

Women's Rights in India

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Women's Rights in India: Achievements, Challenges, and the Road Ahead

Context

- The **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)** remains a landmark global framework for advancing **gender equality**.
- It identified **12 critical areas**, including **education, healthcare, economic empowerment, and political participation**.
- Over the last **three decades**, India has made significant strides in women's empowerment through **government policies, legal reforms, and social movements**.
- However, **gender-based violence, workplace discrimination, and leadership gaps** remain pressing challenges.
- As India approaches **30 years since the Beijing Declaration**, it is crucial to assess the progress made and the way forward.

India's Achievements in Advancing Women's Rights

Health and Maternal Care

- **Maternal mortality rate (MMR)** reduced from **130 (2014) to 97 (2020) per 100,000 births**.
- **Institutional deliveries** increased to **95%** due to schemes like **Janani Suraksha Yojana** and **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana**.
- **Contraceptive use** among married women rose to **56.5%**, improving reproductive health choices.
- **Ayushman Bharat PMJAY** has provided **millions of women** with free healthcare access.

Education and Economic Empowerment

- **Female literacy rate** has improved to **70.3% (2023)**.
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)** has helped improve the **child sex ratio** and girl enrolment rates.
- **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020** promotes **STEM education** for women.
- **1.5 crore women entrepreneurs** have benefited from **MUDRA loans**.
- **100 million women** integrated into formal banking under **Jan Dhan Yojana**.

Women in Leadership

- **Women's representation in Panchayati Raj:** Over 1.5 million women leaders in local governance.
- The **Women's Reservation Bill (2023)** mandates 33% seats for women in legislatures.
- **GATI & G20 TechEquity Platforms** promote women's participation in **STEM fields**.
- **Women on company boards** increased from 5% (2011) to 18% (2023) due to **SEBI's** mandate.

Gender-Based Violence: A Persistent Challenge

- **770 One Stop Centres (OSCs)** provide medical, legal, and psychological support.
- **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (2023)** strengthens **legal protections** for women.
- **Odisha's blockchain-based grievance system** ensures **confidentiality and faster redressal**.
- **Workplace harassment and domestic violence** remain underreported due to **social stigma**.

Challenges in Workforce Participation and Leadership

Economic Barriers

- **Women's labor force participation rate** is 32.8% (2023), lower than global averages.
- **'Broken rung' phenomenon** restricts women from advancing to managerial roles.
- **Gender pay gap:** Women earn 30% less than men for the same work.

Workplace Bias and Stereotypes

- Women in leadership face **double standards**—assertive women are labeled as “too aggressive.”
- **Motherhood penalty** affects career progression, leading to **promotion delays and pay gaps**.

Legal Mandates and Corporate Diversity

- **Companies Act (2013)** mandates at least **one female board member** in public firms.
- **SEBI regulation** ensures at least **one independent female director** in top **1,000 listed firms**.
- However, these remain **compliance-driven**, with limited efforts toward true inclusivity.

The Road Ahead

- **Stronger legal enforcement** for workplace rights and safety.
- **Bridging gender pay gaps** through targeted policies.
- **Increasing women's participation in emerging fields** like AI, cybersecurity, and finance.

- Shifting focus from token representation to genuine leadership roles.
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Conclusion

India has made **significant progress** in gender equality, but challenges remain in **workforce participation, leadership, and safety**. Future efforts must focus on **economic empowerment, legal reforms, and changing societal attitudes** to ensure **true gender justice**.



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