

From Margins to Mainstream: Women's Issues and Governance in the 2024 Lok-Sabha Election

Amna Mirza & Akshita Nagpal

Abstract

This paper explores the intricate relationship between governance, women's issues and the 2024 Lok-Sabha Mandate, with a particular focus on minority women. As India faced one of the most challenging elections, understanding the role of women, especially from marginalized communities, is crucial for shaping a more inclusive and equitable society. This study explores the impact of patriarchal structures and globalization on minority women highlighting the dual layers of discrimination they face. By examining government policies and initiatives aimed at women's empowerment, the paper evaluates the progress made and the challenges that persist. Key areas of focus include education, entrepreneurship, healthcare and social welfare, emphasizing how these domains intersect with governance to influence the lives of minority women. Through a nuanced analysis of contemporary development trends and the transformative potential of government schemes, this paper sheds light on the essential role of women in India's democratic and socio-economic landscape. Ultimately, it calls for targeted interventions and inclusive policies to ensure that the voices of minority women are not only heard but actively shape the future of governance in India.

Keywords: Gender Empowerment, Patriarchy, Globalization, Government Policy

Introduction

Women empowerment is a complex term with multiple meanings that change with place and time. This concept has a different meaning for different people. Women empowerment has been a central theme in literature, with poets and writers often highlight the strength and potential of women. Sri Aurobindo's epic poem, Savitri, encapsulates

the multifaceted nature of women's experiences and their resilience in the face of adversity.¹

I am woman, nurse and slave and beaten beast;

I tend the hands that give me cruel blows.

The hearts that spurned my love and zeal I serve;

I am the courted queen, the pampered doll,

I am the giver of the bowl of rice,

I am the worshiped Angel of the House.

I am in all that suffers and that cries....

I am the spirit in a world of pain....

God gave me love, he gave me not his force.

Inspired by these verses, this article explores the empowerment of minority women in the context of India, particularly during the tenure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It examines the government's policies and initiatives aimed at uplifting and empowering women from minority communities. By focusing on aspects such as education, entrepreneurship, healthcare and social welfare, we gain insights into the progress made and the challenges that remain in the journey towards gender equality. This article aims to shed light on the transformative potential of empowering minority women and the significant contributions they make to society.

Understanding Patriarchy, Gender, and the Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion

Patriarchy, deeply ingrained in our social fabric, influences the dynamics of gender and shapes our perceptions of inclusion and exclusion. To foster a society that truly values equality, it is crucial to comprehend the workings of patriarchy and its impact on gender relations. It is a system rooted in power dynamics that prioritizes male dominance and control over women.² It manifests in various aspects of life, including family structures, education, employment, politics and culture. This system perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes, assigning rigid roles and expectations to individuals based on their gender. By upholding male authority and devaluing female experiences, patriarchy creates a power imbalance that permeates societal interactions.

Within the framework of patriarchy, gender becomes a determining factor for inclusion or exclusion. Men are generally favoured and given more opportunities, while women face systemic barriers that limit their access to resources, decision-making positions and social recognition. These disparities are evident in the gender pay gap, the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles and the prevalence of gender-based violence.

Inclusion encompasses creating an environment where all individuals, regardless of their gender, have equal opportunities and access to resources. Overcoming patriarchal biases requires dismantling gender stereotypes, challenging discriminatory practices and structural violence, and promoting inclusive policies. It involves recognizing and celebrating the diverse contributions of individuals of all genders, fostering empathy and respect, giving all equal decision-making powers and ensuring that their voices are heard and valued.

Exclusion, on the other hand, results from the perpetuation of patriarchal norms and practices. Women, non-binary individuals, and marginalized genders often face exclusionary practices that limit their agency, opportunities and social participation. This exclusion manifests through gender-based discrimination, limited representation and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. It is important to acknowledge that exclusion affects not only those who are directly marginalized but also the entire society, as valuable perspectives and talents are lost.

Understanding patriarchy and its impact on gender dynamics is a crucial step towards fostering a more inclusive society. By challenging traditional gender roles, advocating for gender equality and promoting policies that dismantle systemic barriers, we can work towards a future where all individuals, regardless of their gender, have equal rights and opportunities. Recognizing the influence of patriarchy in shaping social structures and actively working to dismantle it will pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive world for everyone.

Impact of Globalization on Women

Globalization, with its far-reaching effects on economies and societies, has brought about significant changes in the lives of women around the world. While globalization has offered new economic opportunities, it has also contributed to the perpetuation of gender inequalities and created unique challenges for women. The impact of globalization on women can be seen in various aspects, including economic opportunities,

the gendered division of labour, exploitation and human trafficking, as well as empowerment and agency.

In terms of economic opportunities, globalization has expanded markets and opened doors for trade and investment. However, women often find themselves relegated to low-paying and insecure jobs, particularly in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and domestic work. Discriminatory practices, including unequal pay, limited access to resources and credit and lack of maternity leaves further widen the gender gap in economic opportunities, hindering women's empowerment and economic mobility.

Furthermore, globalization has reinforced gendered division of labour, with women disproportionately burdened by unpaid care work. As global market demands increase, families face pressures that often limit women's participation in formal employment, education and career advancement. This imbalance not only perpetuates gender inequalities but also hinders women's ability to achieve economic independence and contribute fully to the society.

Another concerning aspect is the rise of exploitation and human trafficking facilitated by globalization. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to these exploitative practices, as they are enticed by promises of better economic prospects or fall prey to fraudulent recruitment agencies. As a result, they become victims of sexual exploitation, forced labour, and abusive working conditions, perpetuating gender-based violence and reinforcing existing power imbalances.

Despite these challenges, globalization also offers avenues for women's empowerment and agency. Access to technology and information has enabled women to connect, organize, and advocate for their rights on a global scale. Women's movements, facilitated by digital platforms and social media, have been instrumental in challenging patriarchal norms, demanding gender equality, and amplifying marginalized voices. Global networks and partnerships have provided opportunities for knowledge exchange, capacity building, and fostering women's leadership and entrepreneurship.

In conclusion, the impact of globalization on women is multifaceted, with both opportunities and challenges. While globalization has expanded economic possibilities, it has also perpetuated gender inequalities, exploitation, and marginalization. By recognizing these realities and implementing gender-responsive policies, we can strive for a more equitable and inclusive global society where women have equal access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making power.

Harnessing the potential of globalization to empower women and dismantle gender disparities is essential for sustainable development and social progress.³

How Patriarchy and Globalization impacted women in Minority community

Patriarchy, deeply embedded in Indian society, operates within minority communities as well, reinforcing gender inequalities and restrictive norms. Women in minority communities often face double marginalization, where patriarchal structures intersect with cultural and religious norms that may further restrict their agency and opportunities. These women are subjected to practices such as early and forced marriages, limited access to education, restricted mobility, and unequal participation in decision-making processes.

Globalization has brought both positive and negative implications for women in minority communities. Economic globalization has created opportunities for income generation, often through the informal sector, which has been a source of employment for many women. However, globalization has also introduced disruptions within traditional livelihoods, particularly in rural areas. As minority women may have relied on these traditional livelihoods, they are disproportionately affected by these changes, facing challenges in adapting to new economic realities.

Furthermore, globalization has not always resulted in equitable benefits for women in minority communities. While some women have gained access to better education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, others have been left behind, trapped in exploitative labour conditions or excluded from the formal economy. The forces of globalization can exacerbate existing gender inequalities, leading to increased vulnerability and marginalization for women in minority communities. It is crucial to acknowledge the agency and resistance of women in minority communities.

Despite facing multiple barriers, these women have been active agents of change, mobilizing within their communities to challenge patriarchal norms and advocate for their rights. Grassroots organizations and women's movements within minority communities have played a vital role in empowering women, fostering collective action, and demanding social justice. To address the impacts of patriarchy and globalization on women in minority communities, comprehensive measures are required. This includes implementing gender-responsive policies that

address the specific needs and challenges faced by these women. Measures should encompass educational initiatives that promote gender equality, providing economic opportunities that are inclusive and sustainable and challenging discriminatory practices within cultural and religious contexts.

Additionally, empowering women in minority communities requires engaging with community leaders, religious institutions, and civil society organizations to foster awareness and promote gender equality. Collaborative efforts between government bodies, community organizations, and international actors are necessary to create an enabling environment that supports the rights and well-being of women in minority communities.

Changing Aspects of Development in Contemporary Times

Development in contemporary times has undergone significant transformations, driven by various dynamic factors that have reshaped our understanding and approach to progress. This article explores four key dimensions that have played a central role in the changing landscape of development: human security, the fourth industrial revolution, the digital age and Globalization 4.0.

One crucial aspect of contemporary development is the concept of human security. This holistic approach goes beyond traditional notions of security, focusing on safeguarding individuals from a range of threats including economic insecurity, social exclusion, political repression and environmental degradation. Recognizing the interplay between development, peace, and well-being, human security emphasizes the need to address underlying vulnerabilities and foster inclusive and sustainable development for all.⁴

The advent of the fourth industrial revolution has ushered in a new era of development. Marked by the integration of digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and automation, this revolution has transformed industries, economies, and societies. It holds great potential for innovation, productivity gains, and economic growth. However, concerns have also emerged regarding job displacement, inequality and the digital divide. Ensuring that the benefits of technological advancements are equitably shared and that no one is left behind has become a critical focus of contemporary development efforts.

The digital age has revolutionized the development landscape, driven by information and communication technologies (ICTs). It has reshaped communication, commerce, education, healthcare, and governance. The

digital revolution has expanded access to information and services, empowered individuals and communities and fostered inclusive participation. Nonetheless, challenges such as privacy concerns, cybersecurity threats, and the risk of deepening existing inequalities have emerged. Effectively harnessing the potential of the digital age while addressing these challenges is essential for achieving sustainable development.

Globalization 4.0, characterized by a rapidly changing global landscape and emerging technologies, has brought forth a new phase of global integration. It highlights the interconnectedness of economies, societies and individuals in an increasingly digital and interdependent world. Globalization 4.0 offers opportunities for inclusive and sustainable development through cross-border collaboration, knowledge sharing, and technology-driven innovation. However, it also calls for addressing issues such as rising inequality, protectionism, and the environmental impact of economic activities to ensure that globalization benefits all segments of society.

The changing aspects of development in contemporary times reflect the complex and evolving nature of our globalized world. Embracing the dynamics of human security, the fourth industrial revolution, the digital age and Globalization 4.0 is crucial for shaping a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable future. Development efforts must prioritize the well-being and security of individuals, leverage technological advancements for the benefit of all, bridge the digital divide, and ensure that globalization promotes shared prosperity. By doing so, we can move closer to a future where development is measured not only by economic progress but also by the well-being and fulfilment of every individual, as well as the resilience of our planet.

Indian Minorities and Women

In India, the Constitution recognizes and protects the rights of minorities, encompassing both religious and linguistic communities. As per the Constitution, minorities refer to groups that are numerically smaller in relation to the rest of the population. This recognition is based on the principles of equality, secularism and the preservation of diverse cultural identities within the nation.

Religious minorities in India include Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Parsis, among others. These communities follow distinct religious practices and have their own cultural traditions. The Constitution safeguards their right to practice, profess, and propagate

their religion freely. It ensures that they are not subjected to discrimination based on their religious beliefs.

In addition to religious minorities, linguistic minorities are also recognized and protected under the Constitution. Linguistic diversity is a significant aspect of India's cultural fabric, with numerous languages spoken across the country. Linguistic minority communities are those that have a distinct language and culture within the broader Indian society. The Constitution guarantees the right of linguistic minorities to preserve and promote their language, culture and educational institutions.

The constitutional recognition of minorities reflects India's commitment to pluralism and the preservation of cultural diversity. It aims to foster an inclusive society where all individuals, irrespective of their religious or linguistic background, can coexist and contribute to the nation's progress. The protection of minority rights is essential in maintaining social harmony and upholding the principles of equality and secularism in India.

The Constitution provides certain safeguards and provisions to protect the interests and rights of minorities.⁵ These include the right to establish and administer educational institutions, the freedom to manage religious affairs and the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. These provisions aim to ensure that minority communities have equal opportunities and can actively participate in all spheres of life while preserving their distinct cultural identities.

Within minority communities in India, women often face unique challenges and intersections of gender, ethnicity and religion. They encounter a complex web of discrimination and marginalization that arises from both patriarchal norms and the dynamics of their respective minority cultures. Women within minority communities may face restrictions on their education, employment, mobility, and participation in decision-making processes.

Traditional practices and conservative interpretations of religious norms can reinforce gender roles and limit women's autonomy and agency. Access to healthcare, justice and social services may also be limited, exacerbating their vulnerability. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that women within minority communities are not passive victims but resilient agents of change. They contribute to the social, economic, and cultural fabric of their communities.

Many women have emerged as leaders, activists, and catalysts for positive transformation. They challenge regressive practices, advocate for gender equality and strive to create inclusive spaces within their communities. Addressing the issues faced by women within minority communities requires a comprehensive approach. It entails empowering women through education, vocational training and economic opportunities. It involves promoting awareness and dialogue within communities to challenge discriminatory practices and patriarchal norms. Legal and policy measures should be implemented to ensure gender equality, protect women's rights and provide support mechanisms for survivors of gender-based violence.

Collaboration between community leaders, religious institutions, civil society organizations and government agencies is essential in creating an enabling environment for women within minority communities. By fostering dialogue, facilitating capacity building and promoting inclusive policies, it is possible to empower women, dismantle gender inequalities and create a society where every individual, regardless of their gender or minority status, can thrive and contribute to the overall development of the nation. In conclusion, women within minority communities in India face a unique set of challenges arising from the intersections of gender, ethnicity and religion. Recognizing their agency, resilience, and contributions is crucial in addressing their specific needs and advancing gender equality within minority contexts. By promoting inclusivity, empowering women, and fostering dialogue, we can create a society that celebrates diversity and ensures that all women, regardless of their minority status, have equal rights, opportunities and dignity.

Empowering Women: The Transformative Impact of Government Schemes in India

The Prime Minister has famously quoted, "*The progress of humanity is not possible without the empowerment of women.*" In recent years, the Indian government has undertaken various welfare programs and initiatives aimed at empowering women and enhancing their socio-economic well-being. These schemes have played a crucial role in addressing gender disparities, promoting women's education, entrepreneurship, healthcare and housing. This article explores the transformative impact of government schemes on women in India and highlights their contributions to women's empowerment. The Prime Minister has repeatedly pointed out the need for women empowerment in his various addresses to the nation and through the radio show,

Mann ki Baat. Through these programmes, he highlights how women can actively contribute towards the development of the nation.

Government initiatives have significantly contributed to improving women's access to education and skill development. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme (2015) is one such effort of the government that works towards ensuring the elimination of sex-selective abortions and promoting primary education of each and every girl child in the country. Efforts to enhance enrolment and retention rates of girls in schools have yielded positive results, with a substantial increase in girls studying up to high school and beyond. Notably, the representation of girls in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education stands at an impressive 43%, surpassing many developed nations. This demonstrates the government's commitment to fostering gender inclusivity and empowering women in traditionally male-dominated fields.

Women's entrepreneurship has received significant support through government schemes, leading to an increased financial inclusion and economic empowerment. The Mudra loan scheme (2015), which offers collateral-free loans to small entrepreneurs, has been instrumental in providing access to credit for women. With 70% of Mudra loan beneficiaries being women, this initiative has enabled women to establish and expand their businesses, contributing to economic growth and their own financial independence. Additionally, schemes like the Stand-Up India (2016) initiative and the Swamitva Yojana (2020) have further facilitated entrepreneurship and land ownership for women. The Government has also launched Mahila-E-Haat as a technology driven online marketing platform for the women entrepreneurs who want to reach out directly to the buyer. Through the medium of this initiative, many women from far-flung areas of the country have started marketing their products on this portal. This has given a boost to the local products and has presented entrepreneurship opportunities to many marginalized women. The current government is also taking steps to provide skill training to the women so that they can fully participate and reap the fruits of their hard work.

Furthermore, it has been observed that women have become the biggest beneficiaries of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana Scheme with more than 56% of the accounts being held by women. The provision of ease in opening of bank accounts has not only promoted the financial inclusion of women but has also helped them transcend boundaries that remained unavailable to the women. These initiatives have significantly contributed to an increase in the number of women

entrepreneurs across the country. The Gender-based budgets of India in the last few years also highlight the Prime Minister's vision of having a women-led empowerment.

Government schemes have prioritized women's health and maternal welfare, aiming to reduce maternal and child mortality rates while improving overall healthcare services. The Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) ensures quality antenatal care for pregnant women, while the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMKVY) provides financial assistance to pregnant and lactating mothers. These schemes have not only improved healthcare access but have also promoted awareness about maternal health, resulting in reduced maternal and infant mortality rates. The financial assistance provided further protected the women from the wage loss that they had to endure during the pregnancy.

The government has recognized the importance of safe and secure housing for women's empowerment. The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) has allocated a substantial budget of Rs 80,000 crore to provide affordable housing to the urban and rural poor. Notably, a significant proportion of the 3 crore houses under the PMAY are registered in the names of women, ensuring their ownership and empowerment. This initiative not only provides women with shelter but also enhances their access to social and financial resources, promoting their overall well-being.

Government schemes have also focused on ensuring women's safety, protection, and access to justice. Initiatives such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) campaign aim to address gender-based discrimination, promote the value of the girl child, and encourage girls' education. Additionally, the Nirbhaya Fund has been established to support various measures aimed at enhancing the safety and security of women, including the setting up of women helplines, One-Stop Centres and increasing the number of fast-track courts for handling cases of violence against women. The Women Helpline Scheme has provided women with a 24-hour emergency number i.e., 181 that can be used by any women affected by any kind of violence throughout India. The Government has further integrated several women-based schemes like One Stop Centre Scheme, Universalization of Women Helpline Scheme, Swadhar Greh Scheme, Ujjawala Scheme, Working Women Hostel Scheme, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana, Mahila Shakti Kendras and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana under one umbrella scheme 'Mission Shakti' to enhance the security and empowerment of the women.

Government schemes in India have played a pivotal role in empowering women and addressing gender disparities. The transformative impact of these initiatives is evident in areas such as education, entrepreneurship, healthcare, housing and women's safety. Through increased access to education, financial inclusion, healthcare services and secure housing, women have been able to assert their potential and contribute to the nation's progress.

The success of schemes such as Mudra loans, PMAY, PMSMA and BBBP exemplifies the government's commitment to women's empowerment and inclusive development. Moving forward, sustained efforts, continued investment and the expansion of such programs will be crucial to further advance women's empowerment, foster gender equality and create an environment where women can thrive and lead in all spheres of life. With women at the forefront of development, India can unlock its full potential as a progressive and inclusive nation.

Towards New Nuances of Women Empowerment Narrative

India's approach to women's empowerment has evolved significantly in recent years, transitioning from mere women's development to women-led development.⁶ Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently highlighted this shift during a session on food security and gender equality at the G7 summit. The nation's transition from women development to women-led development signifies a fundamental change in perspective.⁷ It acknowledges the potential and capabilities of women as leaders, decision-makers and drivers of change in all sectors of society. This paradigm shift recognizes that empowering women not only benefits them individually but also contributes to the overall progress and prosperity of the nation. At this G7 Summit, the Prime Minister even acknowledged the role of six million women volunteers, especially the ASHA workers, in battling the pandemic.

The G20 Summit under India's Presidency in 2023 also focused on creating opportunities for women entrepreneurs and working towards increasing the percentage of women in the workforce. The G20 Alliance for the Empowerment and Progression of Women's Economic Representation (EMPOWER) was formed mainly to encourage the empowerment of women in the private sector and to push towards increasing women leadership. Through mutual cooperation, this G20 meet helped in reducing the digital gender gap.

Achieving women-led development requires creating an enabling environment where women have equal access to opportunities,

resources, and decision-making processes. This includes addressing gender disparities in education, employment, entrepreneurship and political representation. Efforts to bridge these gaps have yielded positive results, with an increase in the number of girls enrolled in schools, women's participation in the workforce and their representation in leadership roles across various sectors.

While significant strides have been made, several challenges remain on the path towards women-led development. Gender-based violence, social norms and cultural barriers continue to hinder progress. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving legal reforms, awareness campaigns and community engagement. Additionally, promoting financial inclusion, skill development and access to healthcare and social protection are crucial areas that need sustained attention.

India has witnessed inspiring examples of women leaders who have broken barriers and shattered glass ceilings. From political leaders like Indira Gandhi, Pratibha Patil and Nirmala Sitharaman to corporate leaders like Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw and Chanda Kochhar, women have risen to prominent positions across various fields. Their success stories serve as motivation and inspiration for aspiring women leaders, showcasing the potential for women to excel and lead in diverse domains. Besides these prominent figures also, a large number of women entrepreneurs have risen in India in their specific fields and serve as motivating examples for all the aspiring girls. Many women leaders and women entrepreneurs have portrayed a perfect example of how women can maintain both a public and private life, without giving up on either of them.

The Indian government has implemented several initiatives to empower women and promote their leadership. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) campaign focuses on addressing gender-based discrimination and promoting education for girls. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana provides clean cooking fuel to women in rural areas, improving their health and quality of life. Additionally, policies like the Maternity Benefit Program, Sukanya Samridhi Yojana and the Startup India program aim to support women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship. These schemes have directly or indirectly been very beneficial for women, especially the minority women who have always been doubly subjugated. The data suggests that more than 37% of the beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana belonged to the minorities. The Prime Minister led government has ensured that empowering women is not only for vote-

bank politics but is the need of the nation. No country can progress if its women are left behind. All-round development of the nation is possible only with the empowerment of minorities of the country without any political exploitation.

Achieving women-led development requires collaboration between various stakeholders, including government, civil society organizations, the private sector and international partners. Partnerships can promote knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, and resource mobilization to support initiatives that empower women. Collaborative efforts can also address cross-cutting issues such as gender-based violence, climate change and digital inclusion, ensuring that no woman is left behind.

India's shift towards women-led development marks a significant milestone in its women empowerment narrative. It recognizes the immense potential of women as leaders and catalysts for change. By providing equal opportunities, addressing barriers, and fostering an inclusive environment, women can lead in diverse spheres and contribute to the nation's progress. The government's initiatives, partnerships, and collaborative efforts play a vital role in empowering women and breaking down systemic barriers. However, continued commitment, investment and collective action are required to overcome the challenges that hinder women's full participation and ensure a truly inclusive and gender-equal society. With women at the forefront, India can realize its vision of sustainable and inclusive development, where every woman can thrive and contribute to a better future.

Empowering Women: The Journey so far and the Road Ahead

The empowerment of women in India has seen significant progress over the years, with various government schemes and initiatives aimed at addressing gender disparities and promoting women's inclusion and leadership. While acknowledging the achievements made thus far, it is important to recognize that there is still much more work to be done in order to achieve full gender equality and women-led development.

The Indian government's commitment to women's empowerment is evident in the implementation of schemes such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Ujjwala Yojana, Maternity Benefit Program and Startup India. These initiatives have positively impacted the lives of women, providing them with access to education, healthcare, financial support and entrepreneurial opportunities. They have contributed to increasing women's representation in various fields and breaking down societal barriers.

However, despite these efforts, challenges persist. Gender-based violence, unequal access to resources and opportunities, cultural norms, and discriminatory practices continue to hinder women's progress. Addressing these challenges requires sustained action, policy reforms, and a comprehensive approach that targets the root causes of gender inequality.

There is a need to strengthen legal frameworks to protect women's rights and ensure swift justice for cases of violence and discrimination. Creating safe spaces for women, both in public and private domains, is essential to foster their participation and leadership. Enhancing access to quality education and skill development programs is crucial in equipping women with the necessary tools to succeed in diverse sectors. Moreover, economic empowerment remains a critical aspect of women's empowerment. While there have been significant strides in this area, there is a need to further promote financial inclusion, facilitate access to credit and encourage entrepreneurship among women. Creating a conducive environment for women-owned businesses to thrive, including mentorship programs, market linkages and support networks, can unleash the untapped potential of women entrepreneurs.

Inclusivity should also extend to marginalized and vulnerable groups of women, such as those from rural areas, tribal communities and minority backgrounds. Tailored interventions and targeted policies are required to address the specific challenges faced by these women and ensure that they are not left behind in the journey towards women-led development. Collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector entities and international partners is crucial in driving the agenda of women's empowerment forward. Sharing best practices, mobilizing resources and collectively advocating for gender equality can amplify the impact of individual efforts and accelerate progress. All these efforts would ensure that women play an active role in India's aim of becoming Atmanirbhar Bharat.

While there has been commendable progress in empowering women in India, it is evident that much more needs to be done. Women-led development requires sustained commitment, multi-dimensional approaches and targeted interventions to address the deep-rooted gender disparities and barriers that persist. By recognizing the challenges, investing in comprehensive strategies, and fostering collaboration, India can create a society where women have equal opportunities, voice and agency, leading to a more inclusive and prosperous future for all.

The Role of Governance

The 2024 Lok-Sabha elections mandate depicted an intersection of governance and women's issues, especially concerning minority women. This essay explores how the elections can impact women's empowerment and governance, focusing on policies, challenges and progress. It delves into scholarly perspectives, government initiatives and case studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The empowerment of women in India has been a long and arduous journey, influenced by various social, political and economic factors. Historically, women in India have faced systemic discrimination and marginalization. However, with the advent of independence and subsequent constitutional guarantees, the status of women began to improve. The Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution mandate the state to promote the welfare of women and children. Scholars have extensively studied women's empowerment in the context of governance. Amartya Sen, in his work "Development as Freedom," argues that empowering women is essential for overall development. Sen highlights that gender inequality hinders economic growth and social progress.

Similarly, Naila Kabeer, in her book "Reversed Realities," emphasizes that empowerment is a multi-dimensional process requiring changes in women's access to resources, their agency, and the institutional structures that sustain gender inequality. Despite these initiatives, numerous challenges persist. Patriarchy remains deeply entrenched in Indian society, affecting women's access to education, healthcare and employment. Minority women, in particular, face double marginalization due to their gender and community status. The lack of political representation and decision-making power further exacerbates their plight. According to Naila Kabeer, globalization has created new economic opportunities for women but also introduced new forms of exploitation, particularly in the informal sector. The gendered division of labour often places women in low-paying, insecure jobs, further entrenching economic disparities (Kabeer, 2016). Scholar Bidyut Chakrabarty argues that increased political participation of women is crucial for inclusive governance. He notes that while women's representation in Indian politics has improved, it remains insufficient, particularly for minority women who face additional barriers to entry (Chakrabarty, 2014).

Some of the prominent scholars and analysts primarily worked on the landscape of this theme as, Dr. Ranjana Kumari, a prominent scholar

and director of the Centre for Social Research, emphasizes the importance of integrating women's issues into governance frameworks. She argues that empowerment of women, especially from minority communities, is crucial for holistic national development. Policies must be designed to address the intersectional challenges faced by these women, including access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. The 2024 Lok-Sabha elections presented an opportunity for political parties to prioritize these issues and implement inclusive policies that could transform the socio-economic landscape for minority women.

Political analyst and author Milan Vaishnav highlights the political significance of women's votes in the Indian elections as women constitute nearly half of the electorate in India. Their participation and preferences can significantly influence electoral outcomes. Political parties are increasingly recognizing the need to address women's issues, such as safety, employment, and education, to garner their support. Minority women, in particular, face compounded disadvantages that need specific policy attention. The 2024 Lok-Sabha Mandate reflects the success of parties in addressing these critical areas.

Historian and author Ramachandra Guha provides a historical context to the evolution of women's rights in India. According to him, the struggle for women's rights in India has been long and arduous, marked by significant milestones and setbacks. From the abolition of sati to the fight for women's suffrage, and more recently, the enactment of laws against domestic violence and for workplace equality, the journey has been transformative. However, minority women have often been at the fringes of these movements.

The Gender Studies analyst, Professor Nivedita Menon, a noted feminist scholar and professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, stresses the need for a gender-inclusive approach in governance as gender inclusivity is not just about having more women in positions of power but also about creating policies that address the unique challenges faced by women. Minority women often experience multiple layers of discrimination. Policies need to be intersectional, considering factors like caste, religion, and socio-economic status. The 2024 Lok-Sabha elections were a turning point in how we address and integrate women's issues into the national governance agenda.

A Human Right Activist, Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia Director at Human Rights Watch, points out the human rights dimension of women's issues. The rights of minority women are human rights that

must be protected and promoted by the state. Discrimination, violence, and socio-economic marginalization are significant barriers to the realization of these rights. Effective governance requires that these issues be addressed comprehensively. The 2024 Lok-Sabha elections provided an opportunity for political leaders to demonstrate their commitment to human rights by prioritizing the needs and rights of minority women in their manifestos and policies.

The 2024 Lok-Sabha elections presented an opportunity to address these challenges through inclusive and targeted policies. Political parties had to prioritize women's issues in their manifestos and ensure the implementation of existing laws and schemes effectively. Enhancing political representation for women, particularly from minority communities, is essential for equitable governance.

Conclusion

While substantial progress has been made in empowering women in India, it is clear that there is still a long way to go. Empowerment of women, especially the minority women can bring about a revolutionary change in the social fabric of the country. Equating the welfare of the women to the welfare of the nation would be the first strong step in this direction. The government's efforts through various schemes and initiatives have brought positive changes and improved the lives of many women. However, challenges such as gender-based violence, unequal access to resources and cultural norms persist. It is essential to continue addressing these challenges through sustained action, policy reforms, and collaborative efforts. By prioritizing women's empowerment, ensuring equal opportunities and challenging societal norms, India can pave the way for a future where women lead and thrive, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society. The 2024 Lok Sabha results are pivotal in determining the governance landscape regarding minority women's issues. The effectiveness of the new government in addressing these concerns will depend on their commitment to inclusive policies, equitable implementation and active engagement with minority communities.

References

- [1] Politics, Women and Well-being: How Kerala *Became A Model*", Jeffrey Robin, Oxford University Press, 1993
- [2] D. Hazarika, "Women Empowerment in India: A Brief Discussion", International Journal of Educational Planning & Administration, Vol. 1, No. 3, Pp. 199-202, 2011.

- [3] H. Subramanyam, "Women Education in India Facts and Factors", Asian Entrepreneur, Pp. 61-71, 2011.
- [4] Jeffrey, Robin (1993) : *Politics, women and well-being. How Kerala*
- [5] K. Sethuraman, Empowerment of Women in India-A Movement for Tribal Women Education, 2008.
- [6] Osella, Filippo and Osella, Caroline(2000): *Social mobility in Kerala-Modernity and identity in conflict*, Pluto Press, London.
- [7] R.M. Shettar, "A Study on Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment in India", IOSR Journal of Business and Management, Vol. 17, No. 4, Pp. 13-19, 2015.
- [8] R.N. Kadam, "Empowerment of Women in India-An Attempt to Fill the Gender Gap", International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, Vol. 2 No. 6, Pp. 11-13, 2012.
- [9] Saradamoni, K(1909b): *Sthree, Sthreevadam, Sthreevimochanam* (Malayalam), D.C Books, Kottayam.
- [10] V. Vidushi, "Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in India", International Journal of Applied Research, Vol. 1, No. 12, Pp. 1051-1053, 2015.

Endnotes

- [1] Renaissance: Thoughts, Stories and Ideas, Sri Aurbindo Society: Creating the Next Future, India.
- [2] Suliman, Nadine. The Interwined Relationship between Power and Patriarchy: Examples from Resource Executives Industries, 2019.
- [3] Beneria, Lourdes. Gender and Development: A Historical Overview. Taylor & Francis, 2015.
- [4] Anderson, David. Human Security: Theory and Action, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, New York, 2018.
- [5] Pylee, M.V. India's Constitution, 16th Edition, S Chand & Company Limited, India, 2017.
- [6] India now in Women-led Development Phase, Economic Times, 11th March, 2023.
- [7] India transitioned from Women's led development to Women-led Development, Business Standard, 28th June 2023.