

Gender and Governance: A Critical Content Analysis of Women's Inclusion in India's Twelfth Five-Year Plan

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Abstract: Gender inequality remains a significant concern in the contemporary global context, with international communities emphasising the need to address this issue comprehensively. India is not exempt from this global perspective. Effective resolution of women's issues necessitates their comprehensive inclusion in the development planning process. Women's socio-economic advancement is crucial for national progress, contributing to inclusive economic growth, poverty alleviation, and gender equality. The Five-Year Plans (FYP) of India have been instrumental in the nation's development, underscoring the essential role of women across various sectors to elevate their societal status. Employing qualitative content analysis, this research studies the representation and inclusion of women within the 12th FYP of India, in light of the Gender Inequality Index (GII) provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Keywords: Five-Year Plans of India, Women Empowerment, Gender Inequality Index, UNDP

1. Introduction

Across various cultures and historical periods, women have encountered varying levels of gender inequality, and they have frequently been treated as a secondary priority or the inferior gender. The prevalence of gender discrimination has manifested itself in women's lives through multiple avenues, such as limited access to education, restricted employment opportunities, low political representation, unequal payment, gender-based violence (Oswald, 2023), and inadequate power over their bodies and reproductive rights (Parker, 2020). Despite these challenges, policy planners persistently combat gender inequality and have spearheaded groundbreaking social movements to champion

women's rights. Nonetheless, significant challenges still exist in achieving genuine equality for women across all societal domains.

This pervasive issue transcends regional and cultural boundaries. Gender inequality remains a critical concern in the contemporary global context. International communities strongly emphasize addressing this issue, and India is not excluded from this universal perspective. With a population of approximately 1.405 billion, India is home to one-sixth of the world's inhabitants (Tamuli & Mishra, 2023). Women, constituting almost half of India's large population, have historically been victims of persistent patriarchal norms and gender disparities (Prillaman, 2023). However, they hold immense potential to drive transformative changes in politics, social issues, economics, etc.

One of the main ways to effectively address women's issues is through their comprehensive inclusion in the development planning process. Women's socio-economic development is paramount for national progress and contributes to inclusive economic growth, poverty alleviation, and gender equality (M. Ghosh, 2018). A good example of these plans in India is the FYP, which has been instrumental in the nation's development. The FYPs of India have played a crucial role in the country's development. These plans, highlighting the vital role of women across various sectors, aim to elevate their status within society.

Over the past six decades of the FYPs, substantial transformations have taken place across various sectors of the nation. The 12th FYP represents the pinnacle of the eleven preceding plans, consolidating efforts and initiatives into a cohesive, practical, and sustainable programme. The 12th FYP analyses past achievements and setbacks, offering

valuable insights for future strategies. This plan prioritises matters concerning diverse groups of women, recommending targeted programmes to address their specific issues. Employing qualitative content analysis, this research studies the representation and inclusion of women within the 12th FYP of India, in light of the GII provided by the UNDP.

2. Literature Review

The portrayal of women in FYPs of India has been the subject of several scholarly investigations. The most thorough and comparable study to the current research was published in 2012 by the UN Women under the title of ‘Location Gender in the 12th FYP’. Considering the objectives and achievements of the 11th Plan, this research meticulously examines the involvement of women in the 12th Plan and provides a new framework for women’s involvement in this Plan. This paper introduces three categories to analyse the representation of women in the 12th. These sections are respectively named ‘inclusion as workers’, ‘ensuring an equitable share in the benefits of development’, and ‘recognising the contributions and claims of the voiceless’. This study discusses women’s challenges in multiple fields such as agriculture, transportation, tourism, health, education, urban sector, rural sector, sustainable management of natural resources, etc. (Kapur et al., 2012).

Mynavathi and Aruna (2016) explore the Indian government’s initiatives for women’s development, empowerment, and entrepreneurship, with a particular focus on the impact of policies implemented since the mid-1990s. Their study indicates that the government has undertaken various measures through schemes and programmes to combat poverty, promote gender equality, and empower women. The research highlights the successful achievement of the

objectives of the Self-Help Groups (SHGs) movement. Furthermore, it discusses the rise of female entrepreneurs who have become inspirational figures, challenging the traditional notion of male dominance in entrepreneurship. The study evaluates each FYP by concentrating on three key areas: health, education, and employment.

Konwar (2019) analyses the provisions for women's empowerment in Indian FYPs, highlighting the evolution from perceiving women's development merely as a 'welfare' issue in the initial plans to a more comprehensive approach that includes 'development' and 'empowerment' in the later plans. Recognising that women's empowerment is crucial for human development, especially for marginalised or disadvantaged segments of society, the primary objective of the 12th FYP is to eliminate gender-based inequities, discrimination, and violence against women. The paper recommends that both governmental and voluntary sectors implement initiatives and strategies to eradicate inequalities and advance women's empowerment in terms of resources, economic opportunities, influence, rights, and political representation.

Furthermore, De (2021) analyses matters pertaining to women's empowerment in the context of the FYPs, with particular emphasis on gender equality. Through this critical examination of the FYP, De highlights the central goal of promoting women's status as a crucial aspect in all the plans related to the empowerment of women in India.

In addition, Gupta (2014) critically examines all the FYPs of India, assessing the contribution of strategic development to addressing women's issues. In line with Mynavathi and Aruna's viewpoint, Gupta observes that the focus has progressively shifted from welfare-oriented approaches to gender and development frameworks within the FYPs. This shift is essential to address the multifaceted deprivations faced by women, including socio-cultural, institutional,

economic, and financial discriminations. Consequently, adopting a gender perspective and integrating a life-cycle approach are pivotal for fostering inclusive growth and ensuring equality.

Kaur (2018) employs a research methodology similar to that of Mynavathi and Aruna (2016), utilising secondary data sources to analyse each FYP. Kaur asserts that since the implementation of the first FYP (1951–1956), the Indian government has recognised the crucial role of women in development. Over the last few years, there has been a significant realisation that integrating women into the process of inclusive growth can only be achieved by transforming inclusive democracy from a myth into a tangible reality.

It is worth noting that the reviewed papers exhibit certain methodological ambiguities. While qualitative methods were predominantly employed, the specific procedures were not always comprehensively detailed, which may contribute to a more descriptive nature of the studies. Additionally, a recurring theme among the reviewed literature is the absence of an explicitly defined theoretical framework. The analyses do not always make clear the underlying perspectives on women that inform their evaluations. Although these studies touch upon various social issues affecting women, they do not delve deeply into women's issues and gender inequality as measured by the indicators of the GII.

3. Capability Approach

In this context, it is essential to consider theoretical frameworks that can effectively address gender inequality. The capability approach, a theoretical framework commonly employed in gender research, has been articulated by Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Kumar Sen. This approach comprises two normative propositions: first, that “the freedom to achieve well-being holds primary moral importance,” and second, “that well-being should be understood in terms of people’s capabilities and functioning” (Robeyns et al., 2023). The main

focus of the capability approach is enhancing access to the necessary resources for a gratifying life (ibid.).

The GII was introduced in 2010 by the UNDP to quantify the loss of achievement within a nation resulting from gender-based disparities. This index measures the accessibility of both women and men to three sources: health, empowerment, and the labor market. The development of the GII did not depend solely on a singular theoretical framework. Nevertheless, the capability approach emerged as a key theoretical influence in its formation.

From the perspective of the GII, the primary focus of gender equality within the health sector is women's reproductive health. The UNDP constructs the Women's Reproductive Health Index using the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) and the adolescent birth rate. This index allows policymakers and researchers to quantify data and deepen their understanding of the obstacles women face in accessing reproductive healthcare services. Similarly, the GII's perspective on gender equality in the labor market centres on female and male labor force participation rates (LFPR). The labor market is a significant dimension of gender equality, and it is crucial to consider the barriers that reduce the participation rate of individuals—particularly women—in labor market studies on gender inequality.

Moreover, according to the GII's indicators, the primary focus on gender equality in terms of empowerment lies in the proportion of females and males with at least secondary education, as well as their respective shares of parliamentary seats. These two indicators collectively form the female and male empowerment index. They underscore the importance of equal participation in education and politics for achieving empowerment and, ultimately, gender equality. The level of educational participation reflects the opportunities available for personal

and professional growth. Additionally, the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women or men signifies the political influence of each gender in the policy-making process.

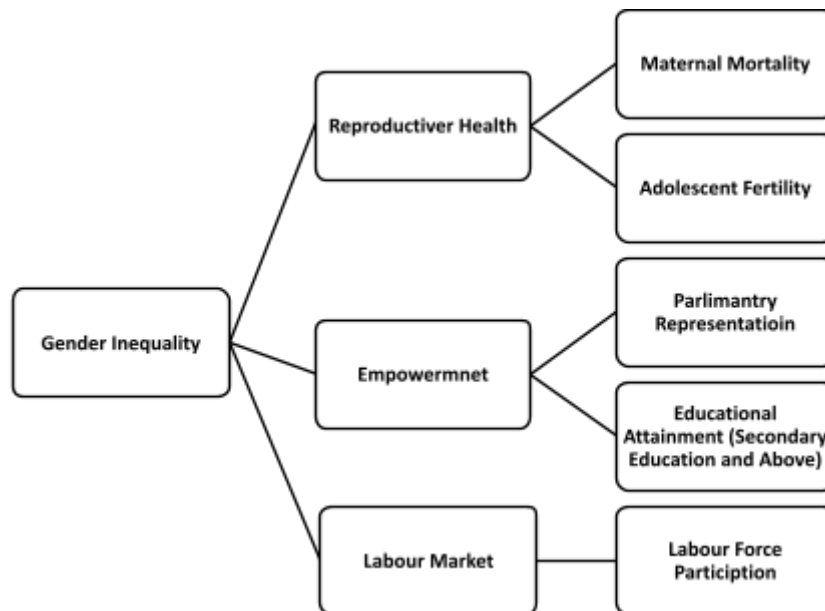


Figure 1: Gender Inequality Index, UNDP (2010)

4. Method

The textual data for the present study is derived from the 12th FYP of India, which comprises three volumes that serve as the primary sources of information. These volumes are titled: (1) *Faster, More Inclusive and Sustainable Growth*, (2) *Economic Sectors*, and (3) *Social Sectors*. Employing the capability approach, the three volumes of the 12th FYP of India were taken under scrutiny.

The first step in delving deeper into this study was reading the entire text of the three volumes of the 12th FYP to gain a comprehensive understanding of the overall context and the status of women in this plan. Next, the NVivo software was utilised during the second reading to

begin the coding process. NVivo is a commonly used computer software among qualitative researchers for organising and examining non-numerical data. This helpful software is used across a wide range of fields where in-depth examination of small or large qualitative datasets is required. To evaluate the text of the 12th Plan with a focus on gender equality in NVivo, it was essential to define specific codes (or in NVivo's terminology, specific 'nodes') to classify all sections relating to women within the text of the 12th Plan.

Since the GII has played a pivotal role in conducting this research, the coding frame was built based on its three chief dimensions: health, empowerment, and labour market. The GII specifies each of these dimensions and clarifies that health comprises two indicators—maternal mortality and adolescent births; empowerment comprises the female and male populations with at least secondary education and their respective shares of parliamentary seats; and the labour market includes female and male LFPR.

Since the 12th Plan was not exclusively written based on the GII, it has considered factors beyond the aforementioned indicators in addressing women's issues. For instance, in the field of women's health, topics such as early marriage, nutritional deficiencies, female medical insurance, sex ratio, sex-selective abortion, female access to sanitation facilities, HIV transmission from mother to child, and barriers to maternal well-being were addressed, although these factors are not included in the health dimension of the GII. For this reason, during the coding process, similar to the approach of the 12th Plan, this research extends beyond the indicators of the GII to include other topics related to women's health under the specified node for health. A similar approach was adopted for women's labour market and women's empowerment.

The main coding challenge emerged after the secondary reading. Upon closer examination of the text, there were still some instances that could not be easily categorised under any of the GII's indicators. The 12th FYP repeatedly addressed the necessity of enhancing women's access to essential services that ultimately pave the way for their empowerment. Even though these sections could be considered as facilitating factors for women's empowerment, they did not clearly fall under women's education or women's share of parliamentary seats. These examples represented the importance of women's access to financial budgets, urban services, land rights, energy resources, social mobility, and, above all, security. Undoubtedly, by ensuring women's access to resources and security, the government can break down barriers to women's empowerment and build a more equitable society. Therefore, a new indicator was added to the empowerment category under the title of 'resources and security'.

It can be said that the primary reading and coding procedure initially focused on textual data. In contrast, in the secondary coding phase, a supplementary subcategory was incorporated into the theoretical framework based on the data and findings. Following the initiation of a critical analysis of the codes, the issues concerning women in the 12th FYP were thoroughly examined. The discussion section is organised into three main categories: women's health, women's empowerment, and women's labour market. To address the research questions, official datasets from the World Bank were utilised to analyse growth trends in these areas from 2007 to 2020. The codes were then reviewed in light of the World Bank's statistics on women's health, empowerment, and employment in India. Eventually, a new interpretation and reading of the 12th FYP—based on the three indicators of the GII and the capability approach—was obtained.

5. Discussion

Employing the GII, the 12th FYP was scrutinised across three themes: women's health, female labour market participation, and women's empowerment. Within women's health, the 12th Plan prioritised maternal health over other areas. Regarding the female labour market, it deliberated on the involvement of women in the agricultural sector. Concerning women's empowerment, the plan addressed challenges in women's education more extensively than other subjects. The 12th Plan also recognised women's access to resources and security as crucial avenues for their empowerment. Figure 5-1 illustrates the frequencies of the three themes concerning women across the 12th FYP. Each of the themes will be discussed in the following sections.

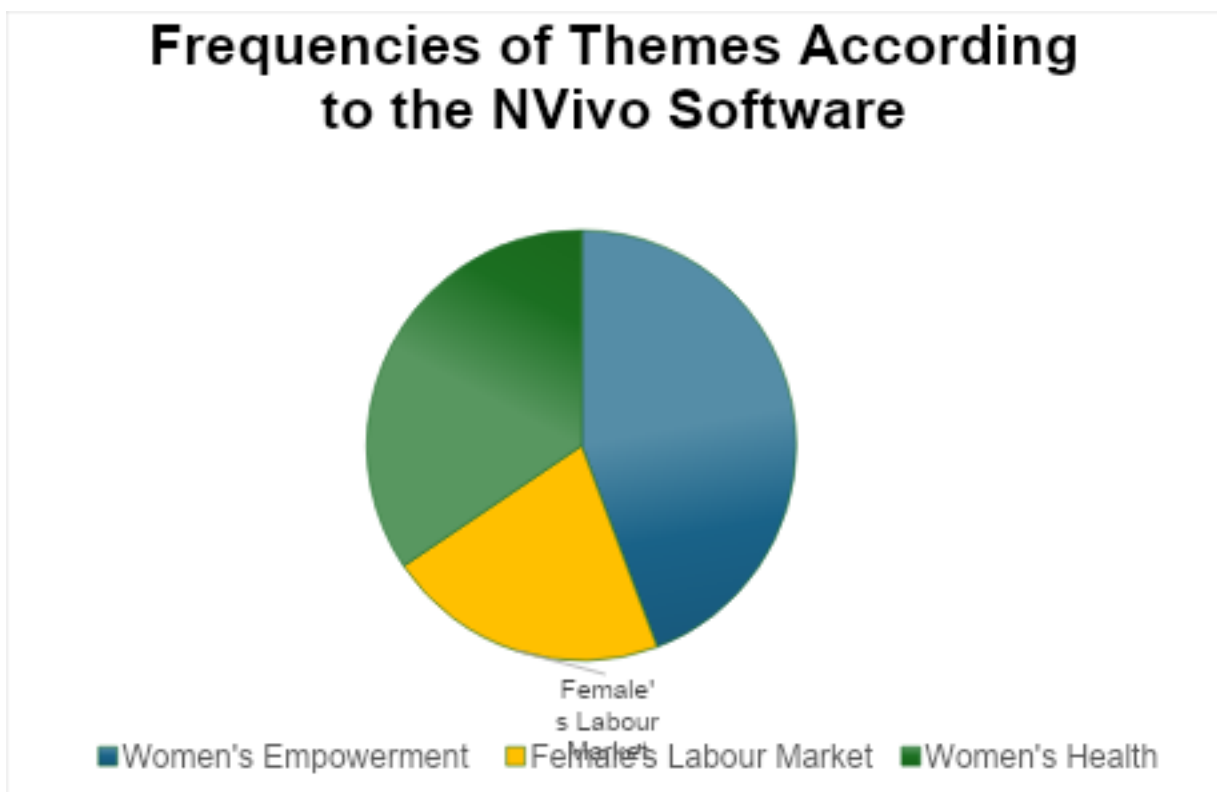


Figure 2: Frequencies of Themes, Created by Authors

5.1 Women's Health

Improving women's reproductive health is crucial not only for the health benefits it provides but also for its socio-economic benefits to women, their families, and communities (Grépin & Klugman, 2013). Women's reproductive health enhances labour productivity, expands the female labour supply, increases wages, and ultimately contributes to economic development (ibid.). To effectively promote gender equality and empower women to reach their full potential, it is essential to recognise the interconnectedness of women's health with the labour market, education, and other social factors.

The 12th FYP of India was not exclusively designed based on the UNDP's indicators; rather, it prioritised the specific conditions prevailing in India. Consequently, in addition to the factors of maternal mortality and adolescent birth, the plan addresses various other aspects of women's health. These include obstacles to maternal health, early marriage, nutritional deficiencies among girls and women, female medical insurance, sex ratio, sex-selective abortion, access to sanitation facilities, and the transmission of HIV from mother to child.

5.1.1 Maternal Mortality

According to the World Bank (2023), India experienced a downward trend in the MMR between 2010 and 2020. In this regard, a regression model was utilised to estimate the data, incorporating information on maternal death ratios in non-AIDS deaths among women aged 15–49, fertility rates, availability of birth attendants, and gross domestic product (GDP) measured based on purchasing power parities. Based on this data, since the initiation of the 12th FYP in 2012 to 2017, the MMR decreased from 162 to 119 per 100,000.

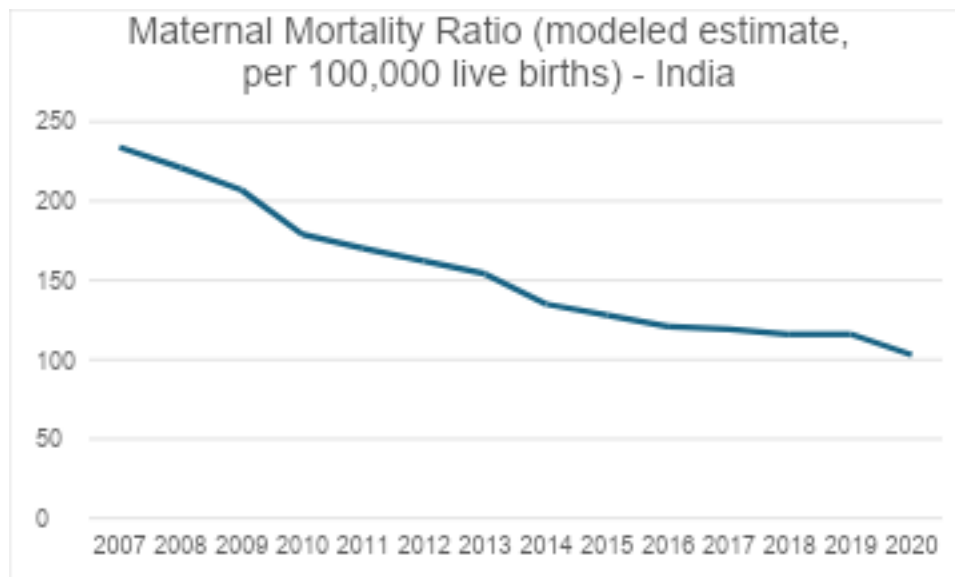


Figure 3: Maternal Mortality Ratio in India, World Bank (2023)

Maternal mortality is the most discussed topic relating to women's health in the context of the 12th Plan. The Plan introduces the reasons for maternal mortality in India as the following:

1. **Limited access to transportation services:** The 12th Plan confirms that “every minute a woman dies in childbirth, but many of these deaths could be avoided with timely access to transport (Volume 2, p. 198).” The Government of India placed special emphasis on women's access to transportation as a means to reduce maternal mortality, and the 12th Plan prioritises “better access to emergency obstetric care (both public and private) within a two-hour travel time in cases of complication (Volume 3, p.29).”
2. **Nonqualified midwives:** The 12th FYP recognises the lack of qualified practitioners, including midwives, as one of the challenges in the health system resulting in maternal mortality risk. Concerning this issue, the Plan decides to revive midwifery and update traditional skills and knowledge with formal training.

3. **Nutritional deficiency:** Anaemia appears as a major nutritional concern in the 12th Plan and is linked to maternal mortality risk as well. The most common nutritional factor contributing to anaemia is iron deficiency. The 12th Plan aims to decrease anaemia among women and adolescent girls by providing iron and folic acid supplementation. Not only does the 12th Plan bring attention to iron deficiency, but it also highlights deficiencies in other vital minerals essential to the human body.
4. **Abortions:** Adolescent mothers are more prone to encounter difficulties such as unwanted pregnancies. Therefore, unsafe abortion is more prevalent among them. Moreover, due to the preference for boys over girls in India, many women are coerced by their families to undergo abortion in cases of female fetuses. Over the years, the Indian government has enacted several laws to promote gender equality, with reducing sex-selective abortion as a central objective. In this regard, the 12th Plan recognises the significance of ‘The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act (PC-PNDT Act)’ to combat this issue. This Act aims to tackle the use of technology for fetal gender determination and reduce female feticide. The 12th FYP recommends that “the provisions of the PC-PNDT Act must be reviewed to make sex selection practices effectively punishable.” The 12th Plan adds that it is imperative to strengthen this Act by implementing more effective enforcement methods and making the penalties more severe. Additionally, it is crucial to implement “restrictions on sex detection and sex selection advertisements” as well as the “registration/regulation of sonography machines (Volume 3, p.172).” The law highlights that all registered centres are required to maintain all records, charts, forms, reports, and consent letters for at least two years. Furthermore, the 12th Plan refers to the necessity of

providing greater “access to a basket of contraceptives, and safe abortion services (Volume 3, p.14)” to reduce the risk of unwanted pregnancies and abortion.

5.1.2 Adolescent Birth

Child marriage or early marriage (a marriage in which either one or both spouses are below the legal age of 18) annually impacts the well-being of 12 million young women across the world by jeopardising their physical and mental health (Burgess et al., 2022). Early marriage detrimentally affects girls by reducing their educational opportunities, increasing the risk of domestic violence and sexual abuse, endangering their reproductive health, and increasing the risk of adolescent birth. Moreover, it puts girls at a higher risk of early and rapid childbearing, which negatively impacts their physical and emotional health. Adolescent mothers face difficulties such as unwanted pregnancies shortly after giving birth, resulting in harmful health outcomes for themselves and their children. Also, child brides are highly prone to suffering the unfavourable consequences of early marriage, including unsafe abortions and health complications.

Child marriage is mentioned in the 12th Plan as a major concern that affects women's health. In this regard, the Plan introduces the ‘Extension of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act) up to Senior Secondary’ to expand the possibilities for adolescents to attain their full learning rights and to tackle early marriages of girls, adolescent birth, and juvenile delinquency (Volume 3, p.196). The 12th Plan acknowledges that around 43 percent of married women during the establishment of the 12th Plan in the age group of 20–24 years were married before attaining the age of 18 (Volume 3, p.199).

Furthermore, child marriage—along with other issues such as the dowry system, poverty, alcohol consumption, and the inferior status of women in Indian society—sets the stage for

domestic violence. To address this problem, the 12th Plan implements the ‘Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA)’ and the ‘Dowry Prohibition Act (DPA)’. Under the PWDVA, state governments must appoint Protection Officers, enlist Service Providers, and notify medical facilities to help the victims of domestic violence (Volume 3, p.179).

5.2 Female’s Labour Market

Increasing the GDP rate is the key shared target across all the FYPs, which can be achieved by expanding human capital and labour force participation (LFP). Among all nations, India is listed as one of those with the lowest female LFPR (Directorate General of Employment, 2023). It is a common belief that as women become more involved in educational pursuits, their chances of engagement in the labour market will also increase. However, the relationship between women’s education and LFP in India is a complex matter (Pappu, 2015). Between 2000 and 2020, India witnessed a consistent annual decline in female LFP. Social researchers identify factors such as increased educational enrolment of girls, lack of suitable employment opportunities, higher household incomes, traditional values, and gender discrimination as the main reasons behind this downward trend (Verick, 2014).

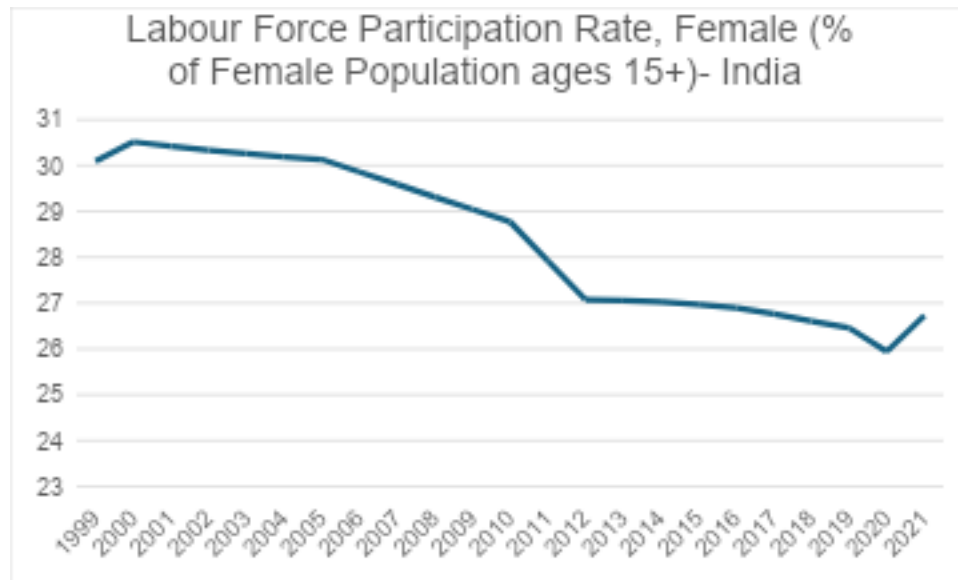


Figure 4: Female's Labour Force Participation Rate in India, World Bank (2024)

The low female LFPR is a barrier to achieving greater GDP growth and advancing toward higher levels of development. Addressing the challenges within the female labour market is crucial for fostering increased GDP growth. The 12th Plan considers women's significant role in the sustainable socio-economic development of India. In this regard, it focuses on promoting home-based and women-centric enterprises such as agriculture, handloom weaving, and handicraft industries, all of which can play a pivotal role in the country's GDP growth. With respect to the female labour market, the 12th FYP discusses agriculture more than any other issue and highlights the phenomenon of the feminisation of agriculture.

5.2.1 Female's Labour Force Participation

Following the liberalisation of India's economy, the farming industry experienced a notable phenomenon, commonly referred to as the 'feminisation of agriculture'. Under this circumstance, the ratio of females involved in agricultural activities exceeds that of male

labourers (Das et al., 2021; Pattnaik et al., 2018; Saxena, 2019). Although this may appear to reflect progress within India's patriarchal society, it should be noted that the feminisation of agriculture does not signify an improvement in women's empowerment or their economic status. Rather, it strongly reflects rural poverty. As the 12th Plan states, the main reason behind this situation is that "small and fragmented holdings do not allow for the generation of sufficient household income (Volume 3, pp. 167–168)"; therefore, male members of the household often migrate to urban areas for employment, leaving the farms to women and children. Women's increasing involvement in agriculture not only adds to their already heavy domestic workloads but also jeopardises their well-being and educational opportunities. Accordingly, researchers such as Pattnaik et al. (2018) describe this condition as the 'feminisation of agrarian distress'.

Despite the pessimistic interpretations, the feminisation of agriculture has certain benefits. For instance, it contributes to food security and offers economic empowerment to poor women. Consequently, the 12th FYP emphasises the advantages of greater female participation in agricultural work and proposes practical programmes for improvement. One major concern it addresses is land ownership. The Plan stresses that land used by women for shelter or livelihood should be registered in their names and that this should be uniformly implemented across all Indian states (Volume 1, p. 193). The Plan also prioritises the viability of small-scale farm enterprises to ensure women's agricultural success. Group farming is proposed as a means to empower Dalit and women farmers through land ownership and financial growth.

To increase female participation in manufacturing and handicrafts, the 12th Plan "supports the promotion of marketable manufacturing skills in production activities (Volume 3, p. 169)", particularly among marginalised women. For instance, bamboo mat-making—a traditional handicraft—serves as a crucial source of income for rural women (Lynser et al.,

2015). Women skillfully weave bamboo into mats, baskets, hats, and furniture. Despite the significance of their work, bamboo mat weavers face challenges such as limited access to financial resources, raw materials, and technology. Nevertheless, the 12th Plan recognises bamboo mat-making as a women-friendly occupation that can promote women's empowerment and economic self-reliance. The Plan recommends that the government establish bamboo mat-making centres to train local women and supply mats for industrial processing into roofing materials (Volume 2, p. 368).

Overall, the 12th FYP acknowledges women as valuable, underutilised resources who, when equipped with adequate training and support, can contribute meaningfully to both their own empowerment and national economic growth. However, the Plan overlooks women's participation in leadership roles, managerial positions, or fields requiring specialised expertise.

5.3 Women's Empowerment

The 12th FYP aims to boost female educational participation by addressing key barriers, including teacher shortages, lack of sanitary facilities, inadequate public transportation, and restrictive social values. While the Plan recognises women's involvement in the Panchayati Raj system, it does not explicitly address their representation in parliamentary politics. The Plan allocates budgets toward supporting women's empowerment, signalling a commitment to gender-sensitive development strategies. These measures aim not only to improve educational access but also to promote broader empowerment.

5.3.1 Women's Education

Gender parity in education can significantly influence economic growth. Policymakers can empower women and enhance labour force participation and productivity through strategic

investments in education. The 12th Plan treats women's education as a key avenue for empowerment. While female education in India has made strides in recent years, structural challenges persist—especially in secondary education. The World Bank (2024) reports a 6% increase in female school enrollment between 2012 and 2017, reflecting expanded access. However, several social and infrastructural barriers limit full participation.

The 12th Plan identifies key reasons behind low female enrollment, such as long commutes and insufficient transport. As a response, it recommends constructing hostels and improving transportation access. Although hostel accommodation has not significantly raised overall female enrolment rates, it has markedly benefited girls from Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes (Mukherjee & Dasgupta, 2023). Hostels also help reduce dropout rates and address accommodation issues for teachers in marginalised regions.

Another critical issue is the lack of usable toilets. The Plan notes that “over 63 percent of rural schools have no usable toilet facilities (Volume 3, p. 54)”, and recognises this as a major cause of female dropouts. Thus, it prioritises building gender-specific toilets in schools as a vital measure, alongside enhancing educational quality and providing sibling care services. Ray & Datta (2017) note that such toilets correlate positively with enrolment and participation among upper primary students, irrespective of caste.

The 12th FYP also promotes vocational training as a pathway to empowerment. This training develops women's skills, self-confidence, and labour market readiness. For instance, it includes women living with HIV in livelihood programmes and offers them training to raise awareness about HIV while enhancing economic self-sufficiency (Volume 3, p. 175). Women's participation in education and decision-making leads to innovation and inclusive growth.

5.3.2 Women's Political Representation

Despite progress in closing gender gaps across sectors, Indian politics remains male-dominated. Access to legislative representation plays a crucial role in political empowerment and inclusive governance (Ghosh, 2022). Women's presence in parliament can shape public discourse and policy direction. Yet, a notable gender gap remains in India's democratic institutions (Rajput & Thakkar, 2023).

One of the key GII indicators for empowerment is the share of parliamentary seats held by women. The 12th Plan does not explicitly discuss this. Instead, it focuses on women's participation at the local level through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). These include Gram Panchayats (villages), Block Panchayats (intermediate level), and Zilla Panchayats (district level). Women's higher engagement at this tier contributes to inclusive decision-making and national development. The Plan encourages greater involvement of women in village governance, especially in agriculture.

Women's health, education, and labour market participation are interlinked components crucial to empowerment. Analysing these dimensions is both a moral imperative and an economic strategy. They lead to higher productivity, increased labour supply, better wages, and national growth. As a long-term planning document, the 12th FYP provides a suitable context for implementing these strategies.

5.3.3 Security and resources

Despite the systematic framework provided by the GII for coding the text of the 12th Plan, certain instances could not be categorised within any of the GII's existing indicators. These instances emphasised the importance of women's access to financial resources, urban services,

land rights, energy resources, social mobility, and security. As a result, a new indicator was introduced in the analysis under the women's empowerment dimension: 'resources and security'.

Women's access to resources and security is vital for building a more inclusive and sustainable society. It also plays a key role in socially and economically empowering them. To ensure sustainable livelihoods, the 12th Plan highlights the importance of land distribution among poor families in disadvantaged regions. Access to cultivable land provides households with both a livelihood and a shelter. The Plan prioritises gender equality in property rights, mandating that future land contracts be issued either jointly in the names of men and women, or exclusively in women's names. Ensuring women's land ownership enhances their economic power, personal security, and social standing. It also fosters financial independence, increases self-reliance, and strengthens their role in household decision-making.

Additionally, the 12th Plan recognises women as "primary stakeholders in energy and natural resource management, especially for domestic use." Consequently, insufficient access to liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) disproportionately affects women. Gender norms often assign cooking and domestic work to women. When clean cooking fuels are inaccessible, women must collect firewood or resort to unsafe traditional methods, which are laborious, harmful to health, and time-consuming. This restricts their participation in education and the labour market. The Plan aims to empower women by training them in renewable energy technologies and creating a large pool of female energy technocrats and entrepreneurs. This initiative not only improves women's control over energy resources but also enhances their health and social agency.

The 12th Plan also seeks to improve women's access to financial resources, particularly for victims of social harm or unfortunate circumstances who require institutional support for rehabilitation. In line with Supreme Court directives, the Plan proposes a scheme for restorative

justice and financial assistance for rape survivors. Improved access to financial resources enables women to escape cycles of poverty and inequality, promoting sustainable development, social justice, and mobility.

A persistent issue in Indian society is low social mobility, compounded by the caste system that often prevents upward movement across socio-economic classes. In addition to caste barriers, patriarchal norms further constrain women's mobility, even within their own caste. The 12th Plan places special emphasis on women from Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). It acknowledges that poverty alleviation alone cannot solve women's limited mobility, as gender-based issues of inclusiveness affect all women regardless of income. Therefore, the strategy for addressing women's issues should be distinct from strategies targeting other marginalised groups. However, the Plan often lumps women together with SCs, STs, OBCs, the differently abled, and other marginalised populations, overlooking their unique identity and needs.

The 12th Plan also seeks to ensure a "gender-sensitive and child-friendly environment" by implementing provisions to protect women and children from all forms of violence. It specifically highlights the vulnerabilities of tribal women, who face "double discrimination"—as members of tribal communities and as women within those communities. Furthermore, the Plan affirms the goal of eliminating "untouchability and all forms of discrimination against women," ensuring security and dignity for all members of SC, ST, and OBC communities. Even urban services such as street lighting and public transportation are addressed in terms of women's safety.

In sum, improving women's access to services, resources, and security equips them to thrive in education and the labour market. These elements contribute not only to their

empowerment but also to protection from various forms of violence. Yet, the GII lacks indicators for measuring women's access to resources and security. It is therefore recommended that future revisions of the GII incorporate this critical dimension.

Conclusion

The approach of India's Five-Year Plans (FYPs) toward women's issues has undergone a substantial transformation over time. The analysis of the 12th FYP reveals a significant shift in the way India addresses gender-related challenges compared to earlier plans. The Plan recognises gender inequality as a central obstacle to achieving inclusive and sustainable development. It identifies and addresses women's specific needs across a range of sectors while proposing targeted strategies for improvement.

The 12th FYP also emphasises women's autonomy and agency, seeking to challenge patriarchal norms and highlight women's capacity as active agents of development rather than passive beneficiaries of welfare. It underscores that advancing gender equality is not just beneficial to women but crucial for national economic growth and socio-cultural advancement.

However, the Plan is not without shortcomings. One of the key criticisms is that women are frequently not treated as a distinct identity group. Instead, their issues are often addressed collectively with those of other marginalised groups—such as SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities, and the differently abled—without acknowledging the specific structural disadvantages that women face. This lack of differentiation may limit the Plan's effectiveness in addressing issues unique to women across social and economic classes.

Two interpretations emerge here. First, by grouping women with other disadvantaged populations, the Plan ensures greater attention to those at the intersection of caste, gender, and poverty. Second, this approach can dilute the focus on women-specific issues beyond basic

needs, such as access to higher education, leadership roles, or political representation. For example, while the Plan addresses women's access to health services, transportation, secondary education, and agricultural employment, it overlooks women's participation in university education and decision-making bodies.

Although income-based classifications are occasionally used, the Plan recognises that women from all income brackets continue to face challenges related to gender-based exclusion. While poverty alleviation can help low-income individuals, it is not a substitute for gender-sensitive strategies targeting the structural barriers women face. As UN Women (2012) observes, the 12th FYP highlights the importance of inter-organisational collaboration, especially among institutions working on women's issues, to foster a society committed to gender equality. However, the Plan lacks a clear roadmap for enabling such collaboration across government departments and stakeholders.

In conclusion, evaluating the 12th FYP's inclusion of women reveals both progress and persistent gaps. The Plan acknowledges women as key contributors to national development, but inconsistencies in implementation strategies and ambiguous attitudes toward gender equality point to the need for more robust, gender-responsive policy frameworks. Tackling structural discrimination and strengthening women's agency is crucial for achieving substantive equality. The emphasis on women's roles in the 12th Plan signals India's intent to align with global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and strive for a truly inclusive and sustainable future that benefits all citizens.

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