



Cover Page



STATUS OF INDIA'S FEMALE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT AND ITS RELATED TARGET FOR VIKSHIT BHARAT: WHEN CAN INDIA BE SELF-RELIANT?

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Abstract: All eyes are on the Vikshit Bharat and Swablambi Bharat programmes which is in the main stream of Indian government's economy policies. These two policies carry a huge number of target and similarly on the other hand it too faces internal changes to achieve them.

Objective: This paper targets to compare both targets, policies, status and challenges regarding the women empowerment focused on Vikshit Bharat and by elaborating challenges it questions the success of Swablambi Bharat.

Methodology: The paper uses simple descriptive statistics and made self-analysis on the given data. The paper extracts data from different government websites related to its objectives and in a systematic manner it presents all the status and challenges faced while implementing the policies. The paper will focus on giving the population data with gender gap analysis, the SDG goals and where India lies in comparison to other countries, female labour participation with their education status.

Result: The paper ends with the conclusion that the poor status of female labour force participation in comparison to men, and their enrollment in higher education, poor GDI index. These clearly defines how India needs to focus to speed up the process to achieve the targets of SDGs, Vikshit Bharat and to become Self-reliant.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Vikshit Bharat, GDI, Swabalambi Bharat, FLFPR, GER.

JEL Code: J16,J24,O15,I25

Introduction: India is a fastest growing country with \$3.94 trillion GDP and world's fifth largest economy by market exchange rate and third largest economy by purchasing power parity in 2024 with 5.8 percent of GDP growth rate. With around 1.47 billion (147 crore) size of population in 2026, (MOSPI), it surpassed China and became the highest populated country in the world and is in eye catching position where it is targeted and praised too by other countries, dealing with all the pros and cons. (census,2011). Being the super-fast-growing economy it is too challenged with the internal problems. India has a robust vibrant youth population of around 65percent among 15-64 age group. Total male population consists of 62.33 Cr and female population of 58.76 Cr. (Census, 2011). When we look closer, we can find that the youth population of India is facing challenges regarding job opportunity. Data shows that 79.05 of male population are in LFPR where 27.58 of female population are under FLFPR. There is lack of quality education and this diverts them towards the over dependence on soft technologies and mislead them. On the other side there is also a challenge of geographical dualism- "Myrdal's famous theory", in India, where one area is developed with rich infrastructure, town planning and basic amenities, the other areas are under developed where there is lack of basic needs. This is not the only dualistic nature it also deals with diversified social and cultural activities and regional inequalities with unstable economic and political conditions. However, among all the diversified nature, India still stood at a remarkable position, with highly growing economy rising ahead. If this truly stands, then on the cost of whom? It is on the basis of risk regarding education, the only factor that can combine all the spheres of



Cover Page



development and India is still performing poor in it. Among all the nations India scores less in the indexes like GDI with 0.874 (HDR, 2025), GGI with 131 out of 148 countries (WEF, 2025), with 0.069 of MPI value it ranks 111 out of 125 countries (HDR, 2023) etc. where education is one of the important dimensions to measure the development. Education is the one and only thing that can push the economy towards development what we call as Vikas and here, India is targeting for Viksit Bharat by 2047. But the sad reality comes in the figure of GDP expenditures which is very low for the development of education. Lao Tzu a Chinese Philosopher has rightly said that “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a life time”. This famous saying directly reflects the importance of Education in present society and it acts as a game changer for the society.

As we all know Vikshit Bharat is an initiative launched by Indian government on 2023 with the goal to transform India to a developed nation by 2047 and to push this forward on 2024 Indian Government again launches one more campaign i.e. Swabalambi Bharat with the prime objective of promoting swadeshi products, fostering entrepreneurship and generating employment to make India Self-Reliant by making it Poverty free and Unemployment free. In comparison to this India signed the Earth Summit on 2015 to make the country sustainable developed in all the 17 goals.

From all among the 17 goals the fifth Important goal is Gender Equality which is one of the targets of both Swablambi Bharat as well as Vikshit Bharat and the Key to achieve this is the fourth goal of the SDGs i.e. Quality Education. It is nothing wrong to say that right and quality education is the key to success of each and all goals and targets that can be social economical or political. But still so many regions in India are facing challenges in getting basic education services. Viksit Bharat@2047 is the government’s vision to transform the country into a self-reliant and prosperous economy by 2047 and its 4th pillar is dedicated for women empowerment, but with poor education and FLFPR can India achieve this?

To answer this lets, take the NEP 2020, the report has clearly focused on the skill-based education pattern and prioritizes vocational education. These two targets no doubt will boost the quality of education but the service of education may not distribute equally to all the regions. It must be equally distributed first then only it will end with good result. The current budget again failed to cover this gap. In comparison to other countries India is spending its GDP’s less percentage on education as well as in Research and Development, which is holding it back from making remarkable progress in this sector. Common Objectives of Viksit Bharat and Swablambi Bharat Related to Women is Economic Empowerment & Workforce Participation. The other objectives of Vikshit Bharat that is similar with the goals of SDGs are Education & Skill Development, Safety, Good Health, Security & Legal Empowerment, Leadership & Political Participation and Social Upliftment & Gender Equality

Literature review:

K. Pattabiramaiah et.al, (2023) concluded that Women in India still face issues like feminization of poverty, inadequate investment in social sectors, rising violence against women, and stereotypical representation of women in society. Bhatia et.al, in (2024) explores the critical role of women’s empowerment in achieving this vision. And found that the gender disparities persist as well as deep rooted, particularly in areas such as education, healthcare, and workforce participation. Sharma. A. in (2024) objectifies to present women’s status, on the basis of their social rules on gender considerations, particularly focused on the historical perspective of Gujarat regarding the specific laws and programs against women exploitation in



Cover Page



2 2 7 7 - 7 8 8 1



colonial and post-colonial or after independence and found that there are still so many challenges in socio-economic and political grounds for women. Kumari. P. (2024): focused on the contributions of women educators, activists and leaders who worked to make the society equitable in the field of women’s education in India. Jameel. J. (2025): The study objectifies to analyse the current state of human rights in India and concludes that there is the importance of participatory governance, institutional accountability, and inclusive policy-making in making the society more equitable. Goyal. S. et.al, (2024): This paper intricately focuses on the multifaceted struggle of women and concluded that the societal constraints, familial pressures and gender expectations creates barriers for their growth and rights. Yoganandham. G. (2024) It sets objective to explore the critical role of vocational education, skill development, and entrepreneurship in achieving India’s vision of self-reliance under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative by emphasizing the importance of equipping the workforce, especially youth and women, with relevant skills. This research employs a descriptive and diagnostic approach, relying on secondary data and statistical tools to explore the key dynamics of the topic. Ahmed. A. (2024) Empowering Indian women must be the first priority to achieve the goal of Vikshit Bharat as well as the goal of SDGs and the article studied the problems, obstacles, needs, and rights of women in India and suggested the strategies to support for their empowerment.

Objectives:

The objective of the paper is to compare both targets, policies, status and challenges regarding the women empowerment focused on Vikshit Bharat and by elaborating challenges that questions the success of Swablambi Bharat.

Methodology:

The research design is of a descriptive + diagnostic type that extracts the published data from government reports and used simple tools to analyse it. The paper includes the (i) population data, (ii) enrolment of girls in higher education, (iii) labour force participation rate of both male and female population, (iv) Government’s Budget expenditure on education, (v) gender budget, (vi) UNDP reports on GDI. The main sources of these reports are MOSPI of Government of India, Press Information Bureau, Sustainable development reports, Union Budget, Outlook and many other sources.

Result and Analysis:

Status of India’s Population and Labour Force Participation Rate:

India’s population growth is an alarming situation as the rate of growth is too speed and spontaneous. Below there is the data of population growth with the gender gap from where one can clearly understand the trend.

Table: 1 India’s Gender wise decadal population Growth with male and female LFPR (1901-2021)

	Census Year	Population	Variation	Variation %	Male	Female	Male LFPR	Female LFPR
1	1901	23.84 Cr	—	—	12.08 Cr	11.74 Cr	--	--
2	1911	25.21 Cr	1.37 Cr	5.75%	12.84 Cr	12.37 Cr	--	--



Cover Page



3	1921	25.13 Cr	-7.72 Lac	-0.31%	12.85 Cr	12.28 Cr	--	--
4	1931	27.90 Cr	2.77 Cr	11.00%	14.29 Cr	13.58 Cr	--	--
5	1941	31.87 Cr	3.97 Cr	14.22%	16.37 Cr	15.47 Cr	--	--
6	1951	36.11 Cr	4.24 Cr	13.31%	18.55 Cr	17.56 Cr	--	--
7	1961	43.92 Cr	7.77 Cr	21.51%	22.63 Cr	21.29 Cr	--	--
8	1971	54.82 Cr	10.89 Cr	24.80%	28.40 Cr	26.41 Cr	--	--
9	1981	68.33 Cr	13.52 Cr	24.66%	35.34 Cr	33.00 Cr	--	--
10	1991	84.64 Cr	16.31 Cr	23.87%	43.94 Cr	40.71 Cr	84.35	30.34
11	2001	102.87 Cr	18.23 Cr	21.54%	53.22 Cr	49.65 Cr	83.68	34.48
12	2011	121.09 Cr	18.21 Cr	17.70%	62.33 Cr	58.76 Cr	79.05	27.58
13	2021	-	-	-	-	-	78.65	27.72

Source: (World Bank 1901–2024)

The above table shows the increasing trend of population growth except in 1921 i.e. 25.13cr. with -7.72 lakh variation, in comparison to the previous decade 1911 i.e. 25.21cr., shown the negative growth. After 1971 it caught the speed of double-digit growth. Accordingly, if we see the growth gender wise then it is clearly understood that the growth in male population is fast and more than the female population growth. Though there is growth in female population but their participation in labour force is not that impressive in comparison to male labour force participation.

Table:2 MALE AND FEMALE LFPR RATIO

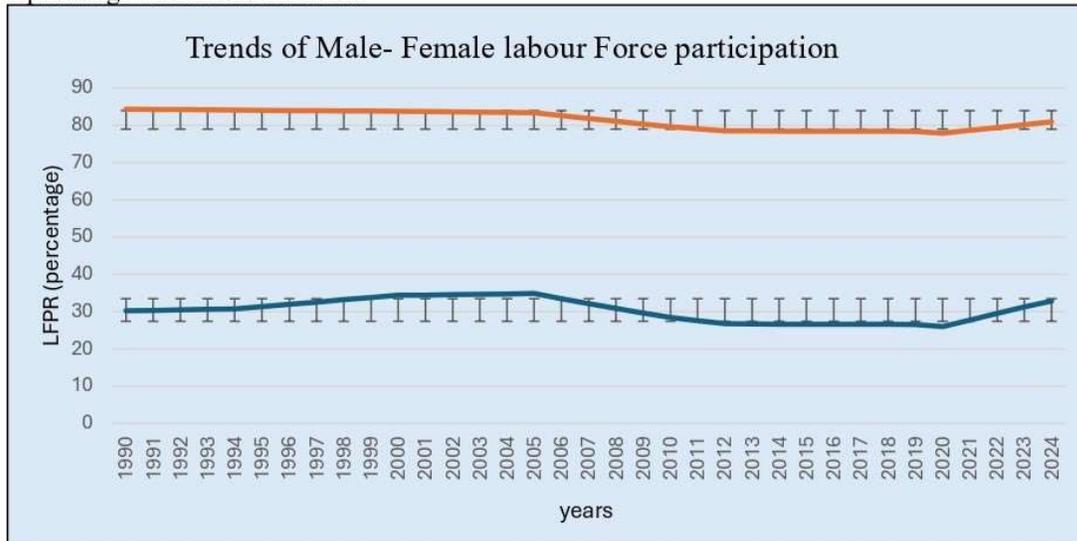
Year	Male LFPR (%)	Female LFPR (%)	Gender Gap	Year	Male LFPR (%)	Female LFPR (%)	Gender Gap
1991	84.29	30.34	53.95	2008	81.07	30.89	50.18
1992	84.23	30.46	53.77	2009	80.33	29.64	50.69
1993	84.18	30.59	53.59	2010	79.61	28.42	51.19
1994	84.12	30.74	53.38	2011	79.05	27.58	51.47
1995	84.06	31.33	52.73	2012	78.51	26.76	51.75
1996	84	31.93	52.07	2013	78.47	26.68	51.79
1997	83.94	32.54	51.40	2014	78.44	26.62	51.82
1998	83.87	33.16	50.71	2015	78.42	26.6	51.82



1999	83.81	33.77	50.04	2016	78.41	26.59	51.82
2000	83.74	34.4	49.34	2017	78.4	26.59	51.81
2001	83.68	34.48	49.20	2018	78.39	26.58	51.81
2002	83.61	34.57	49.04	2019	78.37	26.55	51.82
2003	83.54	34.66	48.88	2020	77.9	26	51.90
2004	83.47	34.75	48.72	2021	78.65	27.72	50.93
2005	83.39	34.85	48.54	2022	79.4	29.48	49.92
2006	82.6	33.5	49.10	2023	80.15	31.24	48.91
2007	81.83	32.18	49.65	2024	80.9	32.8	48.10

Source: (World Bank 1990–2024)

The above table shows the trend of Male-Female labour force participation and their gap between them. The table is important to notice the movement of both male and female labour force to exactly identify the problem of gender inequality and their solution regarding job market with equal wage-income distribution.



Source: (World Bank 1990–2024)

The above chart clearly presents the labour force participation among male and female. The red line represents the Male LFPR where the blue line below represents the Female LFPR. There is decline in female labour force participation from the year 2005 to 2012 and after that decline it continued at the same rate up to 2020. But after 2020 it caught the speed and growing at high rate with faster than male labour force participation. If we compare both the trend then in comparison to female male percentage stood high but from the year 1997 female LFPR increased while in the other hand male LFPR slightly decreased it continued up to 2005 and both shows the decreasing trend but again the Female LFPR dressed very speedily than the Male LFPR. In the end both have increased with the same nature as before that female LFPR is growing more higher than the male LFPR.

Table:3 Labour Force Participation (male & female) and Unemployment Rate of age above 15 in both Rural and Urban Area in (June-September) 2025

Sl. No.	Dimension	Overall		Trend	Rural		Urban	
		June	Sept.		June	Sept.	June	Sept
1	LFPR	54.02%	55.30%	Increased	56.9%	57.4%	50.4%	50.9%
2	FLFPR	32.0%	34.10%	Increased	35.2%	37.9%	-	-



3	FWPR	30.20%	32.30%	Increased	33.6	36.3	-	-
Unemployment rate								
4	Dimension	Overall		Trend	Rural		Urban	
5		August	Sept.		August	Sept.	August	Sept.
6	Unemployment rate	5.1%	5.2%	Increased	-	-	-	-
7	UR (Male)	-	-	-	4.5%	4.7%	5.9%	6.0%
8	UR (Female)	-	-	Increased	5.2%	5.5%	8.9%	9.3%

Source: PIB, MOSPI, GOI (2025)

The above table depicts the LFPR and WPR of female population where in rural areas it has positive growth rather in urban areas. In case of unemployment rate the female unemployment, rate is higher than the male unemployment rate and that to it is greater in the urban areas than the rural areas. it can be concluded that in the rural areas there female population is more work oriented and mostly in the informal works like mostly daily wage labour activities that can be more in agricultural work.

Status of Higher Education and the Female Enrolment Ratios

In employment, education plays an important role from behind. With higher education and skill there is high chances of getting shifted from labour force to work force with more decent work.

Table: 4 Enrolment in Higher education (2014-15 to 2021-22)

Indicators	2014-15	2020-21	2021-22	% Increase (2014-15 to 2021-22)
Total Enrolment (Crore)	3.42	4.14	4.33	26.5%
Female Enrolment (Crore)	1.57	2.01	2.07	32%
Minority Enrolment (Lakh)	21.8	-	30.1	38%
Minority Female (Lakh)	10.7	-	15.2	42.3%
Overall, GER	23.7	-	28.4	-
Female GER	22.9	-	28.5	-
Gender Parity Index (GPI)	-	-	1.01	-

Source: PIB, MOSPI, GOI

If we see there is 26 percent of growth seems in total enrolment out of which enrolment of female population stood highest especially within the minority females in 2021-22 with 15.2 and total growth records 42.3 percentage.

Table:5 Higher Education Enrolment, GER Trends and NEP Reform Progress (2019–20 to 2022–23)

Indicator	2019–20	2021–22	2022–23 (Provisional)	Remarks / Target
Total Enrolment (Crore)	—	4.33	4.46	Increase of 0.13 crore from 2021–22
Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)	27.1	28.4	29.5	Continuous improvement
NEP GER Target	—			50% by 2035

Source: Economic survey 2026-27



Cover Page



The NEP 2020 has targeted to make 50% of gross enrolment in higher education by 2035 where the status of gross enrolment now is 29.5 in 2022-23 in comparison to 2019-20 when NEP 2020 was made. If we see the growth rate between 2019-20 and 2021-22 also in 2022-23 it is increasing at very slow rate i.e. 1.04, 1.03 and expected to increase in that pace, if no proper policy or government enforcement is made.

Table:6 India’s Gender Budget – Year-Wise Allocations (Union Budget)

Financial Year	Approximately Gender Budget Allocation
2005-06	~₹24,241 crore
2014-15	~₹98,000 crore
2020-21	~₹1.43 lakh crore
2023-24	~₹2.23 / ₹2.38 lakh crore
2024-25	₹3.27 lakh crore (BE)
2025-26	₹4.49 lakh crore
2026-27	₹5.01 lakh crore

Source: PIB

In comparison with the Gross Enrollment Ratio in higher education and the Female Labour Force Participation Rate, the amount of budget allocation for women and child development is very low. Though it shows the increased expenditure since 2005-06, still the rate of growth is not outstanding.

Challenges before India to achieve the goals and targets of Vikshit Bharat and Swablambi Bharat:

- In first case the female population growth is no doubt increasing but in comparison to male it is very slow.
- Secondly, the Labour Force participation rate in comparison to male is increasing at a high speed but the rate of growth in comparison to their previous growth low.
- Thirdly, if we categorize between rural and urban population, we can conclude that in rural areas the Female Labour Force participation is more than in the urban population.
- Fourthly, it is the Unemployment rate. The shocking thing is that in urban areas the unemployment rate of female population is so high than in the rural areas.
- From the above two points we can conclude that the rise in Female Labour Force participation and Work Force Participation in rural areas can represents the high number of females participating for jobs in informal sector. And the next part the unemployment rate depicts, as the unemployment rate is high in the Urban areas in comparison to the rural areas, it clearly defines the poor performance of female population in Urban areas.
- No doubt there is positive trends in female education in higher education with high Gender Parity but it is happening in such a slow manner that the target of NEP 2020 seems so far to achieve by 2030.



Cover Page



- The next important point is the public expenditure for women and child development. The amount allocated for the ministry of women and child development is too low and it need to be allocated more fund for their development and most importantly need to be in qualitative and inclusive manner.
- To focus on 5th goal of SDG the point has been improved from 36 in 2018 to 49 in 2023-24 but still it remained lowest scoring goal among others.
- These clearly defines how India needs to focus to speed up the process to achieve the targets of SDGs, Vikshit Bharat and to become Self-reliant.

Recommendation:

- Government shall focus on awareness programme regarding the female child and boost their policy concerns.
- Need more focus regarding new employment opportunity for female labour force.
- In rural areas it is the strength that more females are in labour force as well as in work force but there must be formal job opportunities for the rural women instead of informal sector jobs and this will happen with the infrastructural development regarding both economic as well as social.
- In urban areas various other spheres shall be given with the security in working environment that will boost both the work force population and labour force population.
- With urbanization government need to focus on the enrollment of girls in higher education and also protect their rights in their participation in different job opportunities that will decrease the unemployment rate in urban areas.
- The first most important thing is to focus on the rural areas with proper and quality infrastructure facility regarding education.
- Need to create awareness regarding the job opportunities among female students at higher education.
- Awareness is needed regarding the social and economic freedom and power of women in decision making in home and in society.
- Government shall work on the formal job openings and special training for females both in urban and rural areas to boost the LFPR and reduce the gap.

Conclusion:

Out of the major goals of Vikshit Bharat the goal to enhance equality by reducing the gap of regional and gender equality is challengeable. The paper ends with the conclusion that with the poor status of female labour force participation and their enrollment in higher education, India can hardly achieve its target for Vikshit Bharat and Swablambi Bharat. The gap is so large that the contribution of female workforce population to GDP is very small. The GDI clearly shows the true picture of female development with respect to male development. Closer the GDI to the value 1 more the gap between the male and female in case of education health and standard of living or per-capita income and in India the vale is 0.852 closer to 1. This clearly shows the India with the vale falls in group 5 of the GDI scale that throws light on the substantial gender gap in human development attainments.



Cover Page



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Cover Page



2 2 7 7 - 7 8 8 1



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