

UPDATED VALUE ADDITION MATERIAL 2024

INDIAN SOCIETY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

WOMEN IN INDIA: THEIR ISSUES, ROLE AND ORGANISATIONS



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WOMEN AND THEIR ISSUES

Student Notes:

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Women in India: Their issues, roles and Organizations

Student Notes:

Empowering women in India is a process aimed at dismantling the barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential. Here's a breakdown of key elements:

The United Nations views women's empowerment as "increasing the power of women to take control of their lives." This translates to:

- **Self-worth:** Building confidence and self-belief that challenges traditional gender limitations.
 - eg. Ritu Karidhal led the Mars Orbiter Mission at ISRO, breaking stereotypes about women in science and space exploration.
- **Resources:** Equipping women with access to education, healthcare, financial services, and property ownership.
- **Decision-making:** Enabling women to make informed choices about their lives, including education, career, and marriage.
- **Autonomy:** Granting women autonomy over their bodies, finances, and reproductive health.
- **Social Visibility:** Encouraging women's participation in public life, politics, and decision-making processes that shape society.

1. Gender: A Social Construct

Understanding women's issues requires recognizing the concept of gender.

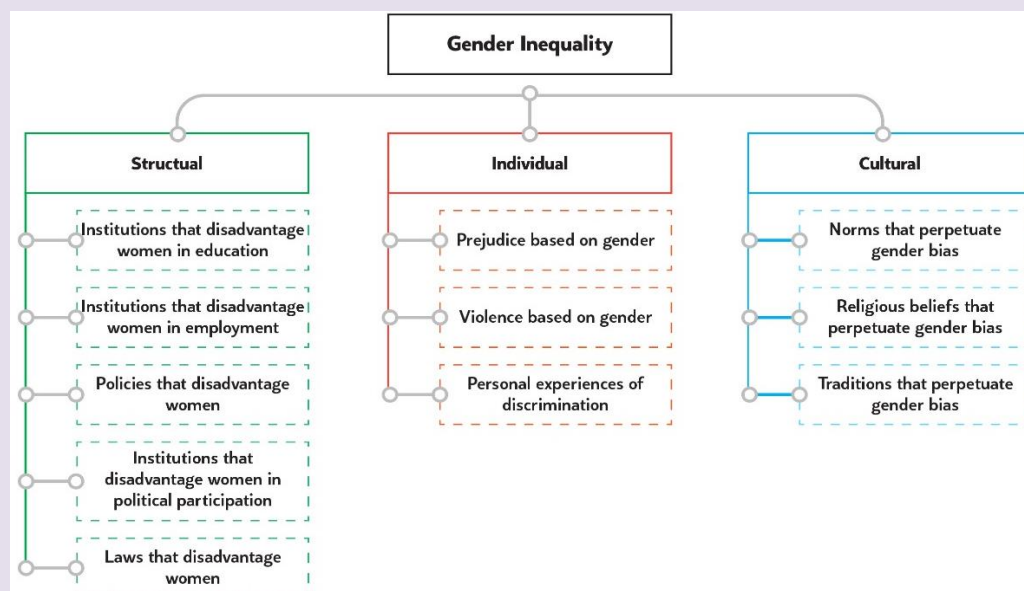
Distinguishing Sex and Gender:

- **Sex:** Determined by biological factors like chromosomes and reproductive organs.
- **Gender:** Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and expectations associated with masculinity and femininity. These expectations are not universal and can vary across cultures and historical periods.

Understanding Patriarchy:

Patriarchy is a social system where power is primarily held by men. It manifests through:

- **Division of Labor:** Men control valued spheres like public life and economic resources, while women are relegated to domestic duties.
- **Limited Mobility:** Restrictions on women's movement and access to public spaces.
- **Unequal Inheritance Laws:** Sons inherit a larger share of property, perpetuating economic dependence of women.
- **Control over Sexuality:** Dictates around women's dress code, marriage choices, and reproductive rights.



2. Role of Women in India

2.1. The Evolving Role of Women in India: From Tradition to Transformation

The role of women in India has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades. Traditionally, societal expectations confined women primarily to the domestic sphere, with emphasis on their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers. This write-up explores this evolution and the ongoing challenges faced by women in India.

- Previously, a woman's "status" as a daughter, wife, or mother dictated her expected behaviour and responsibilities. These roles were clearly defined by social norms, leaving little room for individual choices.
 - However, this is changing. Women are increasingly challenging these traditional expectations and carving out new paths for themselves.
- A key factor in this transformation is access to education. As literacy rates for women rise, they gain the confidence and skills to pursue careers beyond the home. This economic empowerment fosters greater autonomy and challenges traditional gender roles.
 - Women are making their mark in various fields, from science and technology to politics and business. This growing presence challenges gender stereotypes and paves the way for future generations.
 - Eg. Avani Chaturvedi has set a perfect example and has created a milestone by becoming India's first female fighter pilot.
- The rise of the working woman presents a complex challenge. Many women grapple with "role conflict," juggling the demands of professional life with their responsibilities as homemakers and caregivers.
 - Support systems like affordable childcare and shared household duties can help alleviate this burden.

It's important to acknowledge the complexities of women's experiences in India. Caste, class, religion, and other social markers intersect with gender, creating a unique set of challenges and opportunities for each woman.

2.2. A Look at Women's Health in India

The state of women's health in India presents a complex picture, marked by both progress and significant challenges. While there have been improvements in some areas, deep-rooted social and economic inequalities create a precarious landscape for many women.

Gender Bias in Healthcare: NFHS-5 reveals a concerning trend – girls in India receive less medical attention compared to boys. This disparity throughout childhood contributes significantly to widespread anemia among women.

- The NFHS-5 reports a staggering 57% of women (15-49 years) suffer from anemia, compared to just 25% of men in the same age group.

Status of Reproductive Health in India:

- As per NFHS-5, Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has shown a positive decline, dropping to 113 in 2016-18 from 130 in 2014-2016. This decrease indicates some progress in ensuring safer pregnancies.
- According to NFHS-5, institutional deliveries have risen from 79% in 2015-16 to 89% in 2019-21.
- NFHS-5 data shows an increase in modern contraceptive use from 54% in 2015-16 to 60.9% in 2019-21. However, significant disparities exist across regions and socioeconomic groups, limiting women's control over family planning.

- A 2020 study by Lancet Global Health found that only 52% of pregnant women in India received four or more antenatal checkups, highlighting the need for improved access and quality of care.

While India has made significant progress in improving women's reproductive health, challenges and disparities persist.

- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act allows for abortion under certain conditions, but access to safe and legal abortion remains limited, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
- Additionally, gender-biased sex selection and female infanticide continue to be prevalent, leading to a skewed sex ratio.

MTP (Amendment) Act, 2021

- Maximum gestational limit for pregnancies that may be aborted on the advice of one 'registered medical practitioner' is 20 weeks.
- For pregnancies that may be aborted on the advice of two medical practitioners is **24 weeks**.

Women's reproductive rights and empowerment

Reproductive rights encompass the ability of individuals to make informed choices regarding their reproductive health:

- Including the right to plan and space pregnancies, access safe and legal abortion, and obtain comprehensive sexual and reproductive healthcare.

The Supreme Court, in **Suchitra Srivastava** held that a woman's right to make reproductive choices is a dimension of personal liberty under Article 21.

In **X v/s NCT of Delhi (2022)**-The Court said that 'it is the woman alone who has the right over her body' and is the 'ultimate decision-maker' in deciding if she wants an abortion.

These rights are intrinsically linked to women's empowerment, as they provide women with greater control over their bodies, lives, and futures.

- **Socio-Economic empowerment:**
 - When women have control over their fertility, they are more likely to complete their education, enter the workforce, and earn higher incomes.
 - This, in turn, leads to improved livelihoods for women and their families, reducing poverty and inequality.
- **Political empowerment:** When women have control over their reproductive health, they are more likely to engage in civic activities, vote, and run for office. This leads to greater representation of women in decision-making bodies, which can result in policies that better address women's needs and concerns.

Improving women's health in India requires a multi-pronged approach.

- Ensuring access to quality healthcare facilities, particularly in rural areas, is critical.
- Educational initiatives promoting delayed marriage and family planning can empower women to make informed choices.
- Addressing the root causes of poverty and limited opportunities is essential for long-term progress.

3. Women and Employment

Women remain largely underrepresented in the formal workforce. **Economic survey 2024** observed that the female Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) is 37% in 2022-2023. This stands in stark contrast to the global average of 46.2%.

Corporate Sector: While women constitute nearly 40% of the workforce in some service sectors, their presence in leadership roles is much lower. Estimates suggest women hold only around 15-20% of leadership positions in Indian companies.

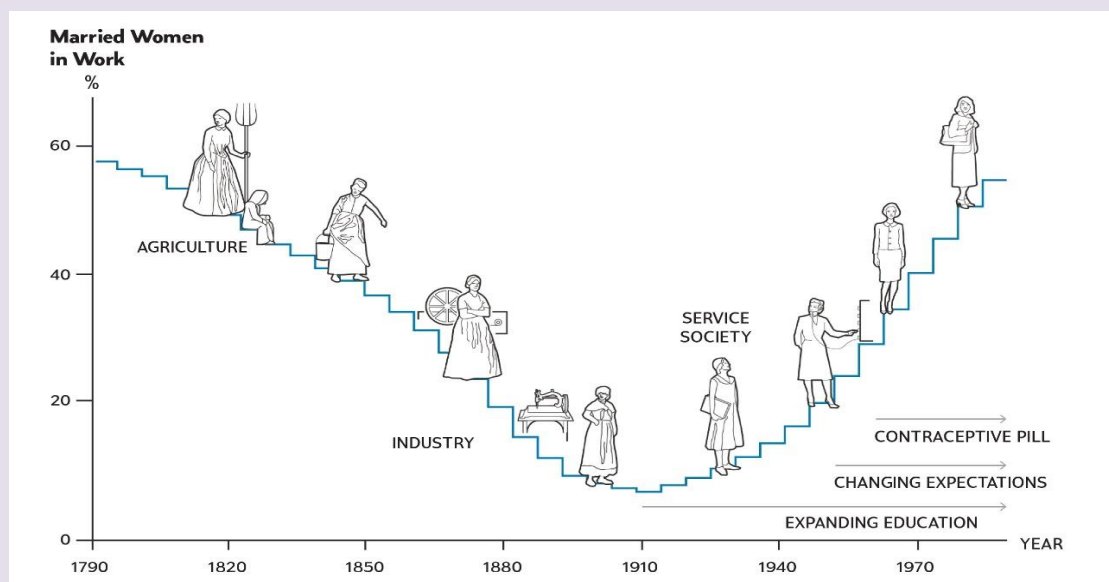
Glass Ceiling and Glass Cliff: Obstacles to Advancement

- **The Glass Ceiling:** Invisible barriers impede women's rise to top leadership positions. Societal biases, unconscious prejudice, and a lack of mentorship and sponsorship opportunities can hinder their progress.
- **The Glass Cliff:** A phenomenon where women are more likely to be appointed to leadership positions during times of crisis. While presenting an opportunity, it can also disproportionately burden women with failing companies and limit their chances of success.

Reasons for Low LFPR:

- **Caste Notions and Restricted Mobility:** Deep-rooted caste hierarchies often dictate societal expectations, particularly in rural areas. Caste notions of purity and pollution can restrict women's mobility, confining them to household chores and limiting their access to employment opportunities outside their immediate villages.
- **Safety and Security Concerns:** Sexual harassment on public transport and inadequate street lighting creates a constant sense of vulnerability for women, especially during night shifts.
- **The Double Burden:** Women often shoulder the responsibility of unpaid care work (cooking, cleaning, and childcare) alongside paid jobs, leading to physical and emotional strain. The lack of affordable childcare facilities further intensifies this burden. This "double burden" forces many women to make a difficult economic calculation.
 - When low wages and a persistent **gender pay gap** (20% national average according to Monster Salary Index, 2023) are factored in, paid work may become a less attractive option compared to the unpaid care work they perform within the household.
- **Digital Divide and Lack of Access to Information:** The digital divide disproportionately affects women in India, limiting their access to information about job opportunities, training programs, and government schemes designed to support female entrepreneurship. This lack of information creates a barrier to entry, particularly for skilled jobs in the formal sector.
- **Lack of Conducive Infrastructure: Childcare as a Critical Piece:** The absence of affordable and accessible childcare facilities is a major hurdle for working mothers.
 - SEWA's Sanghini initiative, a case study in effective childcare solutions, demonstrates the transformative impact such facilities can have on women's ability to participate in the workforce. By providing safe and nurturing environments for children, initiatives like Sanghini empower women to pursue careers without compromising their childcare responsibilities.
- **Increased Household Income and the Discouraged Worker Effect:** A seemingly positive development – rising household incomes – can also contribute to the decline in female LFPR. The "discouraged worker effect" suggests that when other household members (husbands or fathers) earn a sufficient income, women may choose to prioritize childcare and domestic responsibilities over paid work. However, this creates a situation where women's skills and qualifications become underutilized, leading to a long-term loss for the workforce.

The Feminization U Hypothesis (Economic Survey 2017)



The Economic Survey of India (2017) sheds light on a crucial concept – the "Feminization U Hypothesis." Claudia Goldin (Nobel laureate 2023), suggests a U-shaped relationship between economic development and female labor force participation (LFPR).

In the initial stages of development, as traditional agricultural societies transition towards industrialization, women are often withdrawn from the workforce due to several factors:

- **Shifting Skillsets:** The rise of manufacturing necessitates specific skillsets that women may not possess due to limited access to education and vocational training.
- **Social Norms:** Traditional gender roles may dictate that women prioritize domestic responsibilities during this phase.

However, as an economy matures and service sectors like healthcare, education, and IT gain prominence, the demand for skilled labor rises. This creates new opportunities for women, particularly those with relevant education and training. Consequently, the hypothesis suggests an upward trend in female LFPR in more developed economies.

The Feminization U Hypothesis offers a valuable framework for understanding the dynamics of female labor force participation in India. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that this is a simplified model, and the reality is more complex. While the hypothesis may explain the initial decline in LFPR observed in India's data, the current stagnation and even decline in recent years require further exploration.

The underrepresentation of women in India's workforce is not just a social justice imperative but also an economic necessity. A study by McKinsey Global Institute (2025) estimates that India's GDP could grow by \$770 billion by 2025 if it achieves gender parity in the workforce.

To unlock this potential and create a more inclusive economy, several key strategies are needed:

- **Social Norm Shift and Education:** Challenging traditional gender roles through targeted public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives is crucial.
 - Encouraging families to invest in girls' education, particularly in STEM fields and vocational training programs, will equip them with the skills needed to thrive in the formal sector.
- **Safety Measures and Improved Infrastructure:** Ensuring well-lit streets, reliable public transportation, and robust law enforcement mechanisms are essential to create a safe environment for women to work, especially during night hours.

- Investing in affordable and accessible childcare facilities will alleviate the double burden on working mothers.

Student Notes:

Women's Participation in the Indian Workforce and Transport Solutions

Many Indian women (45%) walk to work due to limited access to affordable and safe transport options, compared to men (27%).

Solutions:

- **Improve Existing Systems:** Initiatives like free women's buses need improvements to address overcrowding and unreliability.
 - **Tech-Enabled Mobility:** Live bus tracking apps (like Chalo) can reduce waiting times and improve efficiency.
 - Real-time seat availability and digital ticketing can increase ridership (as seen in Mumbai).
 - **Integrated Transport:** First/last-mile solutions (e-bikes, feeder buses) can connect women to main routes
-
- **Skill Development and Training Programs:** Government and private initiatives can provide targeted skill development programs and training opportunities specifically designed for women.
 - These programs should cater to the needs of both rural and urban women, offering relevant skills for the evolving job market.
 - **Financial Inclusion and Microfinance:** Facilitating access to credit and financial resources can empower women to become entrepreneurs or invest in small businesses.
 - Microfinance institutions play a crucial role in promoting women's economic empowerment.
 - **Bridging the Digital Divide:** Investing in digital literacy programs and expanding internet access in rural areas will empower women to access information about job opportunities, government schemes, and online learning platforms.
 - **Addressing the Wage Gap:** Implementing stricter regulations to enforce equal pay for equal work can help close the persistent gender pay gap. Additionally, promoting policies that incentivize flexible work arrangements and parental leave can make workplaces more accommodating for working mothers.
 - **Formalization of the Informal Sector:** Recognizing and integrating the vast network of women working in the informal sector into the formal economy is crucial. Providing social security benefits, minimum wage protections, and access to skill development programs for women in informal work will ensure fairer working conditions and empower them to transition to the formal sector in the future.

By dismantling these barriers and creating a more enabling environment, India can unlock the full potential of its women and achieve inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Gig Economy and Women

The gig economy, with its promise of flexibility, has the potential to be a game-changer for women's participation in the workforce. However, the socio-cultural landscape of India presents unique challenges that can turn this opportunity into a double-edged sword.

On the Positive Side:

- **Balancing Work and Family:** The flexible nature of gig work allows women to manage their domestic responsibilities – a crucial factor in a society where childcare and housework are primarily women's domain. This flexibility can incentivize women to re-enter the workforce after a break or participate part-time.

The Challenges Remain:

- **Digital Divide:** Limited access to smartphones and the internet significantly hinders women's ability to participate in online gig platforms. Bridging this digital gender gap is essential for inclusive growth.
- **Algorithmic Bias:** Algorithms, despite their supposed neutrality, can perpetuate existing gender biases. Data used to train AI tools might favor male candidates, ultimately limiting opportunities for women. Regular audits and conscious efforts to de-bias these algorithms are crucial.
- **Safety Concerns:** Women in the gig economy, especially those in service-oriented roles, face a heightened risk of sexual harassment from clients. Platforms need robust in-house complaint redressal systems and stricter background checks to ensure women's safety.

The Way Forward

- **Platform Reforms:** Gig platforms need to create a safe and secure environment for women. This includes transparent complaint mechanisms, training programs on bystander intervention, and stricter penalties for misconduct by users.
- **Digital Literacy Programs:** Investing in digital literacy programs for women can equip them with the skills and confidence to navigate the online gig economy effectively.

4. Women and the Care Economy: Empowering Through Investment

The care economy encompasses a broad spectrum of paid and unpaid activities related to providing care and support to individuals, households, and communities.

This includes essential services like:

- **Childcare:** Early childhood education and care for young children.
- **Eldercare:** Assistance and support for older adults.
- **Healthcare:** Medical and non-medical care services at all stages of life.
- **Housework:** Domestic tasks like cleaning, cooking, and laundry.
- **Social care:** Support services for those with disabilities or needing assistance with daily living.

4.1. The Unequal Burden of Care Work

- The **Economic Survey 2024** suggests unpaid care work by women contributes a significant 3.1% to GDP, compared to a mere 0.4% by men. This vast disparity exemplifies the unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities.

Investing in the care economy presents a powerful tool for women's empowerment. By recognizing and valuing care work through increased public and private sector investment, we can unlock several key benefits:

- **Increased Female Labor Force Participation and Economic Growth:** When caregiving responsibilities are more equally shared, or supported by accessible and affordable care services, it frees up women to pursue paid employment opportunities.
- **Enhanced Wellbeing and Productivity:** By alleviating the burden of unpaid care work, women experience improved mental and physical wellbeing. This translates directly into increased productivity in both the caregiving sphere and the paid workforce.
- **Job Creation and a Thriving Care Sector:** A thriving care economy creates millions of new jobs, particularly in sectors like childcare, eldercare, and healthcare. This job creation specifically benefits women, who are often concentrated in these care-related fields.
 - The **economic survey 2024** estimates that direct public investment in the care sector equivalent to 2% of GDP could generate 11 million jobs in India, with nearly 70% benefiting women.

Way forward

- The ILO's 5R framework provides a roadmap for achieving gender equality within the care economy:
 - **Recognition:** Acknowledge the immense social and economic value of care work.
 - **Reduction:** Aim to reduce the amount of unpaid care work to create a better balance between caregiving and other aspects of life.
 - **Redistribution:** Advocate for a more equitable distribution of caregiving responsibilities within households and society at large.
 - **Rewarding:** Ensure fair compensation for care workers, including social security benefits, healthcare access and opportunities for professional growth.
 - **Representation:** Empower care workers, particularly women, to participate in decision-making processes and advocate for their rights.
- **Policy and Investment:** Prioritizing public and private investments in care services is crucial. This includes creating accessible and affordable care options, promoting gender-inclusive policies like parental leave, and supporting the professional development of care workers.

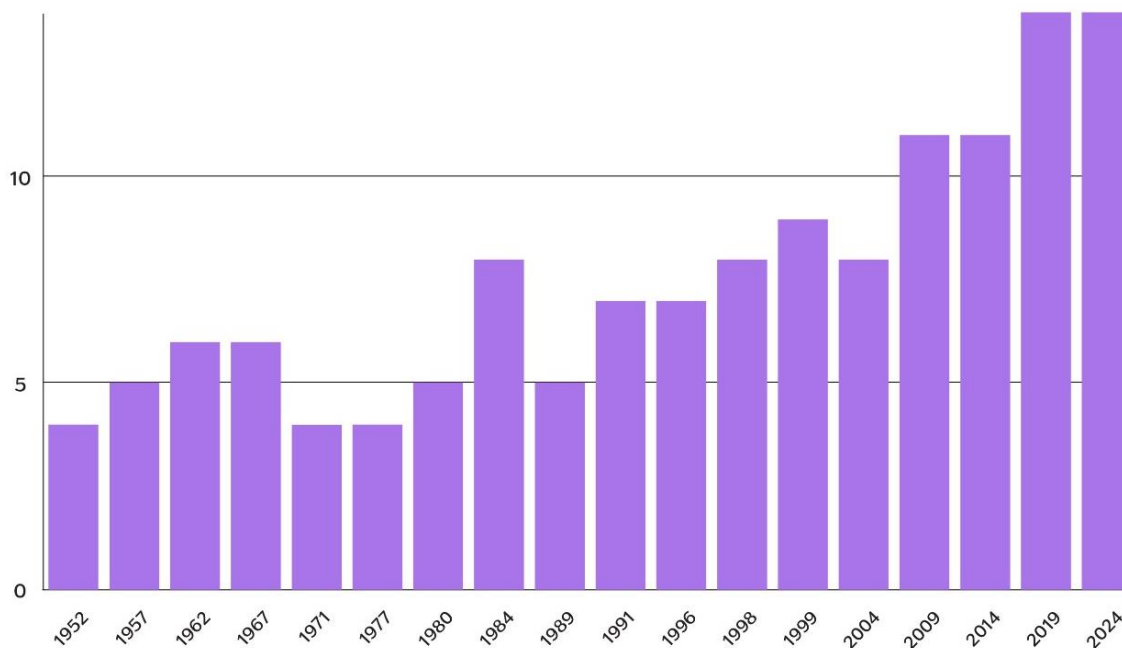
India's vision of "Viksit Bharat" by 2047 hinges on a robust care economy. Investing in care services, creating new business opportunities within the care sector, and promoting gender-inclusive policies are essential steps to achieve this vision.

5. Women in Indian Politics

Despite being nearly half the population, women remain significantly underrepresented in Indian politics. While the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments mandate 33% reservation for women in local bodies, their presence in Parliament and state assemblies continues to be abysmal.

Proportion of Women MPs in the Lok Sabha over the years (%)

74 MPs (14%) elected to the 18th Lok Sabha are women. This is marginally lower than in 2019, when 78 women were elected.



Reasons for Low Participation:

- **Illiteracy:** A major hurdle is low female literacy rates (68% compared to 85% for males). Education empowers women and equips them to participate actively in political discourse.
- **Lack of Confidence:** The practice of "Sarpanchpati," where husbands wield power behind the scenes despite their wives holding elected positions, highlights a lack of confidence among women.

Student Notes:

- **Patriarchal System:** Traditional societal structures often view women as primarily caregivers, relegating political participation to the sidelines.
- **Violence and Intimidation:** Incidents of abuse and violence against women create a climate of fear, discouraging them from entering politics.
- **Work-Life Balance:** Unequal distribution of household chores makes it difficult for women to juggle political aspirations with family responsibilities.

The Importance of Women in Politics:

- **Policy making:** Women's perspectives are crucial for formulating effective policies on issues like education, healthcare, and child welfare. Studies show that women in power prioritize public goods like water and sanitation.

Studies by scholars like Esther Duflo and Raghavendra Chattopadhyay have shown a positive correlation between women leading Panchayats (village councils) in India and increased investment in public goods. Districts with female leaders saw a significant rise in spending on essential services like clean drinking water, a critical concern for many women

The Way Forward:

- **Empowering Women:** Education and skill development programs can boost women's confidence and encourage them to pursue political careers.
- **Quotas and Zipper System: Reservation:** The recent 106th Amendment Act reserving 33% of seats in Parliament and state assemblies for women is a significant step forward.
 - Implementing a system like Rwanda's "zipper method," where every third position is reserved for women, can accelerate progress.

Successful models for women's reservation in political system

Rwanda's "Zipper Method":

- Rwanda has achieved remarkable progress in women's political representation, currently holding the highest percentage of women parliamentarians globally (over 60%).
- This success is largely attributed to their unique quota system – the "zipper method." Political parties are required to alternate male and female candidates on their electoral lists, ensuring a minimum of 30% female representation.

Bolivia's Parity Law:

- In 2009, Bolivia enacted a law mandating equal participation of women in all elected bodies. This law, combined with quotas for indigenous women, led to a dramatic rise in female representation in parliament, from 13% to 50% within a decade. The law also stipulated state funding for women candidates, addressing financial barriers to entry.

- **Addressing Violence:** A strong legal framework and stricter enforcement are essential to create a safe environment for women in politics.
- **Shifting Mindsets:** Public awareness campaigns can challenge traditional norms and encourage both men and women to see women's political participation as essential for a healthy democracy.
- **Capacity Building:** Government initiatives like the Rashtriya Gramm Swaraj Yojana (RGSY) offer training programs to equip women leaders with the necessary skills.
- **Party Reforms:** Political parties need to promote internal democracy and ensure greater participation of women in leadership roles.

By taking these steps, India can move towards a more inclusive political landscape where women have an equal voice in shaping the nation's future.

6. Violence Against Women Across Time and Space in India

Student Notes:

Skewed Sex Ratios and Gendercide

- **Unequal Value:** A deep-rooted preference for sons leads to practices like sex-selective abortions and female infanticide. This societal bias signifies the devaluation of a girl child's life, setting the stage for a lifetime of potential violence.

In rural areas, the ratio is 985 females (NFHS-5) per 1,000 males. This is a significant improvement from the 2011 census, which recorded a ratio of 943 females per 1,000 males. However, this persistent imbalance signifies deep-rooted social and economic factors leading to practices like female feticide and sex selection.

- **Patriarchal System:** India's traditional social structure heavily favours sons as caretakers for aging parents, inheritors of property, and carriers of the family name. This cultural bias puts undue pressure on families to have sons, often leading to neglect or discrimination against daughters.
- **Dowry System:** The practice of dowry creates a financial burden for families with daughters. This burden can lead to a preference for sons to avoid this expense, impacting the well-being of existing daughters.
- **Religious Beliefs:** Certain interpretations of religious texts might emphasize the importance of sons for performing rituals or achieving salvation for parents. This reinforces the social preference for sons.

Socio-Economic Factors Exacerbating the Issue:

- **Land Ownership and Inheritance:** In rural areas, land is often the primary source of livelihood, and traditionally sons inherit it. This leads to a desire for male heirs to ensure economic security for the family. Daughters may be seen as a burden as they marry into another family.
- **Son as Earning Member:** In low-income families, sons are often seen as potential breadwinners, contributing to the family's financial well-being. Daughters may be perceived as an economic liability, especially with limited educational and employment opportunities.
- **Small Family Norm and Technology:** The small family norm, coupled with the easy availability of sex determination tests, may act as a catalyst. Pre-conception sex selection facilities further exacerbate the issue, allowing for the selection of male offspring.

Consequences of a Skewed Future:

The declining child sex ratio has far-reaching and disturbing consequences:

- **Gender Imbalance and Violence:** A shortage of brides in the future can lead to social unrest, trafficking, and an increase in violence against women. A study by the Centre for Social Research, Haryana, found fear of violence against women as a major cause of female foeticide, creating a vicious cycle.
- **Social Issues and Immorality:** It can lead to a decline in the female workforce, increased work pressure on men, and a rise in social problems like loneliness and isolation for men. In extreme cases, it can lead to practices like polygamy, forcible marriage of widows, and even the commodification of women.
- **Economic Downturn:** A large proportion of the productive population, women, is missing due to the skewed ratio. This lack of women impairs the ability of men to work effectively and hinders overall economic growth.

Childhood: Neglect, Abuse, and Exploitation

- **Physical and Sexual Abuse:** The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported over 4,05,414 cases of crimes against children in 2021, with a significant number involving sexual abuse.

- The POCSO Act (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act) is a step forward, but ensuring proper implementation and breaking the culture of silence remain challenges.
- **Trafficking:** India is a source, destination, and transit country for human trafficking. According to the US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report (2023), girls are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for forced labor and sexual exploitation.

Adolescence and beyond:

- **Street Harassment:** A 2017 survey by Plan International revealed that 78% of Indian women have experienced some form of harassment in public spaces. This constant fear restricts their mobility and participation in public life.

Adulthood: Domestic Walls and Workplace:

- **Domestic Violence:** The NCRB reported over 3,05,413 cases of cruelty by husbands or relatives in 2021. However, this is likely an underestimation due to social stigma and fear of reprisal.
- Data from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) suggests that more than two-thirds of married women in India (aged 15-49) have experienced physical or sexual violence from their partners, regardless of socio-economic background.

Marital rape refers to non-consensual sexual intercourse with one's spouse. Despite significant global recognition of its severity, marital rape is not considered a crime under Indian jurisprudence.

Current Legal Framework

Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code, includes an exception: "Sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age, is not rape." This clause effectively legalizes marital rape for women above the age of fifteen, ignoring the principles of consent and bodily autonomy within marriage.

Prevalence and Impact

According to the National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4), 5.4% of women in India reported experiencing marital rape. This statistic is likely understated due to the underreporting driven by socio-economic and cultural barriers.

Reasons for Underreporting

1. **Economic Dependency:** Many women lack financial independence, deterring them from reporting marital rape due to fear of economic insecurity.
2. **Lack of Awareness:** In many cases, women do not recognize non-consensual sex within marriage as rape, owing to deeply ingrained societal norms.
3. **Patriarchy:** The societal structure perpetuates male dominance, using sexual violence as a means to exert control and power over women.

Arguments for Criminalizing Marital Rape

1. **Violation of Fundamental Rights:** The current legal stance undermines Article 14 (Right to Equality) and Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty) of the Indian Constitution. A married woman should have the same rights over her body as an unmarried woman.
2. **Psychological Trauma:** Victims of marital rape experience similar trauma as those raped by strangers, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression.
3. **Form of Domestic Violence:** Marital rape is a severe form of domestic violence, inflicting physical and psychological harm on the victim.
4. **Inconsistent Legal Stance:** Other sections of the IPC, such as Section 376B (rape by a husband during separation) and Section 377 (unnatural offenses), highlight inconsistencies in the legal treatment of marital rape.
5. **International Obligations:** Over 104 countries have criminalized marital rape, acknowledging it as a violation of human rights. The UN Committee on the Elimination of

Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Justice Verma Committee have both urged India to criminalize marital rape.

Arguments Against Criminalizing Marital Rape

1. **Threat to Marriage Institution:** Some argue that criminalizing marital rape could undermine the institution of marriage by disrupting the conjugal rights of spouses. However, marriage has evolved to prioritize individual choice and equality.
2. **Conjugal Rights:** The Hindu Marriage Act recognizes the right to restitution of conjugal rights, but this does not justify non-consensual sex. The recognition of conjugal rights should not override the necessity of consent in marital relations.

The non-criminalization of marital rape not only violates fundamental human rights but also perpetuates gender inequality and domestic violence. There is a need for legal reform to protect the bodily autonomy and dignity of married women. Addressing this issue is crucial for advancing gender justice and safeguarding the rights of all women in India.

The Workplace:

- **Sexual Harassment:** Sexual harassment in the workplace remains a significant issue in India, despite the legal framework established by the Vishakha Guidelines and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013.
 - The National Commission for Women (NCW) reported over 2,500 complaints of sexual harassment at the workplace in 2021 alone.
 - Workplace harassment perpetuates through a combination of power dynamics, fear of retaliation, and lack of awareness about legal rights.
 - Often, women are hesitant to report harassment due to fear of losing their jobs, facing character assassination, or encountering a hostile work environment. This underreporting exacerbates the problem, as perpetrators are not held accountable, and a culture of impunity persists.

Public Sphere:

- **Scrutiny and Sexist Attacks:** Women in public life, from politicians to journalists, are subjected to intense scrutiny often based on their appearance rather than their qualifications. This discourages women's participation in public discourse.
 - A 2021 report by the Reuters Institute found that Indian women politicians are the most targeted group globally on Twitter, facing a barrage of abusive language and threats.

PAPER	GS - I & II	GS - III & IV	ESSAY	OPTIONAL - I & II
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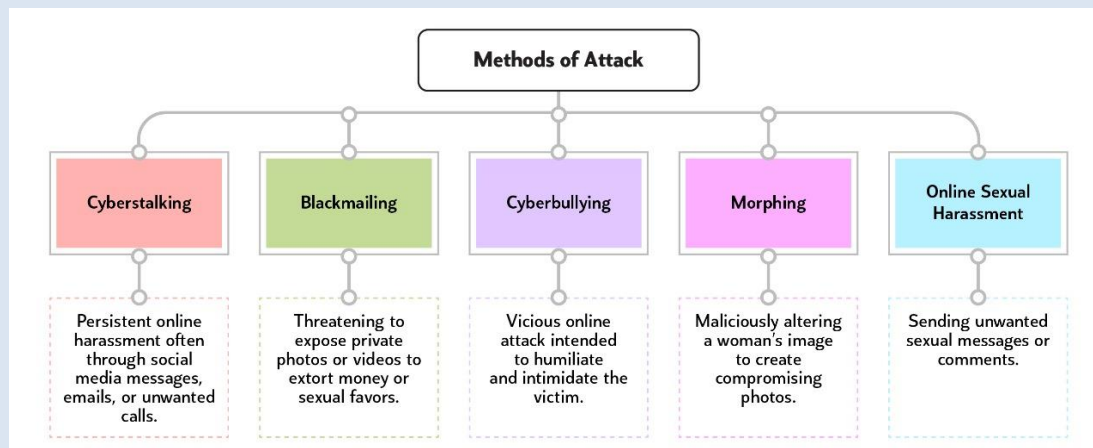
Student Notes:

Cyber Harassment and crimes

The internet, a vast digital landscape offering connection and opportunity, can also become a breeding ground for crime. Women in India are disproportionately targeted by cybercriminals, facing a range of online threats that exploit technology to violate their privacy, safety, and dignity.

The Scope of the Problem

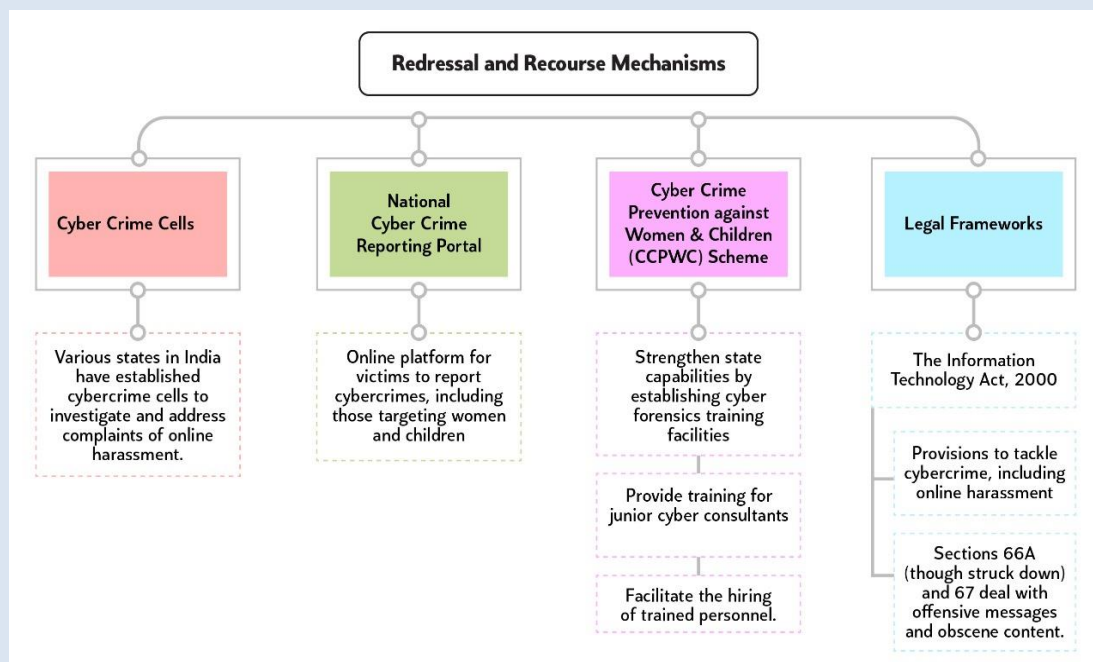
- **Prevalence:** According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), cybercrimes against women are a significant concern. In 2021, over 20% of all reported cybercrimes (52,974) targeted women.



Impact: These crimes can have devastating consequences for victims. They can lead to emotional distress, social isolation, and even physical harm. The fear of online harassment can also limit women's freedom of expression and participation in the digital space.

Perpetuation of Online Harassment:

- **Anonymity:** The ability to remain anonymous online emboldens perpetrators to engage in abusive behavior without fear of immediate repercussions.
- **Social Media Algorithms:** Platforms often prioritize sensational content, which can amplify abusive messages and make them more visible.
- **Cultural Attitudes:** Societal norms that condone or overlook sexism contribute to a permissive environment for online abuse.



Why Stringent Laws Haven't Eradicated VAW

India has a robust legal framework to protect women. Laws like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (2013), and the Criminal Law Amendment Act (2013) have strengthened legal recourse for victims.

However, the fight against VAW is far from over. The persistence of high crime rates against women despite these legal measures points to a complex interplay of factors:

- **Weak Implementation:** Stringent laws lose their power if not effectively implemented. Delays in judicial proceedings are a major concern.
 - According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report 2021, the average pendency rate in rape cases in India is a staggering 42.4%. This backlog discourages reporting and leads to low conviction rates.
 - For instance, the NCRB report 2021 states a conviction rate of only 27.8% for rape cases.
- **Administrative Bottlenecks:** The apathy and inefficiency within the administration can further discourage victims. Bureaucratic hurdles, insensitive handling of cases, and a lack of women-friendly police stations create a hostile environment for reporting.
 - A 2018 report by Human Rights Watch titled "'I Couldn't Bear It Anymore': Failures in India's Response to Domestic Violence" documented instances where victims faced insensitive questioning, victim-blaming attitudes, and pressure to withdraw complaints.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure:** The lack of safe spaces, support systems, and proper rehabilitation facilities for victims creates a sense of helplessness and discourages them from pursuing justice.
 - One Woman One Room, a campaign by the NGO Swati Didi Sanghasthapana works to address this gap by establishing a network of safe homes for survivors of violence. However, such initiatives are limited and cannot meet the nationwide demand.
- **Social and Cultural Obstacles:** Deep-rooted patriarchal norms, societal pressure to endure abuse, and victim shaming often lead women to withdraw cases or accept out-of-court settlements. Lack of financial independence and limited access to education further diminish their agency.
 - A 2021 survey by Lokniti-CSDS found that 52% of respondents in India believe a wife should tolerate violence to keep the family together. This highlights the need for social awareness campaigns that challenge such regressive mindsets.
- **Misuse and Loopholes:** While rare, instances of misuse of legal provisions by filing false complaints can create mistrust in the system. Additionally, regressive sections within some laws themselves can offer loopholes that perpetrators exploit to escape punishment.
 - For example, Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code exempts marital rape from its definition, leaving countless married women vulnerable to sexual violence within their own homes.

Eradicating VAW requires a multi-pronged approach that goes beyond just enacting laws. Here are some key strategies:

- **Strengthening Implementation:** Fast-track courts, improved training for law enforcement officials, and efficient witness protection programs are crucial for ensuring speedy justice.
- **Sensitization and Awareness Campaigns:** Community outreach programs, educational initiatives, and media campaigns can challenge societal biases and empower women to understand their rights.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Promoting women's education and skill development can lead to financial independence, giving them greater agency and bargaining power.

- **Shifting Social Norms:** Social awareness campaigns and community engagement initiatives can challenge patriarchal norms and promote gender equality.
- **Improved Infrastructure:** Investing in safe spaces, women's police stations, and victim support services can provide a secure environment for reporting and healing.

By addressing these challenges and working towards a holistic approach, India can create a society where women are safe, respected, and empowered.

7. The Enduring Fight for Equality: A Chronological Look at India's Women's Movements

The fight for women's rights in India is a long and arduous journey, marked by distinct phases of activism, reform, and evolving ideologies. This section delves into the historical trajectory of the women's movement in India, highlighting its key milestones and the changing objectives over time.

7.1. Phase 1: Reform and Anti-Colonial Struggles (Late 19th - Mid 20th Century)

Reformist Movements

- Savitribai Phule and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar spearheaded campaigns against Sati (widow burning) and child marriage.
- **Educational Empowerment:** Jyotirao Phule established the first girls' school in India in 1848.
- **Key Organisations:**
 - **Brahmo Samaj:** Founded by Raja Rammohun Roy, fought for the abolition of Sati.
 - **Arya Samaj:** Championed women's empowerment.

Anti-Colonial Struggles

- **Integration with Independence Movement:** Women played a crucial role in the Indian independence movement, with Mahatma Gandhi mobilizing them for swaraj (self-rule).
- **Significant Organisations:**
 - **All India Women's Conference (1927):** Advocated for political participation and social reforms.
 - **Women's Indian Association (1917):** Focused on women's suffrage, education, and social reform.

Pre-independence movements, largely led by men, focused on social reforms to "uplift" women. However, post-independence, the baton was passed on to women themselves. The focus transformed from mere reform to demanding true gender equality. This new wave questioned the traditional, gender-based division of labor and challenged the patriarchal structures that perpetuated women's oppression.

7.2. Phase 2: The Quest for Legal and Social Equality (1960s - 1980s)

1. Legal and Social Reforms

- **Towards Equality Report (1974):** Exposed the stark realities of women's lives, highlighting issues like declining sex ratio, economic marginalization, and discriminatory personal laws. This served as a catalyst for further action.
 - **Vina Mazumdar and Lotika Sarkar,** played a key role in compiling this groundbreaking report.

2. The Rise of Autonomous Women's Groups (1970s-1980s):

The 1970s and 80s saw a surge of autonomous women's groups, independent from state control. These groups tackled a diverse range of issues critical to women's empowerment:

- **Economic Empowerment:** Pioneering organizations like the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), championed the cause of women workers in the informal sector, providing them with training, skill development, and access to credit.

- **Legislative Reforms:** Women's organizations actively lobbied the state for legislative reforms.
 - The All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), for instance, played a crucial role in advocating for women's political rights and equal opportunities.
 - **Legal Support:** Organizations like the All India Muslim Women's Personal Law Board (AIMWPLB) and Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Andolan (BMMA) provided vital legal aid. They also provided support to Muslim women facing issues related to marriage, divorce, property rights, and child custody.
 - The landmark Shah Bano case, where a Muslim woman fought for maintenance after divorce, is a prime example of their work.
3. **Cooperative movements:** Cooperative societies like Shri Mahila Griha Udyog (Lijjat Papad) not only provided women with employment opportunities but also empowered them through collective ownership and decision-making.

7.3. Phase 3: Decentralization and Grassroots Activism (1990s - Early 2000s)

Grassroots Movements: The 1990s witnessed a shift towards decentralization and grassroots activism.

- **Constitutional Amendments:** The 73rd and 74th amendments (1992) mandated 33% reservation for women in Panchayats and Municipalities.
- **NGO Rise:** Women-led NGOs provided support networks and legal aid.

Diverse Movements

- **Dalit and Marginalized Women:** This phase also gave rise to movements addressing the specific needs of Dalit women and other marginalized communities. These movements challenged the notion of a singular "womanhood" and highlighted the intersectionalities of gender, caste, and class.

Digital Feminism: The advent of the digital age ushered in a new era of activism. Social media platforms like Twitter became fertile ground for movements like #MeToo, which highlighted issues of sexual harassment and abuse.

- The online space broadened the agenda of the women's movement, bringing issues of LGBTQ+ rights, body autonomy, and mental health to the forefront.

Contemporary Organisations

- **Peace Movements:** Organisations like Naga Mothers Association addressed problems of conflict, peace-building, and substance abuse in insurgency-affected areas.
- **Environmental Advocacy:** Ecofeminism linked women's development with environmental protection.

7.4. Problems Faced by Women's Organisations

Structural Challenges

- **Unorganized Structure:** Many women's NGOs lack proper organization.
- **Financial Constraints:** Limited funding hampers their activities.
- **Urban-Centric Focus:** Most organisations serve urban women, neglecting rural issues.

Social and Political Issues

- **Narrow Support Base:** Women-centric issues often lack active support from men.
- **State Dependence:** Many organisations, despite claiming autonomy, align closely with state agendas.
- **Fragmentation:** There is significant fragmentation among women's organisations, with different sections constituting their own movements.

Government initiatives and schemes for socio-economic empowerment of women:**1. As per the Economic survey 2024:**

- India is transitioning from women's development to women-led development

Gender Budget

- The share of the Gender Budget in the total Union Budget has increased to 6.5% in Financial Year 2025, the highest since the introduction of Gender Budgeting Scheme in Financial Year 2006.

Social Empowerment

- **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao:** Emphasis on cherishing, educating, and saving for the girl child.
- Maternal mortality rate declined from 130/lakh live births (2014-16) to 97/lakh live births (2018-20).
- Institutional deliveries increased from 78.9% (2015-16) to 88.6% (2019-21).
- **PM Matru Vandana Yojana** provides cash incentives for the birth of the first and second child (female), encouraging proper rest for new mothers.

Nutritional Security

- **Mission Saksham Anganwadi & Poshan 2.0** addresses malnutrition in pregnant women, lactating mothers, children, and adolescent girls.
- Focus on health, wellness, and immunity through micronutrient sufficiency.
- Anganwadi centers upgraded to **Saksham Anganwadis** with modern facilities and educational tools.
- Participation of Panchayat and women's collectives enhances accountability in nutrition programs.

Access to Basic Necessities

- **Swachh Bharat Mission:** Construction of toilets.
- **Ujjwala Yojana:** Provision of clean cooking gas connections.
- **Jal Jeevan Mission:** Provision of tap drinking water connections.
- These initiatives reduce women's drudgery and care burden, freeing up time for productive work.

Safety and Legal Aid

- **Sambal:** One-stop centers offer medical and legal aid, police facilitation, temporary shelter, and counseling for women affected by violence.
- 24-hour toll-free women's helpline '181' provides prompt response on government schemes and emergency services.

Education and Skilling

- **Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) Scheme:** Women constitute about 82% of the total beneficiaries.
- **Women in Science and Engineering (WISE KIRAN)** boosts female involvement in STEM fields.
- Initiatives like **Vigyan Jyoti** and exclusive research grants for women scientists under **CSIR-ASPIRE** aim to enhance women's participation in scientific research.

Political Empowerment

- **Nari Shakti Vandan Abhiniyam, 2023** aims to increase women's political participation.
- Reservation for women in Panchayats has led to greater investment in public goods related to women's concerns and improved child health and education outcomes.

Economic Empowerment

- **PM Jan Dhan Yojana:** 55.6% of account holders are women.
- **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-NRLM:** Empowers women through Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

- **Entrepreneurship:** High female participation in **PM Mudra Yojana** and **Stand-Up India**.

Equality in Asset Ownership

- Female ownership of land and assets is crucial for financial security and economic opportunities.

PM AWAS Yojana mandates female ownership of houses to promote gender equity.

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Prajapati**

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