

A STUDY ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN INDIA: CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

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Abstract

This paper examines women's empowerment and leadership in India, focusing on both challenges and opportunities. Despite progress through laws, education, and social awareness, women still face barriers such as patriarchy, workplace discrimination, limited resources, and the burden of balancing family with careers. At the same time, supportive policies, technological growth, and initiatives like Atmanirbhar Bharat are opening new pathways for women in politics, business, and civil society. By analysing these obstacles and enabling factors, the study highlights the gap between policy and practice and suggests ways to build a more inclusive and sustainable society.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, women's empowerment and leadership have become central themes in India's socio-economic and political discussions. In essence, empowerment means increasing women's access to education, healthcare, economic

independence, and political participation, so they can meaningfully contribute to society. In India, the momentum toward gender equality has been fuelled by constitutional guarantees, progressive legislation, international influence, and growing social awareness. However, despite significant

advancements, women still confront structural obstacles like deeply ingrained patriarchal norms, discrimination in the workplace, unequal access to resources, and the simultaneous load of household and professional responsibilities.

With increased access to education, regulations that assist women, advancements in technology, and programs like Atmanirbhar Bharat, India is providing more and more opportunity for women to take on leadership roles. The power of inclusive leadership is demonstrated by the growing presence of women in business, politics, and civil society. This study examines both the challenges such as patriarchy, workplace bias, and resource inequality and the opportunities that can foster gender equality. By analysing these factors, it highlights the gap between policy and practice and proposes ways to build a more equitable and sustainable society.

Review of Literature

Dr. Kathi Saraswathi: Opportunities and Challenges for Women's Empowerment in India (2024) Saraswathi emphasises how discrimination at employment, patriarchal systems, and restricted access to resources impede empowerment. She highlights opportunities through government initiatives like Atmanirbhar Bharat, supportive legislation, and education. In order to promote women's leadership positions, the report suggests merging financial literacy,

mentorship, and awareness campaigns to bridge policy and practice.

S. Kogula Swathi: An Empirical Study on the Challenges and Issues of Women's Empowerment in India (2025) Swathi's empirical research examines harassment, insufficient education, and a lack of legal awareness as obstacles. She contends that empowerment is crucial for achieving social justice and equality. The study advocates for more robust legal frameworks, awareness initiatives, and grassroots efforts to guarantee that women have access to leadership roles in various sectors.

Trisha Chowdhry and Dr. Supriya Surana: Gendered Leadership in Higher Education in India (2026) This conceptual analysis indicates that while the involvement of women in higher education has increased, their presence in leadership positions is still restricted. The authors emphasize the existing institutional obstacles, insufficient mentorship, and gender prejudice in promotion processes. They propose changes in recruitment practices, leadership training, and policy backing to enhance the representation of women in senior academic roles.

Research methodology

Research Design

The study is of a descriptive nature, concentrating on detailing the current

circumstances, obstacles, and possibilities concerning women's empowerment and leadership in India. The study relies on secondary data such as government reports, published articles, surveys, policy documents, and academic studies.

Objective

- To study on various women's entrepreneurship in India.
- To study on challenges and opportunities faced by women entrepreneur.

Research Gap

Some studies show that things like patriarchy and discrimination at work can hold women back. They also talk about harassment and cultural rules that can be a problem. At the time these studies say that education and changes in policies can help. Having a mentor can also make a difference. Most of these studies focus on the systems and social rules that are already in place like patriarchy and workplace discrimination and how they affect women. They do not look at things that might be important, like education and policy reforms and how these can create opportunities, for women. What is missing is an in-depth analysis of digital transformation and technology-driven empowerment for example, how access to digital platforms, online networks, and virtual leadership training can break traditional barriers for

women. The thing is, nobody has really looked into how things like tools and working from home are changing the way women in India become leaders. This is a gap because we need to understand how digital tools, remote work opportunities and social media advocacy are helping women in India become leaders. We should be studying how digital tools, remote work opportunities and social media advocacy are affecting women in India and how they can help them become leaders. Women in India need to be empowered. This can happen through education and policy but also through digital tools, remote work opportunities and social media advocacy. Digital tools, remote work opportunities and social media advocacy can provide ways for women, in India to become leaders that are fair and can be used by many people.

Data Interpretation

Challenges

- Patriarchal norms continue to restrict women's freedom and decision-making power.
- Workplace discrimination in hiring, promotions, and pay limits leadership opportunities.
- Unequal access to education, training, finance, and technology creates barriers.
- Women face the dual burden of managing professional and household responsibilities.

- There are supportive policies but they are not implemented well. This leads to a gap between policy and practice.
- Safety and security concerns, like harassment are issues. They discourage people from participating and also lower their confidence.

Opportunities

- Education is getting easier to access. That is helping more women to pursue careers and leadership roles.
- The government is making policies that support women. The constitution is guaranteeing rights, which is creating pathways for women to have equal rights as men and that is helping to achieve gender equality, for women.
- Technological progress provides new platforms for women to learn, work, and lead in diverse sectors.
- Initiatives like Atmanirbhar Bharat encourage women's entrepreneurship and economic independence.
- Women are increasingly visible in politics, business, and civil society, showing their ability to lead effectively.
- International influence and global movements for equality are strengthening India's push for women's empowerment.
- Corporate diversity programs and workplace reforms are opening

opportunities for women in decision-making positions.

- The rise of digital platforms and remote work offers flexible opportunities for balancing professional and personal responsibilities.
- Mentorship networks and women-focused organizations are supporting skill development and leadership growth.

Findings

- Workplace discrimination and unequal access to resources remain widespread.
- Women often face the dual burden of managing professional responsibilities alongside domestic duties.
- Expanding access to education has opened new pathways for women's participation in leadership.
- Supportive government policies and initiatives like Atmanirbhar Bharat encourage self-reliance and entrepreneurship.
- Technological advancements provide new platforms for women to engage in leadership and decision-making.
- There is a gap between policy and practice—laws and schemes exist, but implementation is often weak.
- A holistic approach is needed, combining education, financial literacy, mentorship, and awareness campaigns to strengthen women's empowerment.

Case Studies: Women Breaking Barriers in Indian Entrepreneurship

Falguni Nayar – Founder of Nykaa

Background

She used to be an investment banker and worked as Managing Director in Kotak Mahindra Capital. Started Nykaa in 2012 at the age of 50. Created one of India's biggest beauty and lifestyle e-commerce companies.

Challenges

Joined a startup ecosystem dominated by men. Saw skepticism towards launching an e-commerce beauty brand in India. Needed to convince consumers about buying beauty products online.

Legal Empowerment Impact

Listed Nykaa in 2021 and became one of the wealthiest self-made women in India. Encouraged women leadership at her firm. Provided employment to many women.

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw – Founder of Biocon

Background

Established Biocon in 1978 in the garage of Bengaluru. Entered into the biotechnology sector when it was almost unheard of in India. Encountered gender discrimination in accessing loan facilities and recruiting talent.

Challenges

The major challenge here was the reluctance of financial institutions to fund an idea from a woman entrepreneur. There was the presence of biotechnology in India at that particular time. The woman entrepreneur needed to justify herself in an area that involved science.

Empowerment Impact

The woman entrepreneur helped create a reputable company dealing in medicines. This company has now become recognized internationally. The woman entrepreneur feels strongly that everyone needs access to healthcare and innovation. She has a passion for ensuring women take up science and technology career positions. Biocon and the woman entrepreneur have brought change through empowering women to take up strategic positions.

Kalpana Saroj – Chairperson of Kamani Tubes

She was born in a Dalit community in Maharashtra. This was where her journey started. She experienced many challenges in her childhood such as child marriage and domestic violence. People used to discriminate her on the basis of her caste. However, she started taking some measures which would help her. Therefore, she started her business of tailoring.

Challenges

Many challenges were faced by her in her lifetime. Caste discrimination and gender discrimination were very prominent among others. She was also extremely poor. She had no formal education. However, she never gave up. She took charge of a company named Kamani Tubes when it was facing bankruptcy.

Leadership & Empowerment Impact

With her hard work, she was able to revive Kamani Tubes from liquidation. This was definitely a success for her. She turned out to be an example of empowerment for other people. At the same time, Indian government also recognized her work. She was awarded with Padma Shri due to her contributions in society and economics. Kamani Tubes and her personal life both serve as an inspiration. She was happy about what she had achieved through Kamani Tubes.

Malavika Hegde – Leadership Revival of Cafe Coffee Day

Background

V.G. Siddhartha's wife, Assumed the responsibility of CCD in 2019 when he died suddenly. The company was facing a dire financial situation owing to its heavy debts.

Challenges

CCD had more than 7,000 crore of debt. Its image was tarnished following the passing

away of the founder. It faced tremendous pressure from the outside world. It needed to restore its credibility among the investors and employees.

Leadership Actions

Worked on cost cutting and lowering debts. Sold off the company's non-core businesses. Improved the operational efficiency of the company. Restored internal spirit and confidence.

Leadership and Empowerment Impact

Managed to reduce the huge debt of the company. Guaranteed the survival of one of the biggest coffee chains in India. Saved many jobs.

Conclusion

As per the research paper entitled Women's Empowerment and Leadership in India: Challenge and Opportunity, there are some hindrances to the full participation of women in leadership in the country although India has made a lot of strides towards gender equality. The factors include patriarchy, discrimination, resource inequalities, and the double burden of professional and domestic life of women. Conversely, opportunities such as increasing education, favorable policies of the government, technological development, and projects like Atmanirbhar Bharat offer chances for women in decision-making positions.

The presence of more female leaders in various sectors including politics, corporate organizations, and civil society demonstrates the power of inclusive leadership. The problem with policies in practice is a vital challenge in achieving this goal. This issue needs an all-encompassing solution through education, literacy, mentoring, awareness campaigns, and implementation of laws.

In other words, the main conclusion is that India is at the threshold and needs to address the issues of barriers and utilize the opportunities to empower women.

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