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WOMEN RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Women's Empowerment, Women's Rights, Gender Equality, India, Gender Discrimination, Women's Rights.</i>	Women's rights and empowerment are essential for achieving social equality and sustainable development in India. This systematic review of literature focuses on the literature about women's empowerment through analysis of the social, economic, educational and political issues that affect the advancement of women. The study adopts a systematic literature review, PRISMA guidelines-based approach, using an interpretivist and descriptive research design. Thematic analysis was used to analyse a total of 9 published studies up to 2018. The results revealed three broad themes of the multidimensional character of empowerment, the factors that favoured the development of the women, and the existence of intractable obstacles that curtailed improvement. The review identifies that, despite the positive turn that has been made in women's participation and opportunities in India, structural inequalities still demand the focus of policies.

1. Introduction

Women's rights and empowerment have become important priorities in India's social and economic development agenda. In the last ten years, there has been a marked improvement in the proportion of women's involvement in the education, employment, and decision-making processes¹. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), the female Worker Population Ratio (WPR)

¹ Kumar, P., & Shankar, I. (2011). Education and women empowerment in India. https://www.academia.edu/download/53626781/01_scan0014.pdf



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increased to 22% in 2017-18. The literacy rate of women has also increased in the country. The development in rural India has been especially good, with 96 per cent growth in female employment, compared to 43 per cent in cities. These trends suggest the increasing opportunities for women and demonstrate the necessity to study the rights and empowerment of women in the Indian context.

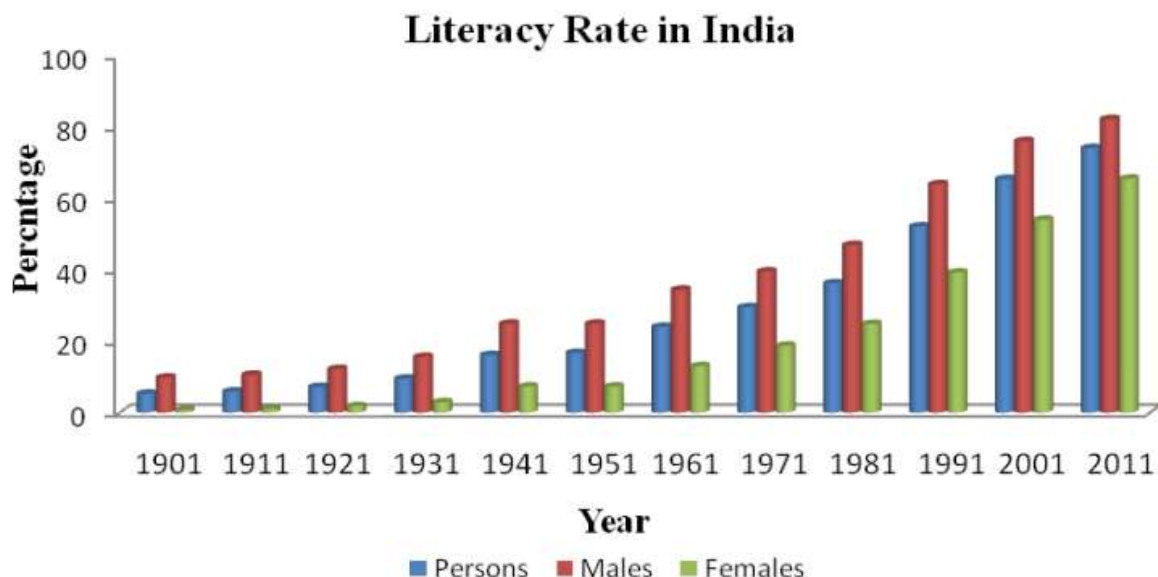


Figure 1: Literacy rate in India²

Although there has been a lot of development in enhancing the rights of women, there are still numerous issues that hinder the empowerment of women in India. Inequality based on gender is still observed in the areas of education, employment opportunities, healthcare, and decision-making³. Women continue to have unequal access to quality education, fewer employment opportunities, wage differences, and a lack of representation in leadership and political roles. Women also have their social and economic involvement limited due to violence against them such as domestic abuse and harassment⁴. The health disparities that are still present in women, especially in maternal and reproductive health, still impact the well-being of women. In addition, women in rural areas tend to

² M Suguna, (2011). *Education and women empowerment in India*. Journal Article - Zenith International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research. http://www.zenithresearch.org.in/images/stories/pdf/2011/Dec/zijmr/15_VOL%201_ISSUE8_ZEN.pdf

³ Khanday, M. I., Shah, B. A., Mir, P. A., & Rasool, P. A. R. V. A. I. Z. (2015). Empowerment of women in India-historical perspective. *European Academic Research*, 2(11), 14494-14505. <https://www.academia.edu/download/112989144/1370.pdf>

⁴ Singh, K. (2016). Importance of education in empowerment of women in India. *Motherhood International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Development*, 1(1), 39-48. <https://www.motherhooduniversity.edu.in/pdf/Publications/2016/Khushboo%20Singh.pdf>



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be more disadvantaged than those in urban areas because of their lack of access to education, income, health care and social amenities.

This systematic review is aimed at evaluating available literature that addresses the issue of women's rights and empowerment in India and offers a clear insight into what drives the social, economic, political and educational development of women.

Aim

To conduct a systematic review of the literature on women's rights and female empowerment in India and find the main factors affecting gender equality and empowerment.

Objectives

- To examine the major dimensions of women's rights and empowerment discussed in the existing literature.
- To identify the social, economic, educational, and political factors affecting women's empowerment in India.
- To analyse the key challenges and barriers that limit the achievement of women's rights and empowerment.

2. Previous Literature Review

Early research was mainly concentrated in the areas of gender inequality, education, health, and the social status of women in a patriarchal society. Researchers claimed that the conventional cultural practices tended to limit the involvement of women in economic and political affairs. Government efforts like the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the National Perspective Plan on Women tried to bring about better welfare and social inclusion of women during the 1970s and 1980s⁵. The significant report titled Towards Equality in the year 1974 brought to the fore the gender disparities prevailing and promulgated reforms in policies. The term empowerment was mostly considered to enhance the access of women to education, health services and fundamental rights at this time.

At the start of the 2000s, it was a period of change in the welfare models to be more empowerment-oriented. The role of women in economic and decision-making processes, as well as in political representations, began to be considered by scholars⁶. In 2001, the National Policy on

⁵ Shetty, S., & Hans, V. (2015). Role of education in women empowerment and development: Issues and impact. *Role of education in women empowerment and development: issues and impact* (September 26, 2015). https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2665898

⁶ Billava, N., & Nayak, N. S. (2016). Empowerment of women representatives in Panchayat Raj institutions: a thematic review. *Journal of Politics & Governance*, 5(4), 5-18. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Narayan-Billava/publication/319297501_Empowerment_of_Women_Representatives_in_Panchayat_Raj_Institutions_A_Thematic_Review/



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Empowerment of Women was adopted to promote gender equality by introducing legal, economic, and social reforms. This was an era when research was carried out, emphasising the role of self-help groups (SHGs) in improving the economic autonomy of women⁷. Researchers discovered that SHGs empowered the women to have access to credit, initiate small businesses, and support household decision-making. Another striking instance was the Self-Employed Women Association (SEWA) in Gujarat that served the women who were in the informal sector by providing financing, training, and advocacy⁸. The effects of the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution that reserved seats for women in local government were also researched.

In the period between 2011 and 2018, the study of women's rights and empowerment became more complex and multidimensional. Research gains more and more force in the linkage of education, employment, leadership, legal safeguard and social inclusion. Researchers asserted that economic independence is not the sole capacity of empowerment, but the capacity to lead through rights and choices and also to engage themselves in their entire society. Such state campaigns, like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, implemented in 2015, were aimed at combating gender discrimination and ensuring that girls and women have better opportunities⁹. A number of studies reported the positive changes in female education and employment. The states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu have been able to show relatively good indicators in female literacy and access to healthcare, and the role of women in local governance. Evidence was also found that the role played by microfinance programmes in promoting entrepreneurship among rural women was escalating.

Though the literature is rich in information about the rights and empowerment of women in India, the majority of the studies are dedicated to one or another dimension, like education, employment, political representation, or legal rights. Few studies have collated these various viewpoints in a systematic way to give a holistic picture of empowerment¹⁰. Moreover, the results of the studies are still divided, and it is challenging to determine common determinants, obstacles, and policy implications. Thus, a systematic review is required to summarise the existing evidence to create a comprehensive picture of women's rights and empowerment in India.

[inks/5c3833cb458515a4c71ca15a/Empowerment-of-Women-Representatives-in-Panchayat-Raj-Institutions-A-Thematic-Review.pdf?origin=journalDetail&tp=eyJwYWdlIjoiam91cm5hbERldGFpbCJ9](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338333cb458515a4c71ca15a/Empowerment-of-Women-Representatives-in-Panchayat-Raj-Institutions-A-Thematic-Review.pdf?origin=journalDetail&tp=eyJwYWdlIjoiam91cm5hbERldGFpbCJ9)

⁷ Self Employed Women's Association. (2018). Advancing cooperation among women workers in the informal economy: the SEWA way. <https://researchrepository.ilo.org/esploro/outputs/book/Advancing-cooperation-among-women-workers-in/995218843102676>

⁸ Chauhan, A. (2018). An analysis of socio-economic impact of women empowerment through microfinance schemes with special reference to Udaipur cluster. *International Journal of Management Studies and Research*, 6(7). <https://uok.ac.in/notifications/Anjoo%20Chauhan%20BUSINESS%20ADMINISTRATION.pdf>

⁹ Verma, R., Dhaka, R., & Agrawal, G. (2018). Beti bachao, beti padhao programme: a right initiative to save the girl child. *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health*, 5(6), 2153-2155. <https://www.academia.edu/download/97586863/2070.pdf>

¹⁰ Diwakar, N., & Ahamad, T. (2015). Skills development of women through vocational training. *International Message of Applied Research*, 1, 79-83. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Taufiq-Ahamad/publication/290691361_Skills_development_of_women_through_vocational_training/links/569b236708aca147694fa80c/Skills-development-of-women-through-vocational-training.pdf



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3. Conceptual Framework

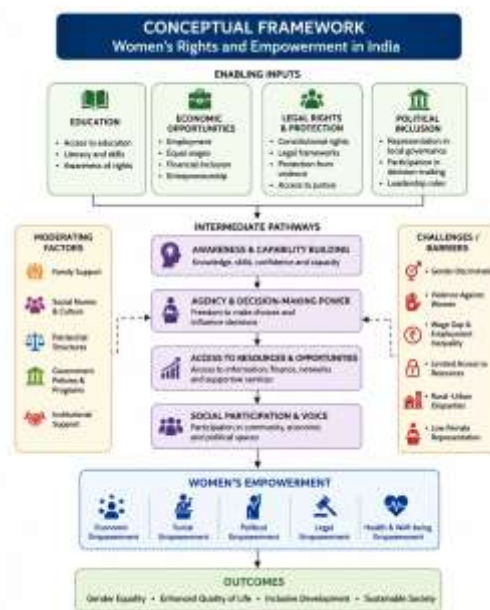


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework¹¹

The above figure shows the conceptual framework of the research. Research reported on the long-term presence of gender-based violence, unequal pay, lack of women in leading roles and the existence of social norms that denied women autonomy.

4. Research Method

This research used an inductive research approach. A descriptive research design was undertaken to conduct a logical analysis and summary of the past research findings¹². The research philosophy underlying the study was that of interpretivists, which focuses on the comprehension of social phenomena in terms of interpreting human experiences and social situations.

- Women's rights
- Women empowerment
- Women's empowerment
- Gender equality

¹¹ Khanday, M. I., Shah, B. A., Mir, P. A., & Rasool, P. A. R. V. A. I. Z. (2015). Empowerment of women in India-historical perspective. *European Academic Research*, 2(11), 14494-14505. <https://www.academia.edu/download/112989144/1370.pdf>

¹² Patten, M. L. (2016). *Understanding research methods: An overview of the essentials*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315266312>



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- Women in India
- Female employment
- Women's education
- Women and political participation
- Gender discrimination
- Women leadership

4.2.2 Databases

- Scopus
- Web of Science
- ScienceDirect
- SpringerLink
- Google Scholar
- *Table 1: Search Strings*¹³

<i>Search No.</i>	<i>Search String</i>	<i>Database</i>	<i>Results</i>
S1	"Women's Rights" AND India	Scopus	132
S2	"Women's Empowerment" AND India	Scopus	185
S3	"Gender Equality" AND India	Web of Science	96
S4	"Women Empowerment" AND Education AND India	ScienceDiret	74
S5	"Women Employment" AND India	SpringerLink	68
S6	"Political Participation" AND Women AND India	Elsevier	124
S7	"Gender Discrimination" AND Women AND India	Scopus	82

*Table 1: Criteria*¹⁴

¹³ Patten, M. L. (2016). *Understanding research methods: An overview of the essentials*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315266312>



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<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Inclusion</i>	<i>Exclusion</i>
<i>Publication</i>	<i>Peer-reviewed articles</i>	<i>Reports, conference papers</i>
<i>Year</i>	<i>Published up to 2018</i>	<i>Published after 2018</i>
<i>Focus</i>	<i>Women's rights and empowerment in India</i>	<i>Studies unrelated to India</i>
<i>Language</i>	<i>English articles</i>	<i>Non-English articles</i>

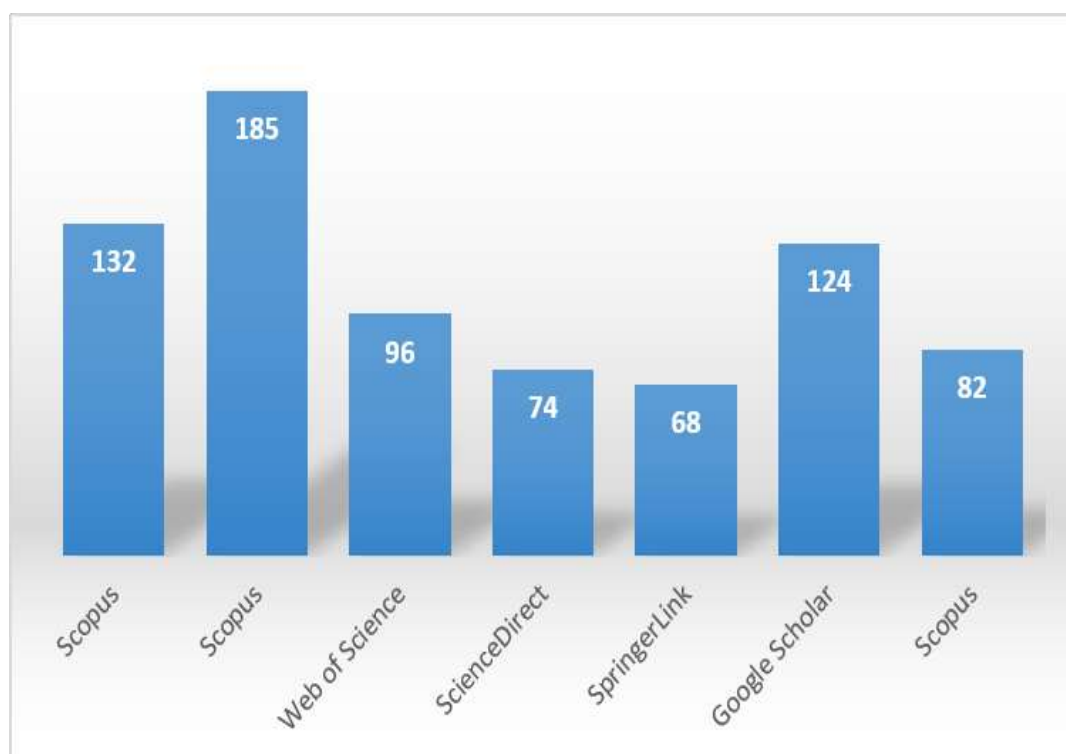


Figure 3: Search results¹⁵

¹⁴ Patten, M. L. (2016). *Understanding research methods: An overview of the essentials*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315266312>

¹⁵ Patten, M. L. (2016). *Understanding research methods: An overview of the essentials*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315266312>



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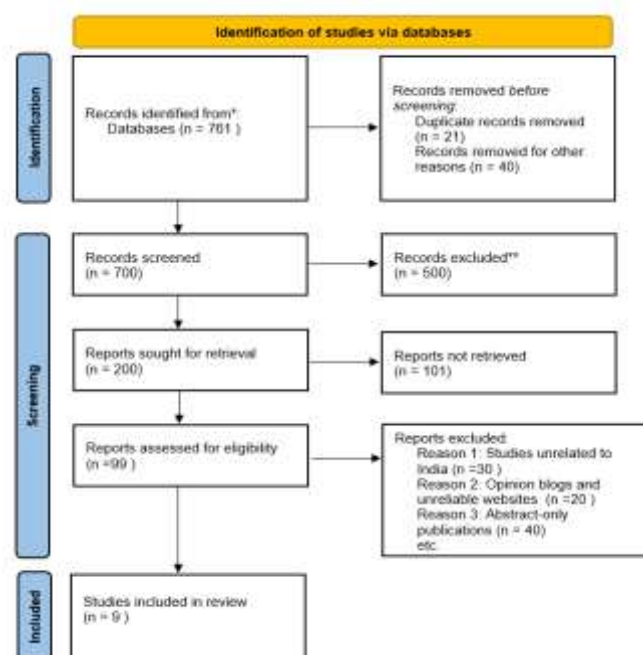


Figure 4: PRISMA¹⁶

A clear study selection procedure was undertaken using the PRISMA framework. A total of 761 recordings were first located. After the process of applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, only 9 articles were left to be reviewed and analysed.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the selected studies¹⁷. The relevant findings were categorised into common themes based on education, employment, economic empowerment, political participation, social barriers and legal rights which were coded and extracted. This methodology allowed for the finding of common patterns and relationships between the chosen studies.

Research Ethics

No human subjects were used as this research was founded solely on secondary data gathered in published educational materials. Adequate referencing of all sources, plagiarism was avoided,

¹⁶ Williamson, K., & Johanson, G. (Eds.). (2017). *Research methods: Information, systems, and contexts*. Chandos Publishing. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=GVPXDgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=research+methods+&ots=6U7SevqSGA&sig=LgSMXREkXb6e9dEYppf-q-rLXgU>

¹⁷ Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology*, 2(17-37), 25. <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=AAniDgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA17&dq=Thematic+analysis+&ots=dpo5hqyeHY&sig=64VOO0CLh4BEDOFgy5eOKPRw0xU>



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proper reporting of findings and objective interpretation of the literature reviewed were all ethical considerations.

5. Result and analysis

Table 4: inductive coding table

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Key Words</i>	<i>Themes</i>
Ghosh, Chakravarti & Mansi (2015); Sapovadia, Patel & Patel (2015); Mathur & Agarwal (2017)	Women's empowerment, education, Panchayati Raj, self-help groups, affirmative action, social protection, political participation, and economic independence	Theme 1: Multidimensional nature of women's rights and empowerment
Amaral, Bandyopadhyay & Sensarma (2015); Brody et al. (2017); Roy, Chatterjee & Dutta Gupta (2018)	Female employment, NREGS, self-help groups, financial autonomy, decision-making, access to resources, empowerment index	Theme 2: Social, economic, educational, and political empowerment determinants
Biswas & Mukhopadhyay (2018); Deb (2016); Vinodhini & Vijayanthi (2016)	Patriarchy, marital status, gender discrimination, globalisation, rural women, social barriers, inequality	Theme 3: Persistent barriers restricting women's rights and empowerment progress

Theme 1: Multidimensional Nature of Women's Rights and Empowerment

Empowerment of women in India is a multidimensional issue that goes beyond economic considerations and addresses education, political representation, social agency, and legal rights. There is some evidence that constitutional changes like the reservation of 33 per cent seats to women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions have helped boost women's representation in local governance¹⁸. Nonetheless, the quality of participation is expected to depend on their level of education, confidence and decision-making ability. Self-help groups (SHGs) are also considered effective tools of empowerment through enhancing financial independence, social networks and community participation of women in rural settings¹⁹. Indicatively, SHG programs in states like West Bengal and

¹⁸ Ghosh, R., Chakravarti, P., & Mansi, K. (2015). Women's empowerment and education: Panchayats and women's Self-help Groups in India. *Policy Futures in Education*, 13(3), 294-314. DOI: 10.1177/1478210315571214

¹⁹ Sapovadia, V. K., Patel, S. V., & Patel, A. (2015). Affirmative Actions for Women Empowerment in India: Assessing Impact of Social Protection on Women Empowerment, Fertility & Welfare. *Fertility & Welfare* (April 3, 2015). <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2589663>



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Rajasthan have helped women to gain access to credit, acquire entrepreneurship skills and make better decisions within the household. Thus, the empowerment needs not only education but also economic opportunities, political inclusion, and social transformation²⁰.

Table 5: EF²¹

Empowerment index (EI)	Low	Medium	High	Total
Overall	52	41.4	6.56	124364
Never Married	100	0	0	30656
Married	32.1	58.6	9.3	87909
Widow	100	0	0	3921
Divorcee	100	0	0	504
Separated	100	0	0	1374
Total	64698	51532	8134	124364

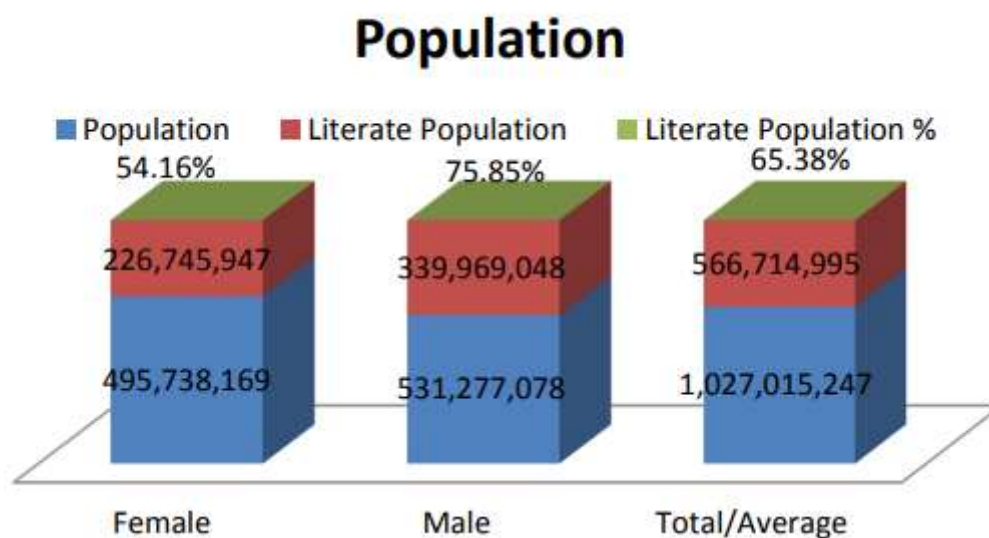


Figure 5: Population²²

²⁰ Mathur, P., & Agarwal, P. (2017). Self-help groups: a seed for intrinsic empowerment of Indian rural women. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 36(2), 182-196. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/EDI-05-2016-0039>

²¹ Biswas, C. S., & Mukhopadhyay, I. (2018). Marital status and women empowerment in India. *Sociology International Journal*, 2(1), 29-37. <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=1227581>



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Theme 2: Social, Economic, Educational, and Political Empowerment Determinants

India has a robust social, economic, educational, and political influence on women's empowerment in India. Education is also a very important determinant as it enhances awareness of rights, work opportunities and involvement in decisions²³. Female literacy has increased substantially, rising from 53.7% in 2001 to 70.3% in 2011, contributing to improved social outcomes. Employment and self-help groups have empowered many rural women economically and have helped them to become financially independent and enhance their family wellbeing²⁴. Employment programmes run by the government, including the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), have greatly increased access of women to paid employment, with women providing about 54 per cent of person-days of employment generated by the scheme during some years. Women have also been empowered politically by being represented in the local governments and this has enabled them to be more engaged in community development and policy making²⁵.

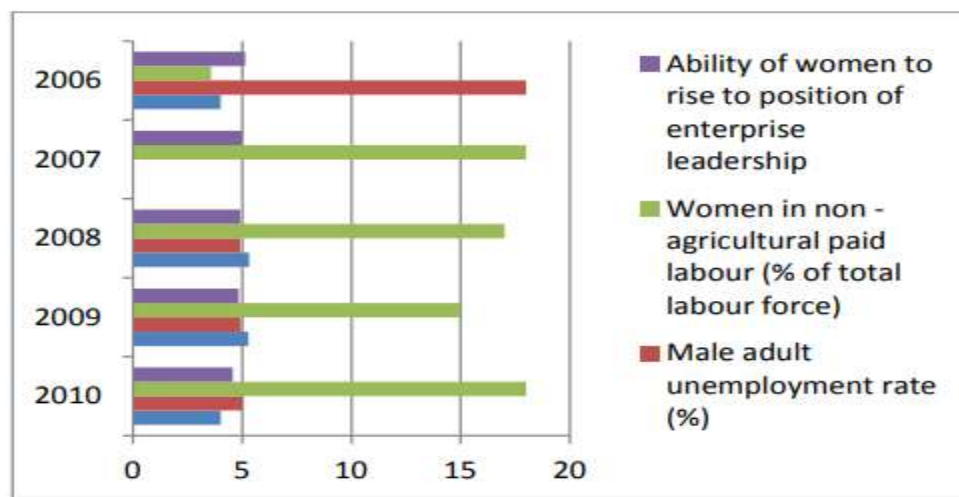


Figure 6: Empowerment²⁶

²² Sapovadia, V. K., Patel, S. V., & Patel, A. (2015). Affirmative Actions for Women Empowerment in India: Assessing Impact of Social Protection on Women Empowerment, Fertility & Welfare. *Fertility & Welfare* (April 3, 2015). <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2589663>

²³ Amaral, S., Bandyopadhyay, S., & Sensarma, R. (2015). Employment programmes for the poor and female empowerment: The effect of NREGS on gender-based violence in India. *Journal of interdisciplinary economics*, 27(2), 199-218. DOI: 10.1177/0260107915582295

²⁴ Brody, C., Hoop, T. D., Vojtkova, M., Warnock, R., Dunbar, M., Murthy, P., & Dworkin, S. L. (2017). Can self-help group programs improve women's empowerment? A systematic review. *Journal of Development Effectiveness*, 9(1), 15-40. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19439342.2016.1206607>

²⁵ Roy, C., Chatterjee, S., & Dutta Gupta, S. (2018). Women empowerment index: Construction of a tool to measure rural women empowerment level in India. *ANVESHAK-International Journal of Management*, 7(1). https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3357543

²⁶ Sapovadia, V. K., Patel, S. V., & Patel, A. (2015). Affirmative Actions for Women Empowerment in India: Assessing Impact of Social Protection on Women Empowerment, Fertility & Welfare. *Fertility & Welfare* (April 3, 2015). <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2589663>



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Theme 3: Persistent Barriers Restricting Women's Rights and Empowerment Progress

Nevertheless, a number of structural and cultural impediments still limit the empowerment of women in India. Gender discrimination, patriarchal social traditions, inequalities in access to resources, and issues to do with safety curtail the experience of women in education, employment and civic life²⁷. Gender-based violence has been a significant issue, where cases of domestic violence, harassment, and discrimination have been reported concerning the freedom and autonomy of women. The choice of women to work and their economic autonomy are also influenced by social requirements of marriage and family obligations²⁸. In fact, social restrictions towards unmarried women, widows, or those who were separated tend to be more intense than towards married women because of the attitude held. Even though there is an increase in the number of women in the workforce, women are still concentrated in the informal sector, where they are not secure and are paid low salaries²⁹.

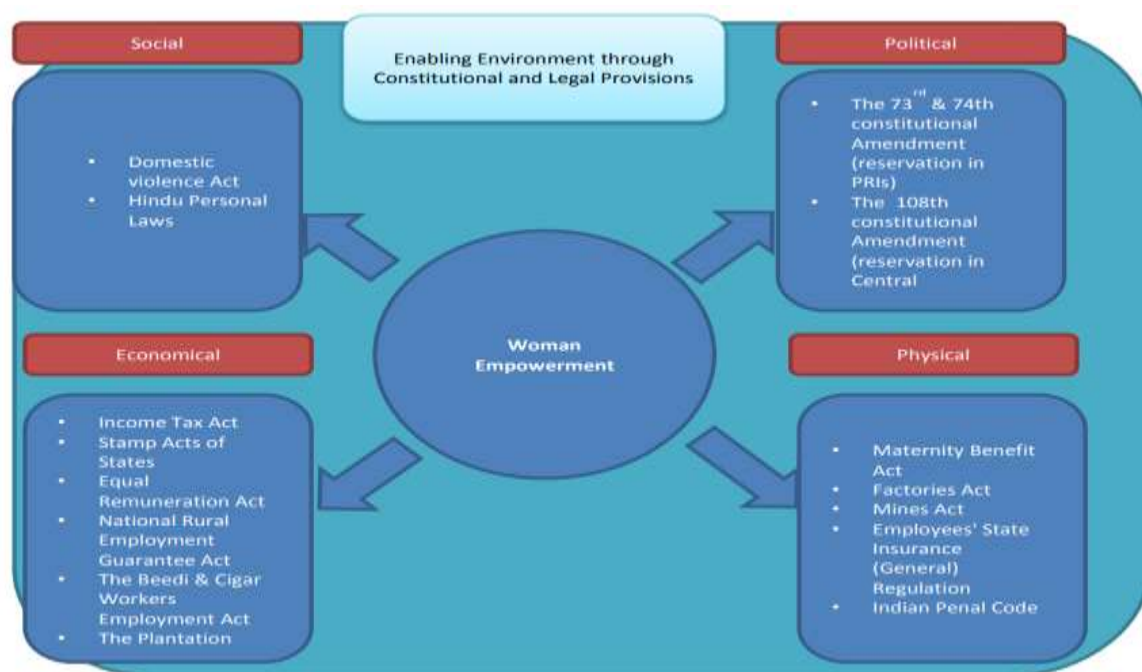


Figure 7: Women's Empowerment³⁰

²⁷ Biswas, C. S., & Mukhopadhyay, I. (2018). Marital status and women empowerment in India. *Sociology International Journal*, 2(1), 29-37. <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=1227581>

²⁸ Deb, M. (2016). Globalisation and its impact on women in India: A review. *International Journal of Applied Research*. <https://www.academia.edu/download/117390815/2-6-8-367.pdf>

²⁹ Vinodhini, R. L., & Vijayanthi, P. (2016). Self-help group and socio-economic empowerment of women in rural India. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*, 9(27), 67-89. DOI: 10.17485/ijst/2016/v9i27/97629

³⁰ Sapovadia, V. K., Patel, S. V., & Patel, A. (2015). Affirmative Actions for Women Empowerment in India: Assessing Impact of Social Protection on Women Empowerment, Fertility & Welfare. *Fertility & Welfare* (April 3, 2015). <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2589663>



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6. Discussion

This systematic review achieved the three objectives of the research. Firstly, the research concluded that empowerment of women in India is a multidimensional effect, which involves education, employment, economic independence, political participation and social inclusion³¹. The results observed that education, self-help groups, job opportunities and government programs are the most critical factors that contribute to empowering women. Patriarchy, gender discrimination, violence and unequal access to resources were considered key barriers to the review.

7. Conclusion

This literature review concludes that women's rights and empowerment in India have been on the rise as a result of more education, employment opportunities, political participation and government intervention. However, the challenges related to the patriarchal regulations, gender and discrimination, violence, and unequal access to resources still remain serious. The findings suggest that empowerment has to adopt an integrated strategy, in which social, economic, educational, and legal changes primarily take place. The empowerment of women by making them more active in making decisions and by offering them more opportunities has now become an important course of action towards achieving sustainable gender equality and the development of Indian society as a whole.

8. Limitations and Future Scope

The present study has limitations since it was limited to English-language peer-reviewed studies published until 2018, which might not consider all the evidence available in other sources. The review was more country-specific in the case of India and, therefore, not a comparison with any other country. Future research can include the use of recent studies, comparative studies and primary data collection as a solution to the emerging issues that may include digital empowerment, equality within the workplace, women's leadership, and the legacy of government policies on women's rights.

AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

³¹ Shetty, S., & Hans, V. (2015). Role of education in women empowerment and development: Issues and impact. *Role of education in women empowerment and development: issues and impact* (September 26, 2015). https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2665898



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PLAGIARISM POLICY

All authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright and ethical matters will take care by all authors. Journal and editors are not liable for aforesaid matters.

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