construction jobs lacking social security benefits, highlighting the need for improved support systems for maternal and general welfare.

8.3. Other Indian government schemes and initiatives to empower women and address various challenges they face³⁰

1. **National Commission for Women (NCW):** Established in 1992, the NCW is a statutory body tasked with studying and monitoring matters related to constitutional and legal safeguards for women, advocating for their rights.
2. **Reservation for Women in Panchayats and Municipalities:** The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992 ensured one-third of the total seats for women in elected offices at the local level, enhancing their political participation.
3. **National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001):** This policy aims to advance women's development across all spheres of life, promoting gender-sensitive legal systems, institutional mechanisms, and international cooperation.
4. **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005:** Enacted to provide immediate and emergent relief to women facing violence within the family, this law aims to protect their rights and ensure justice.
5. **Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD):** Established in 2006, MWCD is the nodal ministry for the advancement of women and children, responsible for formulating and implementing policies and programs for their welfare.

³⁰ Id.

6. **Special Initiatives:** The government has undertaken various initiatives like the National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000), focusing on the survival, protection, and development of girl children, and ESCAP projects for improving gender statistics.
7. **Institutional Mechanisms:** The government has strengthened institutional mechanisms at central and state levels, including National and State Councils for Women, to oversee policy implementation and provide resources and training.
8. **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme:** Launched in 2015, focuses on ensuring the survival, protection, and education of girl children to counteract declining sex ratios.
9. **Working Women Hostel Scheme:** Provides safe accommodation and daycare facilities for working women.
10. **One Stop Centre Scheme:** Offers comprehensive assistance to women affected by gender-based violence, funded through the Nirbhaya fund.
11. **Women Helpline Scheme:** Provides 24x7 emergency responses to victims of violence.
12. **Mahila Police Volunteers Scheme:** Enhances police-community outreach.
13. **Support to Training and Employment Program for Women (STEP):** Focuses on skill development and employment opportunities.
14. **SWADHAR Greh scheme:** Provides shelter, food, and legal assistance to empower women.
15. **Mahila Shakti Kendra:** Offers comprehensive support services and digital literacy programs.
16. **Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme:** Provides daycare facilities for the children of working mothers to support their overall development. Through these initiatives, the government endeavors to uplift and empower women across India.

Additionally, initiatives such as the Women Helpline facilitate access to integrated services for women affected by violence. The Gender Budgeting Scheme mainstreams gender perspective in planning and implementation, while the Integrated Child Development Services Scheme

addresses the holistic development and nutritional needs of children up to six years old and pregnant and lactating mothers.

9. Judiciary in combating Gender Stereotypes roles

9.1. The Chief Justice of India (CJI) recently launched a Handbook aimed at correcting gender stereotypes and guiding judicial practitioners on avoiding the use of harmful stereotypes in legal decision-making and writing.

This handbook was created by the Supreme Court of India to assist the judges and the legal personnel in eradicating the gender bias that is prevalent in legal documents and in case law. It outlines stereotypical expressions and provides examples of the language that should not be used or should be changed to a non-suspect language. The goal of the handbook is to promote non-sexist language in the court and to make sure the new definition of gender is implemented in the judicial system so that everybody regardless of their gender is equal. It emphasizes the importance of selecting the correct words because words not only reflect a judge's impression of the law but also contribute to the shaping of society's norms and values. Other similar tactics which are aimed at challenging the patriarchal gendered narratives have been observed in other countries such as the Women's Court of Canada and the Indian Feminist Judgement Project. Gender stereotyping can be defined as the process of assigning certain attributes, roles or behaviors to individuals based on their gender. It is also important to note that these stereotypical statements are not only unproductive but also negative in terms of women's rights and opportunities as they deny women education and high-status job opportunities and encourage violence against women.

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9.2. In landmark cases, the Indian judiciary has played a crucial role in shaping gender equality and women's rights.

*Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (1997)*³² resulted in the formulation of the Vishaka Guidelines, later incorporated into the "Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013". The case highlighted the violation of constitutional rights due to sexual harassment. *Air India v. Nargesh Meerza (1981)*³³

³¹ Supreme Court of India, 'Ajayinder Sangwan v Bar Council of Delhi & Anr' [2023] Writ Petition (Civil) No. 470 of 2012, https://main.sci.gov.in/pdf/LU/04092023_070741.pdf (accessed 26 May 2024).

³² AIR 1997 SC 3011.

³³ 1981 AIR 1829.

challenged “discriminatory employment practices based on gender, particularly focusing on air hostesses' retirement conditions”, leading to their striking down. *Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma (2020³⁴)* ensured equal inheritance rights for daughters in Hindu Undivided Families.

Even though India has made legal modifications in the modern era, it still has a long way to go when it comes to gender equality as evidenced by its poor performance on the Global Gender Gap Index suggesting that the society still has a prejudice against women. The portrayal of women in India and the situation of women in the country are compared with women in other countries such as the US, thus establishing the fact that despite constitutional provisions and judicial decisions, women in India continue to struggle for equality.

10. Suggestions to combat Gender Stereotypes and improve Women's Empowerment

It is important to comprehend the role of females in these fields in order to address gender stereotyping and to achieve equality between both sexes. It is the responsibility of educators, policymakers, employers, and other members of society to change the existing perception of nontraditional careers for females and encourage them to take up jobs that are commonly associated with males. Awareness creation on nontraditional careers from an early age, the use of school-to-work transition and work-to-school transition strategies, and the promotion of gender-neutral training and policies are the key steps toward promoting inclusion. Gender bias, peer acceptance, and perceived competence challenges should be dealt with to help females overcome to embrace nontraditional career choices. Furthermore, updating curricula, raising job sensitivity, and offering assistance to females aspiring to secure atypical jobs are crucial for the next steps in advancement and equality. Embracing diversity and accepting nontraditional female roles across various sectors and the following measures will ensure a skilled and motivated workforce ready to tackle future challenges³⁵-

- i. Females need a better understanding of traditionally male-dominated jobs to pursue higher-level positions effectively.

³⁴ (2020) 9 SCC 1.

³⁵ Anderson, J. (2003). Industry focus. The Automotive Industry. Retrieved on May 21, 2024, from <http://graduatinengineering.com/industryfocus/automotive2.html>.

- ii. Educators should promote a new perception of nontraditional careers to combat gender stereotypes.
- iii. Encouraging women to consider nontraditional careers is a collective responsibility of schools, employers, and community leaders.
- iv. Providing resources and information about various nontraditional careers is essential for empowering females.
- v. Starting discussions about nontraditional careers at the elementary level can help identify important roles early on.
- vi. Strategies like school-based learning, work-based learning, and activity connections facilitate a better understanding of nontraditional careers.
- vii. Training services, especially in sectors like the military, should embrace nontraditional roles and provide gender-neutral training.
- viii. **Evolution of Perkins Programs:** Originally, the Perkins programs encompassed special populations, including displaced homemakers, single parents, and students seeking non-traditional training. Notably, a majority of these beneficiaries were females. Changes in 1988, driven by congressional mandates, sought to allocate block grant funds more effectively to states to fulfill federal program objectives. vocational education programs have long been pivotal in shaping career pathways for individuals, with federal legislation such as the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act playing a significant role. This act, initially introduced in the 1970s, aimed to ensure equal access and opportunity for females in vocational education. Over the years, it has undergone modifications to align with evolving educational needs and goals.
- ix. **Educator Impact and Recruitment:** Educators wield significant influence in students' lives, especially in vocational education. Their innovative approaches in recruitment and retention activities can profoundly impact women's participation and success in vocational endeavors. Perceptions and attitudes of educators play a pivotal role in shaping student behavior and career choices.

- x. **Equal Access and Wage Disparity:** The American Association of University Women advocates for equal access to high-wage skilled jobs, particularly in traditionally male-dominated sectors like plumbing, construction, and automotive industries. Addressing wage disparities is crucial, with statistics revealing a significant income gap between males and females, especially among those without bachelor's degrees.
- xi. **Assessment of Challenges and Opportunities:** Despite improved opportunities for females, economic challenges persist, particularly for households led by females and low-income families. Access to vocational and technical education is vital in equipping individuals, especially women, with the skills necessary for higher-paying jobs and long-term economic stability. Skilling and training programs play a vital role in introducing women to formal employment opportunities and fostering social networks beyond their families. However, challenges such as dropout rates and gender stereotypes persist, necessitating targeted interventions to promote women's participation in skill development initiatives.
- xii. **Formal and Informal Associations: Women's Bargaining Power and Voice:** Women rely on both formal associations, such as unions, and informal networks to navigate workplace challenges and advocate for their rights. These associations serve as platforms for collective action and facilitate broader discussions on workers' rights and gender equality.
- xiii. **Gender Segregation and Career Stereotypes:** Career and technical education (CTE) plays a vital role in addressing workforce challenges, yet many occupations remain gender-segregated. Efforts to dismantle gender stereotypes and barriers in CTE are essential to enable females to pursue high-tech skills and opportunities in traditionally male-dominated fields.
- xiv. **School-to-Work Initiatives:** School-to-work programs aim to bridge the gap between education and employment, yet they often fall short in promoting non-traditional career paths for females and minorities. Strategies such as inclusive advisory councils, female instructors, and parental involvement can enhance the effectiveness of these programs.

- xv. **Military and Nontraditional Careers:** The armed forces offer diverse career opportunities for women, reflecting positive shifts in nontraditional roles. Initiatives to recruit and train women for nontraditional military roles highlight progress towards gender inclusivity and empowerment.
- xvi. **Computer Education and Gender Dynamics:** Addressing gender disparities in computer education is vital, as proficiency in technology is increasingly essential in the modern job market. Efforts to encourage female participation in computer-related fields are crucial for bridging the gender gap in technology professions.
- xvii. **Career Selection Process and Occupational Identity:** The career selection process is influenced by various factors, including societal expectations, educational experiences, and individual aspirations. Educators play a crucial role in guiding students towards fulfilling career pathways that align with their interests and goals.
- xviii. **Fostering Inclusive Educational Environments for Female Empowerment:** In contemporary society, preparing future workers necessitates not only a readiness to learn but also an understanding of the complex factors influencing career choices, including societal norms and individual attributes such as gender and race. Educational programs play a crucial role in shaping aspirations and guiding career planning, yet there remains a consensus among educators that prioritizing human development over mere efficiency is paramount. The research underscores the unique challenges faced by females and teens in selecting nontraditional career paths, highlighting the imperative for tailored educational initiatives that promote inclusivity and diversity. Despite strides toward gender equality, persistent disparities hinder females' access to fields like technology, where their representation remains disproportionately low. Efforts to address this gap involve creating equitable learning environments and expanding vocational education opportunities, recognizing the crucial role of females in driving economic empowerment through increased participation in STEM professions. As society strives for greater gender parity, fostering inclusive educational environments and providing strong role models emerge as essential strategies to inspire and empower future generations of female professionals.

- xix. **Economically, women face challenges such as wage disparities, limited opportunities, and balancing professional responsibilities with household duties.** Development policies often fail to recognize women's productive roles and focus more on their reproductive functions, contributing to gender disparities in wages and opportunities. Socially and culturally, deep-rooted stereotypes and biases continue to shape perceptions of women's roles and identities. Education and health disparities, along with practices like female infanticide, dowry, and gender-based violence, further exacerbate gender inequality.
- xx. **Media, as a powerful agent of social change, plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and attitudes towards women:** However, media portrayals often reinforce stereotypes and objectify women, contributing to their marginalization. Sensationalized reporting of crimes against women, while ignoring systemic issues, further perpetuates negative stereotypes and undermines efforts for gender equality. To address these challenges, the media must adopt a gender-sensitive approach and promote balanced portrayals of women. Government policies and regulatory mechanisms should incentivize media organizations to eliminate gender stereotypes and promote women's empowerment. Public awareness campaigns, educational initiatives, and community engagement efforts are essential to challenge prevailing norms and promote gender equality.
- xxi. **Empowerment Through Cinema: Evolving Roles of Women in Indian Films:** The present-day Indian women have emerged as educated, financially independent, socially active and goal-oriented through the films produced in recent years. This change has been particularly useful in the campaign for women's rights and the subsequent analysis of other Indian movies that depict shifting female characters. Thus, in this review, we are to evaluate the portrayal of women in Indian cinema in terms of feminism, gender equality, sports, and bravery, acknowledging the agency of movies in social change. Art and cinema are two of the most effective tools to convey the reflection of society and to bring change. Although commercial Indian movies have always steered clear of socially sensitive issues, there has been a welcome change in the independent features that target the neglected sections of society including women. Analyzing particular Indian movies helps in understanding various aspects of female emancipation. For example, "Fashion"

shows the ability to fight in adversity since women face many troubles even if they work as models. As much as “Band Baaja Baaraat” breaks the stereotype by presenting women as capable of running businesses, it also depicts the reality of women struggling to obtain loans. ‘No One Killed Jessica’ highlights the strength and the courage of women in the legal process and points to flaws in the system. “English Vinglish” is a story of self-empowerment through learning a language but at the same time, it also focuses on the need for family and social support. Like “Bohemian Rhapsody”, “Queen” also focuses on the process of accepting one’s uniqueness after a personal failure, underlining the significance of personal growth. Still, “NH10” can be seen as a subversive film that breaks the cliché of the weak and defenseless woman, who is ready to use any means to avenge the murder of her husband. In “Angry Indian Goddesses” women from different fields fight against gender discrimination together which shows that unity is a strength against prejudice. “Pink” makes viewers question the position of women in today’s society, fight against sexism, and demand equality. Both “Dangal” and “Itruthi Sutter” depict women’s struggle in the world of sports where male dominance is evident and women fight for their rights to compete. Despite this, ‘Jai Bhim’ is a portrayal of women’s resilience in trying to seek justice, which is possible only if the patriarchal structure is dismantled. All in all, these films present complex visions of women’s emancipation, from personal success to systemic struggles. With the appearance of new filmmakers, it is possible to fight traditional stereotypes and promote the rights of women to achieve their goals on their own, creating a tolerant society. Indian cinema, through its films, ensures that it tells stories and provides inspiration to society to embrace the change towards gender equality and women’s emancipation.

- xxii. **Structural Forces: Enablers and Barriers** Across sectors, women face similar challenges rooted in structural forces dictated by prevailing norms. Structural changes are imperative, encompassing policies promoting women's skilling, quotas for recruitment and leadership roles, and initiatives addressing safety, education, and early marriage.
- xxiii. **Market Dynamics: Role and Responsibility** The market serves as a pivotal arena where women navigate household determinants, policy implementation, and economic trends. Gender segregation persists within market structures, particularly

in informal sectors, necessitating fair wages, working conditions, and social protections, especially for vulnerable women.

- xxiv. **Framework for Gender Transformative Work** To address gender segregation comprehensively, a nuanced framework is proposed, acknowledging women's own articulations of value, the impact of visibility on agency, and the accountability of duty bearers within household, state, and market spheres.
- xxv. **Institutional discrimination against women** permeates various aspects of human resource practices, including performance evaluations, promotions, and compensation. Biased performance evaluation criteria, such as favoring employees based on office presence, disadvantage women who utilize flexible work arrangements due to caregiving responsibilities. Moreover, formal job ladders in organizations often exacerbate gender segregation, hindering women's advancement as they lack the diverse experiences necessary for promotion. Discrimination against specific subtypes of women, such as agentic women and pregnant mothers, further perpetuates inequalities in hiring and promotion decisions. Additionally, women are underrepresented in leadership roles and receive fewer challenging assignments and training opportunities compared to men, limiting their access to higher-level positions. This systemic bias also contributes to the gender wage gap, as women consistently receive lower compensation than men, even after controlling for factors like education and experience. Overall, discriminatory practices by organizational decision-makers perpetuate gender disparities, affecting women's pay and opportunities for career advancement in the workplace.
- xxvi. **The real estate sector, despite the significant presence of women in the construction workforce and managerial roles, continues to be perceived as male-dominated.** To address this, a national campaign is necessary to promote construction as a viable career option for women and overcome gender biases within the industry. Such a campaign should target specific barriers to attracting and retaining female talent, involving men in the industry as part of the solution and fostering partnerships with industry associations and government bodies. Inspired by Japan's efforts, initiatives like the "Open the Door" Campaign aim to dispel the

notion of male dominance in real estate, encouraging greater gender inclusion at all levels of the sector.

11. CONCLUSION

In order to improve gender equity in the workplace, some suggestions have been made. It is for this reason that it is possible to state that the adoption of flexibility in working conditions can contribute to the reduction of gender differences. Women's networking may help to ensure accountability among them and improve their working environment. It is important to urge women to join skilling institutes and ensure the curricula used are friendly to women. The duty bearers should provide facilities for women's security, safety at workplaces and access to their line of work as well as synchronize the skill development programs. It is imperative to eliminate biases when it comes to skilling programs and education. Future research should address topics such as migration and marriage, women's employment, gender in the platform economy, and the relationship between quality education and skill training. Measures in this category comprise advocating for interventions, enhancing market conditions, and encouraging women to occupy various positions. Policies need to engage with market players for women's economic opportunities and expand access to adolescent girls through gender-transformative education. By addressing these areas, stakeholders can help eliminate gender segregation in the economy and foster gender-transformative work, particularly in NTL sectors. Thus, to remove barriers to women's empowerment in India, it is crucial to have the support of the government, media, civil society, and citizens. Combating systematic prejudices, eradicating stereotyping and empowering and enabling women will enable India to harness the potential and the strengths of women in the country.

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