

CHARTING PATHWAYS FOR GENDER EQUALITY: EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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Abstract

India is part of the global gender equality discourse. Human rights and women's rights in India are difficult, as this paper shows. This study examines historical, legal, and social challenges and discusses pioneering gender equality efforts and the current fight against persistent disadvantages. Constitutional human rights underpin gender equality in India. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar incorporated equality and non-discrimination into the constitution. Employment discrimination and inequality were addressed by the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. Though diverse and complicated, India's socio-cultural milieu maintains gender inequality. The paper acknowledges gender-based violence, education gaps, and pay inequality. Traditional gender norms and customs can hinder women's rights. Women and activists in India pioneered. The grassroots Chipko Movement, Gulabi Gang, and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign have advocated change. This paper stresses education's changing potential to achieve gender equality. Girls' education policy in India has shown promise as a change agent. Projects give women knowledge and skills and challenge old ideas. It also highlights women's leadership and how representation impacts policies that affect women. The paper highlights India's Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013. This international human rights law protects women in secure and inclusive spaces. The paper also highlights landmark women's rights and violence against women laws. In India, human and women's rights go beyond law. Community engagement and grassroots movements challenge entrenched conventions. Self-help organisations, microfinance schemes, and women-led cooperatives overcome economic barriers through collective action. Finally, this paper shows India's progress in gender equality through human rights. Despite challenges, India's women's rights growth is diverse and persistent. As it examines how human rights affect gender equality, the nation becomes more just, inclusive, and empowered. Pioneering gender equality guarantees future generations inherit a society that values everyone's potential.

Keywords: Gender, Human, Constitution, Women, India.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a fundamental principle of human rights, recognised worldwide as an essential driver of social and economic progress. In the diverse and dynamic landscape of India, the pursuit of gender equality takes on a complex and multifaceted character. This exploration seeks to chart the pathways through which human rights influence women's empowerment in India, acknowledging the intersectionality of rights and the intricate interplay of legal, cultural, and socioeconomic factors. India, as a nation, is founded upon democratic values and a commitment to justice and equality, enshrined in its Constitution. Yet, realising these principles in the lives of its women is a continuous journey marked by both progress and persistent challenges. This exploration delves into the role of human rights in shaping this journey, recognising that they form the bedrock upon which women's empowerment is built.¹

The legal framework in India provides a strong foundation for gender equality, with constitutional provisions and legislation explicitly safeguarding women's rights. However, the effectiveness of these legal safeguards often depends on their implementation at various levels of governance. Beyond the legal realm, the influence of human rights extends into education, economic empowerment, political participation, health, and the quest to eliminate violence against women. The cultural and societal norms that shape the lives of Indian women also play a significant role. Human rights principles advocate for challenging and transforming these norms to eradicate discrimination and empower women across all segments of society. Additionally, the concept of intersectionality is essential, recognising that the experiences of women can vary based on factors such as caste, religion, and socioeconomic status. This exploration will examine the pathways to women's empowerment in India through the lens of human rights. It will shed light on the progress made, the challenges faced, and the critical role of government policies, civil society organisations, and advocacy efforts in advancing gender equality. Ultimately, it underscores the significance of upholding human rights principles to chart a more equitable future for India's women, where their empowerment is not just a goal but a human right.²

GENDER EQUALITY

¹ Meghana, Gender justice and its various forms under indian constitution, *available at*: <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/Legal/Article-7669-Gender-Justice-And-Its-Various-Forms-Under-Indian-constitution.html> (last visited: 27.09.2023)

² Women and the Indian constitution, *available at*: [https://Vikaspedia.In/Social-Welfare/Women-And-Child-Development/Women-Development-1/Legal-Awareness-For-Women/Women-And-The-Indian-Constitution#:~:Text=Equality%20before%20law,-Article%2014%20embodies&Text=Article%2015\(3\)%20makes%20it,Educationally%20backward%20classes%20of%20society](https://Vikaspedia.In/Social-Welfare/Women-And-Child-Development/Women-Development-1/Legal-Awareness-For-Women/Women-And-The-Indian-Constitution#:~:Text=Equality%20before%20law,-Article%2014%20embodies&Text=Article%2015(3)%20makes%20it,Educationally%20backward%20classes%20of%20society). (last visited on: 26.09.2023).

Gender equality is the principle advocating that individuals of all genders should receive fair and equal treatment across all aspects of society, including education, employment, and participation in decision-making processes. It is not only a fundamental human right but also an essential cornerstone for fostering a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. While significant strides have been made in advancing gender equality, women and girls continue to confront obstacles and prejudices in various spheres of society. These challenges encompass issues like the gender wage gap, limited access to education and employment opportunities, and underrepresentation in leadership roles.³ The pursuit of a more equitable society benefits not only women but also society as a whole, leading to increased prosperity and overall well-being. It is imperative for individuals, communities, and governments to collaborate in the quest for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls to enable them to realise their full potential.⁴

Equality, or the absence of discrimination, signifies a state in which every individual enjoys identical opportunities and rights. This is the aspiration of every member of society, seeking parity in status, opportunities, and rights. However, it is a widespread observation that discrimination persists among human beings, stemming from cultural distinctions, geographical disparities, and gender disparities. Gender-based inequality remains a global concern even in the 21st century, with disparities persisting between men and women worldwide. Gender equality ensures equal opportunities for both men and women across political, economic, educational, and healthcare dimensions.⁵

Meaning and importance of gender equality

The term “gender justice” lacks a universally agreed-upon definition, often encompassing various interpretations. It is sometimes understood as advocating for equal treatment between men and women, while in other instances, it is seen as a call for justice and fairness towards the “fairer sex.” For the purpose of this discussion, we will consider gender justice in the latter sense. It is imperative to recognise that no society can advance or be considered truly civilised without embracing gender equality, which is fundamentally intertwined with the essence of a civilised community. Mahatma Gandhi, astutely emphasised that “Women are the companions of men,

³ Major dimensions of inequalities in gender, *available at*: <https://www.Cbgaindia.Org/Wp-Content/Uploads/2016/04/Gender-Inequality.Pdf> (last visited on: 26.09.2023).

⁴ Education from a gender equality perspective, *available at*: <https://Files.Eric.Ed.Gov/Fulltext/ED511674.Pdf> (last visited on: 25.09.2023).

⁵ Gender Equality Essay, *available at*: <https://School.Careers360.Com/Gender-Equality-Essay-Essy>. (last visited on: 27.09.2023).

endowed with equal intellectual capabilities.” Ignoring the importance of women in society would indeed be detrimental to the progress and evolution of civilisation.⁶

A nation’s progress and its attainment of higher levels of development hinge on the equal access of both men and women to opportunities. Unfortunately, women in society are often marginalised and denied the same rights as men when it comes to healthcare, education, participation in decision-making processes, and economic independence, especially concerning wage disparities. A longstanding social structure perpetuates this inequality, where girls are systematically deprived of opportunities equal to those given to boys. Traditionally, women have assumed the role of caregivers in families, which often confines them to household duties. This limited participation of women in higher education, decision-making positions, and leadership roles acts as a significant impediment to a country’s growth trajectory. This gender disparity significantly hampers a nation’s growth rate. However, when women actively engage in the workforce, it has a remarkable impact on boosting a country’s economic growth rate. Gender equality not only fosters economic prosperity but also enhances the overall well-being of the nation.⁷

Gender inequality in India

As per the World Economic Forum’s gender gap ranking, India stands at rank 108 out of 149 countries. This rank is a major concern as it highlights the immense gap in opportunities in women in comparison to men. In Indian society, for a long time back, the social structure has been such that women are neglected in many areas like education, health, decision-making areas, financial independence, etc. Another major reason that contributes to the discriminatory behaviour towards women in India is the dowry system in marriage. Because of this dowry system, most Indian families consider girls as a burden. Preference for son still prevails. Girls have refrained from higher education. Women are not entitled to equal job opportunities and wages. In the 21st century, women are still the preferred gender in home management activities. Many women quit their jobs and opt out of leadership roles because of family commitments. However, such actions are very uncommon among men. Gender equality is a fundamental principle of human rights and a cornerstone of social progress. In India, a country marked by diversity in culture, socioeconomic conditions, and historical influences, the journey toward

⁶ Meenal Maheshwar, “Gender Justice and Inequality in India” Volume 2, July 2018, Pen Acclaims, *available at*: <http://www.penacclaims.com/Wp-Content/Uploads/2018/08/Meenal-Maheshwari-1.Pdf>

⁷ Shreya Shree Singh, Gender Justice: A Critical Appraisal, International Journal of Legal Developments and Allied, Vol. 6 (4) 2020

women's empowerment is a complex and dynamic one. This exploration aims to navigate the intricate web of factors that influence women's empowerment in India, with a particular focus on the pivotal role of human rights. The Indian Constitution upholds gender equality as a fundamental right and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. Explore the key constitutional provisions that underpin women's rights in India.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights play a crucial role in promoting women's empowerment in India. Women's empowerment is not just about providing economic and political opportunities; it also involves ensuring that women's fundamental rights are protected and upheld. This discussion will revolve around the examination of rights, encompassing their historical underpinnings, the definition of human rights, their characteristics, and their inherent nature. Additionally, we will briefly delve into the significant milestones in the evolution of human rights and touch upon the classification of these rights. The foundational premise is that all human beings are born with an inherent and inalienable equality in dignity and rights.⁸ These rights are moral assertions that every individual possesses by virtue of their humanity alone, irrespective of factors such as caste, colour, creed, place of birth, gender, cultural differences, or any other considerations. These principles find their formal expression in what we now recognise as human rights. These rights are sometimes referred to as fundamental rights, basic rights, inherent rights, natural rights, or birthright.⁹

Meaning and Definition of Human Rights

Dr. Justice Durga Das Basu provides a comprehensive definition, characterising human rights as “those minimal rights that every individual must possess against the State or any other public authority, simply by virtue of their membership in the human family, without regard to any other factors.”¹⁰ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948¹¹ defines human rights as “rights derived from the inherent dignity of the human person.”

In the context of India, Section 2 (1)(d) of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, defines “human rights” as “the rights pertaining to life, liberty, equality, and the dignity of the individual,

⁸ Dr. Bhagyashree A. Deshpande, *Human Rights Law & Practices*, 3 (Central Law Publications, 1st Edn., 2017).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Characteristics of Human Rights, *The Legal Quotient*, available at: <https://thelegalquotient.com/legal-concepts/human-rights/characteristics-of-human-rights/1490/> (last visited on: 30.04.2024)

¹¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is an international document adopted by the United Nations General Assembly that enshrines the rights and freedoms of all human beings. Drafted by a UN committee chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, it was accepted by the General Assembly as Resolution 217 during its third session on 10 December 1948 at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, France.

as guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants and enforceable by Indian Courts.”¹²

Characteristics of Human Rights:

1. **Universality:** Human rights are bestowed upon every individual without discrimination based on factors such as caste, creed, race, religion, nationality, or place of birth.
2. **Inalienability:** Many philosophers contend that these rights are inherent and bestowed by a higher authority, making them immune to revocation or alteration by any entity.
3. **Indivisibility and Interdependence:** Human rights are interconnected and indivisible. When a government safeguard one right, it assumes the responsibility of protecting other rights of its citizens. For instance, ensuring the right to a fair trial necessitates providing access to food, shelter, and a clean environment to uphold the right to life.¹³
4. **Inherent from Birth:** Human rights are an inherent part of each person's existence, accessible from the moment of birth.
5. **Inherent Regardless of Awareness:** Lack of awareness or non-exercise of these rights does not result in their forfeiture. If an individual is unaware of their right to legal counsel, authorities are obligated to provide free legal assistance or inform them of their rights.
6. **Dignity and Personality Protection:** Human rights safeguard the dignity and individuality of every human being. Rights such as the right to life, right to liberty, and protection against arbitrary arrest and punishment are designed to uphold a person's dignity.¹⁴

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

It is a comprehensive inquiry into the relationship between the principles of human rights and the advancement of women's empowerment within the Indian context. This exploration entails a detailed examination of how the recognition, protection, and promotion of human rights intersect with and impact the status, opportunities, and overall well-being of women in India. Key components of this exploration may include:

Human Rights Framework: International Human Rights Instruments:

¹² Dr. H.O. Agarwal, Human Rights, 3 (Central Law Publications, 17th Edn., 2020).

¹³ Dr. T.P. Tripathi, An Introduction to the study of Human rights 27 (Allahabad Law Agency Publications, 1st Edn., 2008).

¹⁴ Ibid.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): The UDHR, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, forms the cornerstone of modern human rights. It proclaims principles of equality, non-discrimination, and dignity for all individuals, irrespective of gender. India is a signatory to the UDHR, and these principles are aligned with the Indian Constitution.¹⁵

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)¹⁶: CEDAW, adopted by the UN in 1979, is a comprehensive treaty specifically focused on women's rights. India ratified CEDAW in 1993, demonstrating its commitment to address gender-based discrimination and promote gender equality. The treaty has influenced India's domestic legislation and policies related to women's rights.¹⁷

Incorporation into India's Legal Framework:

Domestic Legislation: India has enacted various laws and acts to protect and promote women's rights and gender equality. Notable examples include the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961,¹⁸ the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005,¹⁹ and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013.²⁰ These laws address issues such as dowry harassment, domestic violence, and workplace harassment.

Indian Constitution: The Indian Constitution provides a strong foundation for women's rights and gender equality. It guarantees fundamental rights to all citizens, irrespective of gender. Key provisions include Article 14 (equality before the law),²¹ Article 15 (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex),²² and Article 42 (provision for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief).²³ India's commitment to international human rights instruments aligns with the principles enshrined in its Constitution. The Indian judiciary has played a pivotal role in interpreting and upholding these principles. Landmark judgments, such as *Vishakha v. State of*

¹⁵ *Supra* note 11

¹⁶ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international legal instrument that requires countries to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and promotes women's and girls' equal rights.

¹⁷ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) for Youth, *available at*: [https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/12/cedaw-for-youth#:~:text=The%20Convention%20on%20the%20Elimination,women's%20and%20girls%20equal%20rights.\(last%20visited%20on%2027.09.2023\).](https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/12/cedaw-for-youth#:~:text=The%20Convention%20on%20the%20Elimination,women's%20and%20girls%20equal%20rights.(last%20visited%20on%2027.09.2023).)

¹⁸ The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961

¹⁹ The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

²⁰ Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

²¹ Dr. Kailash Rai, Constitutional Law of India, 128 (Central Law Publications, 11th Edn Reprint 2017).

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 171

²³ Prof. Narender Kumar, Constitutional Law of India, 157 (Allahabad Law Agency, 5th Edn., 2006).

*Rajasthan*²⁴ and several others, have led to the formulation of guidelines and laws addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. However, challenges persist in fully realizing women's rights and achieving gender equality in India. These include issues related to implementation, enforcement, cultural norms, and social practices. Nonetheless, India's legal framework, shaped by both international treaties and domestic legislation, provides a robust foundation for the protection and empowerment of women, and it continues to evolve to address contemporary challenges.

Legal Protections

Analyzing the legal protections and rights guaranteed to women under Indian law reveals a comprehensive framework aimed at promoting gender equality and safeguarding women's rights. Here's an examination of some key legal protections and rights afforded to women in India:

1. **Right to Equality:** The Indian Constitution, in Articles 14 and 15, ensures the right to equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex. This forms the foundational principle for gender equality in India.²⁵
2. **Right to Education:** The Right to Education Act, 2009, ensures free and compulsory education for all children, including girls. It aims to bridge gender gaps in education and promote girls' access to quality schooling.²⁶
3. **Right to Work:** Women have the right to work in India under various labor laws and acts, including the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976. This act prohibits discrimination in wages on the basis of gender.
4. **Right to Health:** The National Health Mission and various state health programs address women's health concerns, including maternal and reproductive health. Additionally, laws like the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994, aim to prevent sex-selective abortions.²⁷
5. **Protection Against Discrimination:** The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, is a landmark legislation that provides legal protection to women facing domestic violence. It covers physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse.

²⁴ (1997) 6 SCC 241).

²⁵ Uma, Right to Equality-A Fundamental Right, available at: <https://www.legalservicesindia.com/article/1688/Right-To-Equality--A-Fundamental-Right.html>. (last visited on 27.09.2023).

²⁶ Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, available at: <https://vikaspedia.in/education/policies-and-schemes/right-to-education/right-of-children-to-free-and-compulsory-education-act-2009-right-to-education-act>. (last visited on 26.09.2023).

²⁷ The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 (Act No. 57 Of 1994) And The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Amendment Act, 2002

6. **Protection Against Harassment:** The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013, mandates the prevention and redressal of sexual harassment at workplaces. It includes guidelines for complaint mechanisms and legal recourse.
7. **Protection Against Violence:** India has enacted various laws to address violence against women, including the Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections on crimes like rape (IPC Section 376),²⁸ dowry harassment (IPC Section 498A), and acid attacks.
8. **Legal Aid and Support:** The National Commission for Women (NCW) and State Women's Commissions work to protect and promote women's rights. Legal Aid Cells and NGOs also provide support and legal aid to women in need.
9. **Reservation in Local Governance:** Women in India benefit from reservations in local governance bodies (Panchayats and Municipalities). This affirmative action promotes women's participation in decision-making at the grassroots level.
10. **Anti-Dowry Laws:** The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, aims to combat the practice of dowry, which can lead to harassment and violence against women.
11. **Anti-Trafficking Laws:** India has laws and initiatives to combat human trafficking, such as the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956,²⁹ and the Ujjawala Scheme for rehabilitation and rescue of victims.

While these legal protections and rights are in place, challenges remain in their effective implementation and enforcement. Cultural norms, social attitudes, and economic disparities also contribute to the complexities of addressing gender-based discrimination and violence against women in India. Nonetheless, the legal framework plays a crucial role in advancing gender equality and protecting women's rights in the country.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Identifying and understanding the barriers and challenges that women in India face in realising their human rights is essential for addressing gender inequality effectively. These barriers and challenges encompass a range of factors, including:

1. **Cultural Norms:** Deeply ingrained cultural norms and traditions can perpetuate gender inequality. Practices like dowry, child marriage, and female seclusion restrict women's rights and opportunities,

²⁸ Prof. S.N. Misra, Indian Penal Code with the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2018, 781(Central Law Publications, 21st Edn., 2018).

²⁹ The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.

2. **Social Prejudices:** Prejudices and stereotypes about women's roles and abilities persist in many Indian communities. These biases can limit women's access to education, employment, and decision-making positions.³⁰
3. **Economic Disparities:** Economic disparities between men and women are significant in India. Women often have limited access to economic resources, including land and credit, which can hinder their financial independence.
4. **Educational Barriers:** Despite progress, disparities in access to quality education still exist. Girls in some regions may face challenges like early marriage, inadequate school facilities, and cultural attitudes that prioritize boys' education.
5. **Violence Against Women:** Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and trafficking, remains a pervasive issue. Fear of violence can deter women from asserting their rights.
6. **Legal Gaps and Enforcement:** While legal protections exist, there are gaps in their implementation and enforcement. Women may face obstacles in accessing justice, particularly in rural areas.
7. **Lack of Awareness:** Some women may not be aware of their legal rights and entitlements, making it challenging for them to assert these rights. Lack of awareness can also hinder access to support services.³¹
8. **Political Underrepresentation:** Women continue to be underrepresented in political decision-making bodies. This lack of representation can lead to policies that do not adequately address women's concerns.
9. **Healthcare Disparities:** Women may face disparities in healthcare access and quality, particularly in rural areas. Maternal health, in particular, is a concern, with issues related to maternal mortality and malnutrition.
10. **Discrimination at Work:** Discrimination in the workplace, including unequal pay, lack of maternity benefits, and limited career opportunities, can hinder women's economic empowerment.
11. **Child Marriage and Early Parenthood:** Child marriage and early motherhood can result in adverse health and social outcomes for young girls, limiting their life choices.

³⁰ UNICEF, Gender Equality, *available at:* <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/gender-equality> (last visited on 27.09.2023).

³¹ Preventing and Responding to Domestic Violence, *available at:* https://www.unodc.org/roseap/uploads/archive/documents/vietnam/publication/Trainee_manual_in_English_6-5-11_.pdf. (last visited on 27.09.2023).

12. Media Influence: Media portrayals of women can reinforce stereotypes and impact how women are perceived in society.³²

Understanding these barriers and challenges is critical for crafting effective policies, interventions, and awareness campaigns to promote women's human rights in India. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach involving changes in societal attitudes, legal reforms, and economic empowerment initiatives to ensure that women can fully enjoy their human rights.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES

Examining various initiatives, policies, and programs implemented by the Indian government and non-governmental organisations to promote women's empowerment and gender equality highlights concerted efforts to address gender disparities and uplift women in Indian society. Here are some key initiatives and programs:

Government Initiatives:

1. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter): Launched by the Indian government, this initiative aims to address gender-based discrimination and promote the education and welfare of girls.³³
2. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana: A maternity benefit program that provides financial support to pregnant and lactating mothers to reduce maternal and child mortality rates.³⁴
3. Mahila Shakti Kendra: An initiative aimed at empowering rural women through skill development, capacity building, and support services.³⁵
4. National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM): This mission focuses on promoting self-help groups (SHGs) and empowering rural women by providing them with access to finance, livelihood opportunities, and social empowerment.³⁶

³² A girl's right to say no to marriage – Working to end child marriage, *available at*: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/ForcedMarriage/NGO/PlanInternational3.pdf>. (last visited on 27.09.2023).

³³ Beti Bachao, Beti Padha, *available at*: [https://ssb.gov.in/index1.aspx?langid=1&lev=2&lsid=2906&pid=2900&Cid=0&lid=1521&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1#:~:text=educate%20girl%20child\),Bet%20Bachao%2C%20Beti%20Padhao%20\(Save%20girl%20child%2C%20educate%20girl,corpus%20of%20Rs100%20crore.](https://ssb.gov.in/index1.aspx?langid=1&lev=2&lsid=2906&pid=2900&Cid=0&lid=1521&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1#:~:text=educate%20girl%20child),Bet%20Bachao%2C%20Beti%20Padhao%20(Save%20girl%20child%2C%20educate%20girl,corpus%20of%20Rs100%20crore.) (last visited on 27.09.2023).

³⁴ Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, *available at*: <https://www.myscheme.gov.in/hi/schemes/pmmvy>. (last visited on 27.09.2023).

³⁵ Mahila Shakti Kendra, *available at*: <https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/Mahila%20Shakti%20Kendra%20Scheme.pdf>. (last visited on 27.09.2023).

³⁶ NRLM - National Rural Livelihood Mission (Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana), *available at*: <https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/nrlm/>. (last visited on 27.09.2023).

5. One-Stop Centers (OSCs): These centres offer support services to women affected by violence, including medical assistance, legal aid, and counselling.³⁷
6. Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana: A savings scheme aimed at ensuring the financial security and education of girl children.³⁸

Non-Governmental Organizations:

SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association): SEWA works to empower women in the informal sector by providing them with access to financial services, skill development, and advocacy.

1. Pratham: This NGO focuses on improving the quality of education for girls through programs aimed at enhancing learning outcomes and promoting girls' education.
2. Breakthrough: An organisation that uses media, technology, and community mobilisation to address issues of gender-based violence and discrimination.
3. Rural Development Foundation: This organisation works towards women's economic empowerment by providing vocational training, access to credit, and income-generating activities.
4. UN Women India: The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women works in collaboration with the Indian government and civil society organisations to advance gender equality and women's rights.
5. Vidya Sahyogini: An initiative that supports girls' education and women's empowerment in rural areas by providing scholarships, mentoring, and life skills training.
6. Mann Deshi Foundation: Focused on rural women's economic empowerment, this organisation provides financial literacy, entrepreneurship training, and access to microfinance. These initiatives and programs represent a diverse range of efforts to promote women's empowerment and gender equality in India. They address various aspects of women's lives, including education, healthcare, economic independence, and social well-being, contributing to the broader goal of advancing women's human rights in the country.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

³⁷ One Stop Centre Scheme, *available at*: [https://vikaspedia.in/social-welfare/women-and-child-development/women-development-1/one-stop-centre-scheme#:~:text=One%20Stop%20Centres%20\(OSC\)%20are,community%20and%20at%20the%20workplace.](https://vikaspedia.in/social-welfare/women-and-child-development/women-development-1/one-stop-centre-scheme#:~:text=One%20Stop%20Centres%20(OSC)%20are,community%20and%20at%20the%20workplace.) (last visited on 26.09.2023).

³⁸ Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY) - Interest Rate 2023, Tax Benefits, Eligibility, Bank List, Age Limit & Other Details, *available at*: <https://cleartax.in/s/sukanya-samriddhi-yojana>. (last visited on 26.09.2023).

1. **Persistent Gender-Based Violence:** Despite legal safeguards, gender-based violence remains a significant challenge in India. Ensuring effective implementation and enforcement of laws, along with changing social norms that tolerate such violence, is crucial.
2. **Economic Empowerment Disparities:** Economic disparities persist, and many women, especially in rural areas, lack access to economic opportunities, land, and credit. Addressing these disparities requires comprehensive economic empowerment programs.
3. **Political Underrepresentation:** Women's representation in political bodies remains inadequate. Encouraging more women to participate in politics and ensuring their voices are heard is essential.
4. **Educational Gaps:** While progress has been made, educational gaps still exist, particularly in rural areas. Focusing on quality education and addressing factors like early marriage and cultural norms hindering girls' education is vital.
5. **Healthcare Challenges:** Access to quality healthcare, especially maternal and reproductive healthcare, remains a challenge in remote regions. Ensuring accessible and affordable healthcare services is critical.

Future Directions

1. **Legal Reforms:** Continue working on legal reforms to strengthen protections against gender-based violence and discrimination. Improving the implementation of existing laws is equally important.
2. **Education and Awareness:** Promote education and awareness campaigns targeting both women and men to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality from an early age.
3. **Economic Empowerment:** Expand economic empowerment programs for women, including access to credit, skill development, and support for entrepreneurship, particularly in rural areas.
4. **Political Participation:** Encourage women's political participation through initiatives such as reserving seats in legislative bodies and supporting women candidates.
5. **Healthcare Access:** Invest in healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural and underserved areas, and provide comprehensive maternal and reproductive healthcare services.
6. **Data Collection:** Enhance data collection on women's status and rights to inform policies and programs better.

7. Community Engagement: Engage communities in discussions about gender equality and women's rights to create bottom-up change. Overall, this exploration seeks to shed light on how the principles of human rights can serve as a catalyst for enhancing the status and agency of women in India, contributing to greater gender equality and social progress.

CONCLUSION

Summarise the key findings and emphasise the critical role of human rights in shaping the pathways to gender equality in India. Discuss ongoing challenges, the importance of continued advocacy, and the vision for a more equitable future where women's empowerment is not just a goal but a human right upheld in practice. human rights are essential for women's empowerment in India. They provide the legal and ethical framework necessary to challenge gender-based discrimination and inequality. However, the effective implementation of these rights remains a challenge, and continued efforts are needed to ensure that women in India can fully realise their rights and achieve empowerment in all aspects of life.