



Gender Budgeting & Legislative Measures for Social Equality

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Women form more than 48 per cent of India's 145 crore population. The sheer numbers underline the need for strong tenets of gender equality in health, education, employment, decision-making, etc. A foundational plank needed to ensure gender equality is provided by an appropriate legal framework, backed by the Indian Constitution, which was promulgated almost 76 years ago. In this context, this article assesses some initiatives taken to achieve gender inclusivity throughout India's growth trajectory.

Reforms to Results

India is the fourth largest economy in the world. India's Gross Domestic Product grew at 6.5 per cent during 2024-25. Such a huge, impressive number could not have been achieved without the active contribution of 0.7 billion women of the country. Economic development and social equality are inextricably linked. Manifestation of efforts made for social equality can take the form of enhanced levels of school enrollments, better health and nutrition levels of children, higher levels of employment and income, and informed political choices and decision-making. Progress has been witnessed in many parameters (Table-1), reflecting the Government's strong determination and astute commitment to advancing towards a more inclusive and just society. There are improvements in life expectancy, maternal health, labour force participation, entrepreneurship and political representation. These

indicators reveal major gains over time and demonstrate a deeper shift towards greater degrees of empowerment of women.

Enabling Legal Provisions

Democracy establishes the tone for gender equality, as both are deeply interconnected. Many countries granted adult suffrage to women much later than they did to men. However, India embraced the principle of universal adult suffrage at the time of democratic inception. Various provisions of the Indian Constitution focus on affirmative action for ensuring an equitable society.

Some of these provisions are: Articles 14 (Right to Equality), 15 (Prohibition of Discrimination), 16 (Equality of Opportunity in Matters of Public Employment), 21 (Protection of Life and Personal Liberty), 23 (Prohibition of Traffic in Human Beings and



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Table-1 : Progress in Various Parameters Defining Gender Equality

Parameters	Earlier Time Period	Later Time Period
1. Life Expectancy of Women at Birth (in years)	70.0 (2011-15)	72.7 (2021-25*)
2. Sex Ratio (Number of females per 1,000 males)	943 (2011)	948 (2025*)
3. Maternal Mortality Rate (Number of maternal deaths per one lakh live births)	167 (2011-13)	97 (2018-20)
4. Female Literacy Rate (per cent)	64.6 (2011)	70.3 (2017)
5. Female Labour Force Participation Rate (per cent)	23.3 (2017-18)	41.7 (2023-24)
6. Women-owned Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (Number)	4.86 lakh (1.4.2021)	2.49 crore (5.10.2025)
7. Women Electors (per cent of total Electors)	55.8 (2009)	65.8 (2024)
8. Women elected to Lok Sabha (Number)	59 (2009)	74 (2024)

* Projected by The Technical Group on Population Projections

Sources: 1. Women and Men in India, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.
2. Udyam Registration Portal

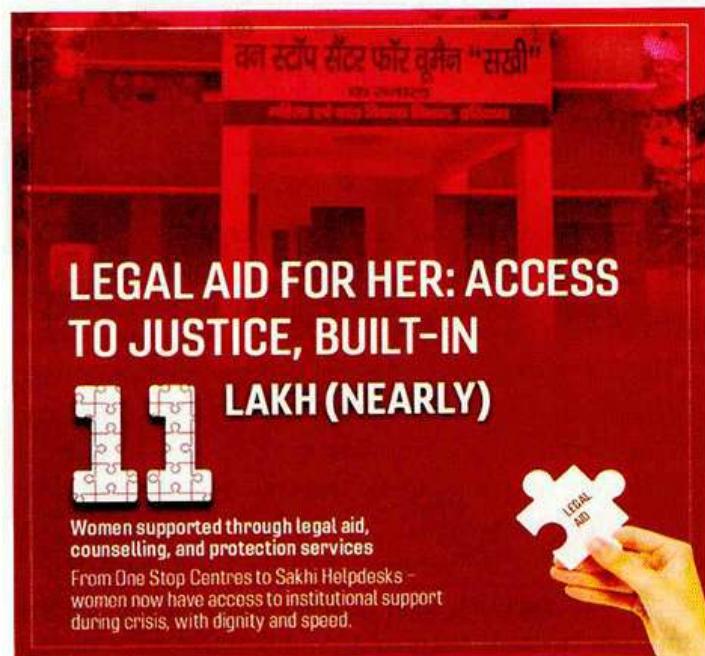
Forced Labour), 39 (Means of Livelihood), 42 (Just and Humane Work Conditions), 51A (Renounce Practices Derogatory to Dignity of Women), 243 (Reservation of Seats in Panchayats and Municipalities) and 325 (Inclusion in Electoral Rolls).

The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution mandate a minimum reservation of 33 per cent for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions and urban local bodies, respectively. The 106th amendment to the Constitution reserves seats for women in Lok Sabha, State legislative assemblies and legislative assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi and reservation for women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes equal to one-third of the total reservations for women.

There are legislations aiming at ensuring safety, security, protection, equality and dignity of women. With the participation of women in economic activities growing, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, is highly relevant, as it establishes a comprehensive legal framework to ensure safe workplaces for women. Taking efforts in this sphere higher, a revamped version of the Sexual Harassment electronic Box (SHe-Box) was launched in 2024, to allow women to register their complaints online for speedier remedies. While The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 aims to protect women's rights both within and outside her home, The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 addresses the social evil of dowry by strengthening women's legal rights. The Indecent Representation of Women Act, 1986, prohibits the indecent representation of women through advertisements, publications, writings, paintings, figures, etc. Further, the Commission of Sati

(Prevention) Act, 1987, provides for the prevention of the commission of Sati and its glorification, both of which are punishable offences.

The Central Government has implemented 4 Labour Codes by amalgamating 29 Labour Laws with effect from 21 November 2025. These are the Code on Wages 2019, the Industrial Relations Code 2020, the Code on Social Security 2020 and the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020. Codification was carried out with the aims of reducing multiplicity of definitions and authorities, enhancing formalisation, facilitating implementation and promoting the use of technology in the enforcement of labour laws, and ensuring social protection and safety in the workplace, besides bringing in transparency in enforcement and equal opportunities for women to





participate in. These legal protection measures directly contribute to higher productivity, inclusive growth and the wider goal of gender equality in India's development journey towards *Viksit Bharat@2047*.

The Central Government enacted *Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita*, *Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita* and *Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam*, which came into effect on 01 July 2024. The objective is to assure modernised and efficient criminal justice systems. Besides, the *Nirbhaya Fund* was set up in 2013 for enhancing women's safety and security. Set up in 1992, the National Commission for Women aims at safeguarding the rights of women.

Apart from domestic legal provisions, India has ratified international conventions which commit to securing the rights of women. Prominent among these are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and the conventions of the International Labour Organization which are related to women's rights. Domestic legislation, along with international conventions, strives to ensure that women meet their potential.

Gender Budget: Ramping Up Resources

In 2024, the United Nations' theme for International Women's Day was 'Invest in Women'. To accelerate economic empowerment of women, the United Nations mentioned ramping up resources, finding jobs with pay transparency, equal pay for work of equal value and access to care services, finding work-life balance, calling for security, and protecting women's rights. Empowerment of women is not limited to a matter

of rights or justice but entails the efforts of women to become a critical driver of economic and social progress.

The Gender Budget Statement, released along with the Union Budget, has three parts. Part A provides budget provisions for those schemes which have 100 per cent provision for women/girls. Part B contains details of those schemes that have 30-99 per cent allocations for women/girls, whereas Part C depicts those schemes that have allocations for women/girls below 30 per cent. The latest Gender Budget Statement, 2025-26, enlists 61 schemes in Part A. The Budget Estimates of Gender Budget Statement for 2025-26 are 19 per cent higher than the Revised Estimates of 2024-25 (Table-2). Gender Budget as a percentage of the total budget has increased from 6.8 per cent in 2024-25 to 8.9 per cent in 2025-26.

Earmarking of the budget for women can be an effective step towards ensuring that benefits reach them. Further, gender-focused budgetary allocations would lead to improved accountability and better monitoring of outcomes, and can act as a catalyst for laying pathways for long-term sustainable growth. The output-outcome monitoring framework devised by NITI Aayog enhances transparency, boosts accountability, and helps Ministries and Departments to track the progress of their schemes.

Table-2 : Gender Budget Statement, 2024-25 and 2025-26 (₹ crore)

Parts	2024-25 Revised Estimates	2025-26 Budget Estimates
A	80,733.35	105,535.40
B	281,104.56	326,672.00
C	14,690.99	16,821.28
Total	376,528.90	449,028.68

Source: <https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/doc/eb/stat13.pdf>

The Way Ahead

The nation is committed to remaining steadfast in its development path by focusing on strategic investments in public welfare schemes with empowering impacts. Women play a critical role in that development. Higher female literacy and increased women's participation in workforce and leadership in sectors like science, education, business, health and governance contribute directly to economic growth and social advancement. For the country to become *Viksit Bharat* by 2047, it is imperative that during the *Amrit Kaal* (2025-2047), women be socially, economically and politically empowered, breaking systemic stereotypes, and the country become a republic of equals. □