



# The Indian Women's Journey

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*The Last Five Decades*



Edited by  
**KAMLA NATH**

The Indian Women's Journey  
The Last Five Decades

# Shakti Books

*Shakti Books* is a significant series devoted to representing the range of issues pertaining to gender and its overlapping and intersectional concerns and contexts. It is unique in its ability to connect with well-known scholars writing on gender issues as well as to reach out to bright young talents negotiating and mediating the field.

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While writings on gender are available across disciplines or within scholarly readership, the interrogation of gender in this series is refreshing and cutting edge. It undertakes to sensitize its readers to unravel the nuances of gender in the everyday and encourages them to take part in this conversation.

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**Bijayalaxmi Nanda**  
*General Editor*

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Kamla Nath



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SHAKTI BOOKS

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*Sponsored by* The Nath Foundation

Published by Ashok Gosain and Ashish Gosain for:  
HAR-ANAND PUBLICATIONS PVT LTD  
E-49/3, Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-II, New Delhi-110020  
Tel: 41603490  
E-mail: [info@haranandbooks.com](mailto:info@haranandbooks.com)/[haranand@rediffmail.com](mailto:haranand@rediffmail.com)  
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# Prologue I

## I Had A Dream

I was only ten when I lost my father in 1951. We were seven siblings. At that time, women were still considerably disempowered. Hence, it was a daunting challenge for them to provide food, shelter and education to their children. Lucknow, my birth place was hardly any better, in this respect.

Just as a lid of a kettle flutters when the warmth builds up inside, my whole body was also bubbling when I looked at the conditions of women around me and dreamt to see that women get their dues. Women at that time were definitely emerging from the shadows, to claim an equal status in the society. To redefine the scope of women power was what I was dreaming about. Would this dream ever come true? Today, at 82, when youth and middle age are far behind me. I definitely do find more women coming into the forefront; it may be the corporate world, the political world, heading financial technologies and medical sectors etc., they are definitely coming up as achievers.

The book, **Five Decades of Indian Women's Journey** has deeply captured the struggles faced by women towards gender equality and their achievements in various sectors. This book could not have come at a better time than now. According to the latest World Economic Forum Report, India has slipped four places i.e. from 108 to 112 globally in terms of gender disparity. Women's participation at workplace is 28 percent. Many factors are responsible for keeping Indian women out of work force. Patriarchy, safety and stereotypes, for example, are the main difficulties in making inroads in professions, hitherto being the exclusive preserve of males.

The status of **women in India** has been subject to many changes over the span of recorded Indian history. Their position in society deteriorated early in India's ancient period. Practices such as female infanticide, dowry, domestic violence, child marriage and the taboo on widow remarriage, have had a long duration in India, and have proved difficult to root out. But now things are changing, education plays an important role to decrease these practices.

Many women in India continue to face significant difficulties. Crime against women such as rape, acid attacks, dowry killing, honor killing, sexual harassment at workplace, sex selection abortion, domestic violence, and forced prostitution of young girls have been reported across India.

If I talk about women participation in social life, and the degree to which women participates in public life that is being outside the home, it varies by regions and background. In recent years, however, more women have started to challenge such social norms.

The Guild of Service (My way of serving the society) as part of its mandate of empowering women has been conducting dowry-less, inter-caste, inter-religion, ostentation-free mass marriages since 1972. This intervention is helping a large number of poor populations to overcome the various difficulties of getting married.

It is amazing how we have gone up the ladder, broken the glass ceiling to a certain extent, but the journey is not over. We have still a long way to go.

Today, the typical dutiful *Bahus* from the *Marwadi* families have emerged as icons at the community level. Every woman today is a role model. She is *Shakti*. Only sky is the limit for them. If they are determined they can achieve. There is a 39% increase in the number of single women – widows, never married, divorced, and abandoned. I believe, economic empowerment is the key to surviving as a single woman in this country.

Education and economic development are correlated, training and education play a vital role in economic empowerment. The female literacy rate is increasing sharply in India, however, women are

still in majority among less skilled and unskilled workers, in urban and rural areas. The relationship between empowerment and education is quite evident. As women have gained rights, formal education has become a symbol of progress and a step toward equity. In order for true gender equity to exist, a holistic approach needs to be taken. Power to women has not been served on a platter. We had to fight hard for equality in area such as suffrage, property rights and many other issues surrounding gender justice for women. We still have to achieve access to health, education and leadership. All around the world, there have been strugglers to ensure women's rights. After Beijing's women's conference, held two and half decades ago in 1995, the scenario has changed to some extent and access to education and many of the sustainable goals have been achieved.

The 73rd constitutional amendment act to give reservation for women in Panchayati Raj saw an upsurge of women in the lower ranks of decision making. The reservation for women in Panchayati Raj system has empowered their lives in real terms. Women in India now participate fully in areas such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc. I am glad we are able to fly and our flight would change women as much as the previous decades have done. Today, a woman has more than one *Avatar* and she is able to find a place in society.

Has my dream ... come true?

**Mohini Giri**



## Prologue II

### I Have A Dream

Being a single child to educated parents, I was given access to a number of opportunities from a young age, which one could correctly consider a privilege. I was completely removed from even imagining that women could have a different experience of their lives. During my college days in Delhi I noticed that daily life was affected for a woman when I was asked to return home at a particular time due to safety concerns while my male counterparts were “allowed” to be out for as long as they wished. I found this odd and discriminatory. It was not until my time at the London School of Economics that I truly discovered the world of “feminism”. I spent time in the university library where I came across an entire section that traced the history of feminist movements from women’s suffrage to right to property. I also studied works of contemporary feminist economists like Sylvia Chant, Naila Kabeer, Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen, and developed a deeper interest in issues, such as feminisation of poverty, gender budgeting, and the economics of care. After LSE, I involved myself with fieldwork in India and Africa, which helped me develop a better understanding of the systematic and organised structure of patriarchy. It was this education and fieldwork combined which allowed me to develop a feminist lens – it felt as though my vision, and way of looking at the world had been corrected. I now apply this feminist lens to each and every project that I take up.

Despite all my prior experience of working with women, this book is yet again an eye-opener. The fact that women not having the same set of opportunities as men reflected in every single data statistic, no matter how you slice it, is worrying. Not only does this hurt the

economy's potential but it also lays down a strong gender stereotype for the future generation, multiplying the problem. This reaffirms my opinion that something needs to be done about this and quickly. Women's dreams and aspirations are soaring yet fail to be realised. The statistics currently show a bleak stage but there are possibilities. What I discovered through the research I carried out for writing my chapter "Indian Women's human Capital" laid some potential avenues to achieve gender equality like education, healthcare and institutional and family support. Much as these areas give me some hope, they also make me want to work harder to use my privilege to bring about a change in the lives of women around me.

While we have come a long way from where we were many years ago, there is still a steep upward journey for us to travel. A point I would like to highlight is that gender inequality, especially in the labor force is blatant and many ideas and policies have been implanted to tackle them (although we need many more of such policies). But there has never been a comprehensive effort across communities, regions and localities to create an atmosphere where a woman and her choices are reflected and her rights guaranteed. We cannot make remarkable progress towards mitigating this inequality if we do not have the involvement of the society.

I am extremely privileged to have received the opportunity to write a chapter in this book and be one of the highly distinguished authors involved with this project. I am sure that everyone who reads this book will find something in it that they connect to, either through their own-shared experiences or through someone close to them. I would like to encourage each reader to take back insights from this book to learn and manifest the feelings and actions of gender equality in their daily lives. Many studies have estimated the following number of years, which the world will take to achieve gender equality - 257, 217, 212, 202, 108, 99 years. At best we are looking at 2118! The world cannot wait until 2118 while 3.8 billion human beings who just happen to be women lead a "sub-optimal" life full of fear and

insecurity. I dream to use my position and try to speed up this process as much as possible. I dream of helping build a world where no one ever deters a woman from achieving her dreams. I dream of a world where the subject matter of this book stands obsolete.

**Mitali Nikore**

## Acknowledgements

For a long time, I had felt the need for this kind of an evaluation which encompasses various disciplines from experts in women's issues. Seeing the study shape the way it has, is truly a vision come true. I cannot perhaps thank everybody who has contributed to this project, but I would like to try – First and foremost I need to profusely thank Dr. Mohini Giri and Dr. T. K. Oommen with whom we had extensive consultations. Dr. Mohini Giri also contributed to the Prologue of the book for which I am grateful. Dr. Sarla Gopalan, with decades of experience in pursuing national policies for better status for women and the author of “Towards Equality Now 2001”, readily agreed to contribute to the project, despite preoccupations and prior commitments. Her contribution has truly been invaluable. I need to profusely thank Dr. D.K. Giri and Dr. Susan Cherian who came forward to support the whole project by offering their office infrastructure and communication between contributors. They proposed several names who would contribute to the study and eventually we narrowed it down to whom we could access and who accepted the offer. I want to especially thank Dr. Pamela Singla and Dr. Arpan Tulsian who took over the study on violence against women at the last moment and added their fresh perspective to the study. I had several discussions with Dr. Shashi Narayanan since May 2019 who had been very supportive of the idea. We discussed various options and narrowed it down to the style as it came out in the final stage and for that I truly thank her. I also want to profusely thank Dr. Santosh Singh who not only described the role of civil society but also evaluated its contribution to improving women's status in India. This is much appreciated and has positively added to the study. I want to thank Mitali Nikore not only for her perspective through an

economic lens but also for her appreciation for the study and her dedication to work towards its completion. I thank Mitali for graciously providing a young women's perspective in the form of a Prelude. I thank Pallavi Parik who made an excellent contribution on progress of women's legal status, despite odd hindrances. Dr. Madhubala Nath, who has experience of several decades of participation in UNIFEM's work in the Southeast Asian region, not only gave her perspective on external forces that have helped Indian women's status but has also been supportive in other needs for completion of this study. She has brought a fresh perspective to the study. I also thank Mr. Narendra Kumar who readily agreed to publish the study in record time.

I am thankful to Manvika Gupta, Ujjwala Singh and Akarsh Gupta who have given their youthful energy especially into preparing drafts and helping in the completion of the project. Their young views and inputs are much appreciated.

The book is a collection of experiences and analysis by experts. As the idea is to generate a discourse on women's status, my co-authors and I will feel gratified, if readers engage with it.

March 2020

**Kamla Nath**

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## CHAPTER 1

# The Study of Half a Century of Indian Women's Journey Towards Equality— An Evaluation and Trends

– Kamla Nath

## INTRODUCTION

The present study has been initiated and supported by The Nath Foundation.

The Nath Foundation was set up in 2011 to further the thinking of Dr. V. Nath, a researcher and development planner who understood that successful development was a process of change, and it requires both the intellectual analysis of large ideas, and down-to-earth implementation of simple ideas. In my association with him he taught me to go deeper in situations and understand them before forming an opinion for which data collection, analysis, discussion and debate are the tools.

My interest in the subject of this study has grown since the experience of my birth almost 89 years ago, when my mother cried at my birth because she wanted a son, after giving birth to three daughter before me. It was my father who took care of me and told my mother, if she does not rejoice the birth of a daughter, who may prove to be a blessing, she will never have the pleasure of sons. Since then, I have never experienced discrimination from any male in my life, be it my father, brothers, husband, sons or other males in the extended family. Today, I am fully empowered woman who was and is loved and



cherished by my husband and sons. However, I read daily stories of broken lives of women and gender differentiation and discrepancies. I have also noticed a strong desire still prevalent among women to have sons, not only in India but world over. With a view to investigate why this preference, I have studied, since early 1960s, women's situations in different economic groups and castes in India, Middle-East and Africa and evaluated development projects for UN agencies where subtle components are included to discriminate women or promote more welfare for men. The current study shows persistence of this pattern inspite of efforts to remove it.

**Women's half century of journey** towards equality has been to climb up from pot holes towards a level playing field with equal access to opportunities for growth and participation in economic and political fields and social institutions and practices which impact their lives at Home and Outside the Home in work place and in the society. They have made very good progress and with speed during the last fifty years when compared with two decades before that, 1950-70. These two decades were focussed on economic and political development of the country after two hundred years of stagnation during the British rule. During British rule women's issues were not on top of the list of priorities or anywhere near the margins.

Talking of status of women there is a duality one faces. On one side is the stereo type and very valid and powerful statement which describes Indian women who are brutally oppressed, denied a voice in their family and community and marginalised in politics and in other structures of society—economic, social and legal and access to resources and ownership of factors of production. The story of women described by statistics and surveys based on these structural realities gets masked in statistics and is summed up in sensational headlines, and folklore which describe women from complete deification—as Shakti, Parvati, Lakshami and Saraswati—to extreme demonisation. They all depict the secondary status of women.

All these descriptions overlook the fact that a woman is a human being in flesh and blood. She is a daughter, wife and mother and is treated differently in her different roles. She is also a citizen and

enjoys constitutional guarantees, legal rights and obligations. She is also a worker and producer of capital and contributes to GDP and is a human resource. She is also part of a social structure and practices built over time, which are based on religious, beliefs and a structures of production which regulate caste, occupational structure and gender relationship based on these institutions and a Jajmani system—a system of distribution of wealth. We need to explain these to address the question of gender equality.

The story of women's status in a country is a reflection of where it stands as a society. Equality is one of the barometers to measure how women are treated in different spheres of life. Unfortunately there are no parameters to measure equality. One could make some assessment on the value system a country ascribes to. To ascertain the value systems, one needs to look at the prevailing stand on personal liberty and individual rights, and whether the country's institutions are socio-economically inclusive.

Since Independence the Indian Constitution guarantees equality between castes, gender and religion. Equality is the hallmark of Democracy and provides for ensuring equality. However, social structures are built around religion and a system of family and economic organisation to ensure smooth functioning of community life and production system where control over labour and capital are important for production and growth. This is the genesis of control of strong over the weak, rich over poor and men over women. Religion and these emerged social structures which are responsible for genesis of class, colour, and gender inequality and are responsible for long struggles for achieving equality.

Equality before the law has engaged nations since the settlement of organised habitation in the world, because it has been the law of nature for stronger beings to dominate the weaker. In spite of famous saying that "All men (and I hope the women too) are born equal, inequality has existed and continues to exist, the world over and so is the struggle to remove it. The inequalities enter in to lives of people through different sides like class, colour, caste, gender and between developed and underdeveloped world. The fight for equality has also

taken different forms; through persuasion, pressure, protests and sometime violent revolutions. The means to remove inequality have been through law and empowering the weak to become strong. The first successful slave revolt in the New World, was when slaves took control and slavery was *abolished* in America including in some colonies. Major efforts have been made by developed countries, since the end of World War II, by channelling development resources through United Nations for economic and social development of underdeveloped countries which would bring equality and ensure peace.

The 1789 Declaration of Independence, together with the 1215 *Magna Carta*, the 1689 English Bill of Rights, the 1776 United States Declaration of Independence, and the 1789 United States Bill of Rights, were all aimed at bringing equality and inspired in large part the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These contain, however, statements of vision rather than reality. Since the end of World War II, independence of colonies and setting up of democratic form of governments in the newly independent countries with a Constitution, and gender equality assured under law has become a goal all over the world.<sup>1</sup>

Gender equality is a pre-condition not only for social justice but also for economic and political development. Equality before the law is a tenant of some branches of feminism in the 19th century; and was a radical goal. But later feminist views hold that formal legal equality is not enough to create actual and social equality between women and men. No nation can develop at its full if 50% of its population i.e. women cannot contribute to it fully. In spite of constitution guarantee for equality, Indian women are subservient to men in all spheres of life, economic participation, ownership of resources, educational attainment and skill development or political decision making.

<sup>1</sup>Footnote Citizens being demarcated as active and passive citizens (in France) is at the origin of the French Revolution and Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen in 1791. It drew attention to the need for gender equality. As players in the French Revolution, women occupied a significant role in the civic sphere by forming social movements and participating in popular clubs, allowing them societal influence, despite their lack of direct political influence.

## SOCIAL STRUCTURES

A social system in which men hold primary power, and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property are also patrilineal, meaning that property and title are inherited by the male lineage. Feminists use the term '**patriarchy**' to describe this power relationship between men and women and attempted to find out its root. The historical nature of gender-based violence confirms that it is not an unfortunate aberration but systematically entrenched in culture and society, reinforced and powered by patriarchy. Violence against women maintains the structures of gender oppression; be it carried out by individuals in private and/or by institutional forces in the public sphere. A *UN Women study* reveals that in combat zones, it is now more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier. Families, communities, and social, legal and civic institutions may covertly and overtly endorse it. Whilst violence commands greater attention and fear; sexism and misogyny do their share to shape inequality, by defining and upholding restrictive gender norms.

Feminism is about women claiming their rights to self-determination and equality. Culture is used to justify gender inequality and violence by evoking traditional cultural beliefs about how women should be treated. The defence of the culture of a place, country, religion, etc., is in fact a defence of the culture in that country and the culture of violence everywhere. The interaction of race and gender are complicated, race is all too often privileged over gender. Holding this and other intersectionality, together offers a more effective route to accountability and transformation. The culture of control of strong over the weak is the prime obstacle to women's advancement and development. Despite differences in levels of domination the broad principles remain the same, i.e. men are in control. The nature of this control may differ. So it is necessary to understand the system, which keeps women dominated and subordinated, and to unravel its workings in order to work for women's development in a systematic way. In the modern world where women go ahead by their merit, the tradition of male control

creates obstacles for women to go forward in a society. The institutions and social relations are built on the concept of inferior or secondary status of women. The society gives absolute priority to men and to some extent limits women's human rights also.

Social relations based on power of men over women and of women over women and of men over men, is a system for maintaining class, gender, racial, and heterosexual privileges. The system of control relies both on crude forms of oppression, like violence; and subtle ones, like laws to perpetuate inequality. The beliefs of male, heterosexual dominance and the devaluation of girls and women lie at the root of gender-based violence. Patriarchy is a structural force that influences power relations, whether they are abusive or not. Power sets the agenda for patriarchy. But, conflating it with abuse or masculinity is problematic and we need a more complex analysis of the typical power and control explanations.

#### DEMOCRACY

Gender in a **Democracy** where tenants of constitution clash with traditional social structures based on the concept that the males are superior to females, which has seeped into religious beliefs and social practices – which even women accept and absorb in their daily life, but clashes with new economic and judicial norms of equality and just structures of democratic governance. There are also challenges posed by technological changes in all fields and work places and the prevalent social system. It is important for us to understand how the existing structures respond to the new challenges, how these structures change and are absorbed by social practices – acceptance/reaction; emergence of professional women who face challenges in work place and at home in sharing household chores. How the elected form of government – an essential part of Democratic form of government get thwarted by social structures built on this power relations.

For democracy to be truly representative and inclusive, all citizens must have equal opportunities to participate in democratic processes. If these conditions are not present the benefits of

democracy for social and economic development will be severely limited, as such genuine democracies cannot allow for inequality or discrimination based on an archaic mind set.

In the economy, Indian women's workforce participation has been falling rapidly. In 2004-05, the share of working-age women in paid jobs was 43%—the same as in 1993-94. This dropped to 27% in 2015-16. In rural India, the slide has been much worse as women's contribution to agricultural work is largely invisible and the sector has not generated employment for women formally. It is estimated that percentage of women in the workforce across the city of Delhi is just 13%; if this is the situation in one of the largest metropolitan cities of the world, clearly something is terribly wrong somewhere. An analysis on how gender inequality affects GDP and the economy in India would link how gender equality in 'work' and gender equality in society are linked. The former is not possible without the latter. The fall in women's work participation rates in a time of increase in unemployment rates, prioritises men for employment. In other words, gender attitudes inform society's reaction to a working woman. Women's mobility is closely linked to their 'honour,' rather than their earning power or their ability to hold a position in a competitive work arena. Also, many instances of domestic violence are triggered by the idea that men are unable to accept their wife's newfound mobility. While domestic violence is common even among women who do not go to work, the increased mobility is an additional reason for the violence. In a social structure based on male control over females, roles are clearly demarcated. So if a woman steps out of the home leaving her daily household duties behind, she is violating her prescribed role. In recent years, increase in violence and in its brutality outside the home is worrisome!

The practices and social norms based on culture and religion impact the beliefs and practices within the home and influence women's personal lives – as a daughter, wife and mother – and their life outside the home as a producer and consumer. The 'inside the home' and 'outside the home' are interlinked. What value a girl contributes to the economy, decides whether she should be born at all or not. And if there is no peace or security outside the home and the

girls cannot safely go out to work and earn, then they should either be not born or be married off early. And if they cannot or do not contribute to family income then there is no need to educate them and they must bring dowry for their maintenance etc.

The man is the head of the household, he alone produces wealth and to increase the wealth/capital, he must control labour male/female and producers of that labour. Women provide labour in subsistence production and their reproductive functions for addition to labour must be in control of the man and therefore their sexuality and children. And she must produce male children because their economic contribution is larger than of girls. This male dominance finds its validity in religious beliefs and manifests itself in various forms like feticide, infanticide, child marriage women's poor nutrition, low levels of education and self-esteem.

Stage of economic development effects these components of the matrix of women's lives and the status of women. Democratic social structures, peace and justice in governance are also some of the hall marks of measuring the stage and speed of development of each country. The United Nations in compiling its human development index has also developed a Gender development index to compare differences between countries and progress within each country in the status of women.

Changes in economic policies like liberalisation in the early 1990's has had an impact on economic organisation (public, private, large, small and household/cottage industry), production and women's work participation rate.

Since 1970, several studies done to investigate women's status have amalgamation of rigorous academic analyses involving secondary research, and others replete with stories from first-hand experience to enable one to delve in and empathise compassionately with the true nature of women's lived reality. The studies show that the traditional structure as well as the evolving structures because of modernisation, development and increase in economic well-being do not automatically promote and nurture gender equality. Special interventions are necessary at policy level and in social practices and

beliefs to change, to bring about a gender just society. In India, inspite of planned economic development efforts for two decades, 1950-70, through series of Five-Year Development Plans, the 1974 women's status report showed *that because of inequality, gender discrimination remains pervasive in many dimensions of women's lives.*

Gender inequality and subsequent discrimination is pervasive in most of the developing world. This is so despite considerable advances in gender equality in recent decades. The nature and extent of discrimination vary considerably across countries and regions. But the patterns are striking; in no region of the developing world are women equal to men in legal, social, and economic rights. Gender gaps are widespread in access to and control of resources, in economic opportunities, in power, and political voice. Therefore, often quoted glass ceiling being faced by women and their glass being half full are not just truism. Women and girls bear the largest and most direct costs of these inequalities—but the costs cut more broadly across society, ultimately harming everyone. Gender equality is a core development issue—a development objective in its own right.

Over the past five decades,—the period of this study—India has undergone multiple evolutions—be it economic liberalisation, grassroots level societal transformation, and technological advancements. Each of these changes have had a differential impact on the lives of women. Yet, in all of the discourse tracing India's economic growth and social development, there has been little discussion on where India's women stand today, not only vis-à-vis men, but in comparison with where the women stood 50 years ago. And what impact have various evolutions had on the position of women.

This study of Indian women's journey towards equality during the last five decades 1970-2020, is based on the premise that there is gender inequality in India, which permeates in all the structures of the society—social, economic, political and legal, in women's personal life as a daughter, wife and mother and outside their home as a producer and consumer. It also premises that Indian women want to be equal to men—the other gender. Historically it has been



established that when there is inequality—caste, class, colour and/or gender, it leads to discrimination and oppression and violence. The depressed group/ groups struggles for equality through persuasion, pressure, demonstrations, agitations, strikes or violent struggles. All these strategies are long drawn and no society has had complete equality so far. The groups struggle inch by inch to become as equal as they can.

The women's struggle has been to become equal partners with men in their different spheres of life—within the home and outside the home e.g. work place. The study of gender equality makes us wade through a matrix with women's unequal status within the home and outside the home; in various fields which are not gender equal—in the economy as a worker, in social field—in getting education and acquiring skills and getting nutrition and medical care, in religion and social practices and beliefs which are discriminatory, in governance and under the laws of the land. The study raises the question, why there is gender inequality and how it reveals itself in different sectors economic and political sphere, in laws which are based on inequality and consequences of these inequalities in the social sector—education, health, nutrition as measured by longevity of life and as widows/single women. As development takes place, the economic, political and social structures change and the changes impact the gap in gender equality. These changes also challenge the traditional structures – How does the change takes place, Is the speed and direction of change synonymous and has direct co-relation between each part of the matrix or do they contradict each other. What has been the quantum of change, and who are the agents of change, in the last five decades which have enforced gender equality and effected the status of women.

This study also emanates from the need to analyse the trends of the feminist women's movement, how it has originated and the forms in which it manifests in contemporary times. It shifts the narrative from a majoritarian-patriarchal view to a feminine, or rather a feminist one and brings out those voices that have been muffled behind veils and stifled in subjugation for far too long.

## METHODOLOGY

The study could have been done in a journalistic style by one author, based on observations and statements and produce a judgemental treatise. However, we were convinced that this approach will not do. It is one person's view. We should request professionals, old and young, males and females who have spent many years and passion to study each field in the rubric, which touch the lives of women: in the economy, legal system, politics—decision making institutions, and other sectors and institutions, which give direction not only towards change but also work as enablers through changes in existing laws and promulgation of new laws and allocating resources to bring about the change. They can give a dispassionate, intelligent analysis of changes and the dynamics of change, based on facts. Such analysis could help in developing a theory for change in the status of women and steps towards gender equality.

The study analyses changes in inequality in different sector over time, deeply scrutinising each area separately, and then bringing the common threads together in the concluding narrative. Five of the key areas which have been examined include:

Women's economic status, changing nature of employment, average wage levels, and occupational distribution, as well as investments placed by families and the state in developing women as human resources;

Women's social status, and evolution of social norms governing their lives from inception to death which are shown through sex ratios, sex selection, reproduction right, feticide, infanticide, educational levels, age of marriage and prevalence of child marriage, longevity of life and other demographic data over time

Women's role in decision making particularly in governance; access to and participation in political parties and the electoral process at different levels of government;

Legal frameworks governing women's rights and obligations, property and other legal rights and experience of seeking justice;

Violence Against Women, domestic and outside the home, its intensity and forms which impacts the status of women at home and

as producers outside the home and hinders progress in other sectors and laws passed to control it and the punishment for the violent acts and their implementation have been analysed;

#### THE ENABLERS/THE CHANGE AGENTS

Support extended by the government towards the women's movement towards equality;

Support extended by the government through policies and flagship schemes over the years e.g. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 1996 and setting up of several Resource Centres for Women based on which several initiatives have been taken like; skill and leadership training, and continue to be taken by the national and state governments. Introduction of Women's Studies in colleges as a subject for degree programmes has increased in study of gender equality.

The role played by grass-root civil society groups in implementing the government programmes to beneficiaries—education, skill development, resources for entrepreneurship—self-help groups and micro-credit and group formations to strengthen their voices, conscientisation of their rights, training in governance etc.

Role of women activist in empowering women and claiming their places as equal in economic and public sectors

The role of international community—through bilateral and international initiatives.

The longitudinal study over five decades has enabled us to see permanent change and trends in the status of women, ignoring temporary hiccups. It also enables us to pinpoint the extent of gender gap and the influences that reduce the gap. The depressed and unequal status of Indian women was brought out and explained exhaustively, in Independent India, for the first time, in a report of a Committee set up by the Government of India in 1971, under a request by the United Nation, prior to announcement of U.N. WOMEN's Year in 1975 and later announcement of Women's Decade 1975-85. The Report, 'Towards Equality' emphasised the necessity for state action and policies to change the status of women

by bridging the gap in the unequal position of women in access to education and health facilities and nutrition and longevity of life, system of marriage and inheritance, dowry laws, violence at home and work place etc. Due to paucity of sex-segregated data on important indicators for equality and lack of research on the subject, the Report advised. The Government of India to bring about changes in existing structures through women friendly policies.

The United Nation announced 1975 as the Women's Year and later 1975-85 as the Women's Decade with a focus on gender equality. The Women's Year itself had brought the focus on the status of women through the lens of equality and if women are not equal to men in various fields, efforts should be made to empower them to become equal.

Another report, published by the Ministry of Women and Child Development of the Government of India 'Equality Now 2001' had evaluated the changes between 1971-2001, based on analysis, primarily of the Census data during this period relating to various areas mentioned above. The latest publication, on the status of women, prepared by the National Commission for Women in coordination with the UN women based on sex-segregated data available in the 2011 Census and initiatives taken by the governments—central and states—and other agencies, to bridge the gender gap and budgetary resources for welfare and skill development programmes for women gives data on changes in major demographic indices until 2011 since the complete data of 2011 Census is available.

We chose to study the changes in Indian Women's status since 1970-2020 because a number of changes were initiated under national and international and bilateral initiative towards equality, through development initiatives during this period and the time lag between an initiative and its impact can be of long duration and their contribution needed to be identified. A linear analysis over five decades brings out the permanent changes and trends more profoundly, weeding out temporary changes.

This study based on voluntary contributions by professionals who specialise in these areas and who have evaluated the changes in their specific areas of expertise, enabled us to go intensely in the

process of change in the status of the Indian woman after five decades of change through empowerment of women and will enable us to see where efforts need to be intensified or to identify new strategies for emerging new situations to take the next step towards equality. The contributors belong to almost four generations of men and women; some senior enough to have traveled the journey since the early 1970s and are part of the change—I should call them the First Generation; and others, who are from the Second Generation, who have lived through the impact of initial changes and have been effected by it in their daily lives and have studied the process of change and some very young and Third generation women, who while are enjoying the fruits of change – e.g. entry into professions and employability, they are faced to deal with and adjust to new social structures and attitudes. Their analysis shows deep interest in this project of evaluating the changes, which have changed Indian women's situation enormously.

The study is not only an effort to celebrate the five decades of progress that women of all walks of life have shown, but also critically examine the areas where gender gaps are most acute. What is of the essence is to examine whether these gaps have been narrowing or growing over the course of time or why they remain persistent. Taking a parametric approach, i.e. breaking down the key components impacting women's agency can help in tracking progress or even regression in each of these areas. The parameters are tailored to suit each of the sectors covered in the study, and are enumerated in the figure below.

Women as human capital	Women in decision making	Women and law	Women and violence	Emerging trends
Labor force/ Workforce participation/ Unemployment (at different levels of education)—sector wise	Proportion of women in Parliament	Extent to which violence against women is punished under the law	Violent crimes against women (rape/acid attack/ kidnappings/ murders)	Proportion of women with access to the internet, mobile phones, and computers—in rural and urban areas

Women as human capital	Women in decision making	Women and law	Women and violence	Emerging trends
Wage gaps in the formal and informal sector	Proportion of women in State legislatures	Extent to which laws protect women's rights at the workplace	Proportion of cases in which perpetrators were known to the woman	Proportion of women migrating for work or education
Access to education (primary, secondary, tertiary levels)	Proportion of women in Panchayats and impact of reservation	Extent to which laws entitle women to familial property and inheritance	Proportion of cases in which punishment was dispensed	Proportion of married women who remain in the workforce
Skill training levels (formal/traditional skills)	Proportion of female CEOs, business leaders, judges, and cabinet ministers	Extent to which laws protect women's rights in a marital union	Proportion of women in urban areas expressing fear of using public transport	Proportion of women with children who remain in the workforce
Maternal and infant mortality	Autonomy while taking decisions regarding own health	Forms in which laws discriminate against single/divorced/widowed women	Typical curfew time for women to return home in the evenings	Proportion of households identifying as joint families/female headed households
Sex ratio/Child sex ratio	Autonomy while taking household decisions	Special legal provisions to protect sex workers		
Women affected by anemia deficiency	Median age of Marriage			

Thanks to increased exposure to technology and knowledge about global lifestyles, young girls and women are increasingly aspiring for greater autonomy and agency over their life choices. Taking such a parametric approach can also help to ascertain that, we need to collect empirical data on extent of the gaps between aspirations and achievements for women and girls.

For instance, analysis in the study has shown that while there has been considerable progress in access to primary and secondary education for girls, labour force participation rates of women are still low and actually declining both in rural and urban areas. This demonstrates that the key gaps lie in attainment of tertiary education

and skill training, which make girls ready for the workplace. Further, gender norms governing curfew timings and household expectations can also limit women's labour force participation – distance from work place and unsafe environment. The recent brutal attacks on women outside the home brings out the necessity of fool proof protection mechanism to make women safe outside the home.

However, one observes increasing inequality and persistent divide between different groups within Indian society. Certain groups – such as urban women with higher education level, who are part of the labour force are perpetuating a virtuous cycle, ensuring the next generation has an even higher standard of living vis-à-vis their own. However, others such as rural, uneducated men, threatened by the progress of women, are enforcing traditional norms in their circle of influence with even more ardent fervour. For instance, village councils have been known to punish women for choosing their own life partner with violence, even amounting to death, ( honour killing ) especially when they violate principles of caste endogamy and village exogamy. The women are raped if they propagate new legal social standards e.g., against child marriage and Bhawari Devi's case in Rajasthan. In spite of tremendous increase in educational levels, women generally have lower levels of education than men, less access to training, and less opportunity to learn the skills necessary for using and dealing with new technologies. All these need to be investigated!

## CHAPTER 2

# Women's Human Capital

– Mitali Nikore

### *Section A—Women in the workforce: tracing the journey of women's participation in the workforce through the last seven decades*

*“Capitalism and patriarchy have had a dual relationship, because capitalism needs cheap labour, and women are the cheapest labour.”*

– Kamala Bhasin, Women's rights activist

### INTRODUCTION

India, today, is an economic powerhouse on the global stage. It earned the moniker of the world's fastest growing major economy in 2017, maintaining growth rates above 7% consistently since 2011-12. The year 2017 was also momentous in Indian history, for it marked 70 years of Independence from British rule. For India's women however, the year 2017 was significant for another reason – it was the year in which India's female labour force participation and employment levels fell to their lowest ever levels since Independence.

India is a country where less than a quarter of women have joined the labour force, and only a fifth are employed. World Bank (2017) notes that India has amongst the lowest rates of female labour force participation globally, with only parts of the Arab world being lower than India.<sup>1</sup> This presents a queer conundrum – why is it that a

<sup>1</sup>Andres et. al. World Bank. 2017. Precarious Drop: Reassessing Patterns of Female Labor Force Participation in India.