



## Women Empowerment in India with Special Reference to West Bengal and Murshidabad District

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### Abstract:

*Women empowerment is essential for achieving social justice, economic growth, and sustainable development. In India, despite constitutional guarantees and policy interventions, women continue to face challenges related to education, economic participation, health, and decision-making. This paper examines the status and determinants of women empowerment in India, with special reference to West Bengal and Murshidabad district. It analyzes empowerment indicators such as literacy, employment, social participation, and the impact of government initiatives including Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Kanyashree Prakalpa. The study is based on secondary data from government reports, research studies, and policy documents. The findings reveal that education, financial inclusion, and social awareness significantly enhance empowerment, while poverty, gender inequality, and early marriage hinder progress. Murshidabad shows improvements due to SHGs and education programs, but challenges remain. The paper suggests strengthening education, skill development, and gender-sensitive policies to ensure inclusive empowerment.*

**Keywords:** *Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, Education, SHGs, West Bengal, Murshidabad.*

### 1. Introduction:

Women empowerment refers to the process of enhancing women's capacity to make decisions, control resources, and participate actively in social, economic, and political life. It involves improving women's autonomy, self-confidence, and access to opportunities. Empowerment is essential for gender equality and sustainable development.

India has made significant progress in promoting women empowerment through constitutional provisions, education, employment opportunities, and welfare schemes. However, gender inequality remains a major challenge. Women often face discrimination in education, employment, health, and decision-making.

West Bengal, a culturally rich and diverse state, has implemented several programs to empower women. Despite these efforts, disparities exist in literacy, employment, and health, especially in rural districts such as Murshidabad. This paper examines the status of women empowerment in India, focusing on West Bengal and Murshidabad district.

## **2. Concept and Dimensions of Women Empowerment:**

Women empowerment is a multidimensional concept involving social, economic, educational, political, and psychological aspects.

### **2.1 Educational Empowerment:**

Education plays a crucial role in empowering women. It enhances knowledge, skills, and awareness, enabling women to participate actively in society. Educated women are more likely to secure employment, make informed decisions, and contribute to family and community development.

### **2.2 Economic Empowerment:**

Economic empowerment refers to women's access to income, employment, and financial resources. Employment increases independence and improves women's social status.

### **2.3 Social Empowerment:**

Social empowerment involves freedom from discrimination, access to health services, and participation in community activities.

### **2.4 Political Empowerment:**

Political empowerment includes women's participation in governance, decision-making, and leadership roles.

## **3. Status of Women Empowerment in India:**

India has implemented several policies and programs to promote women empowerment. However, challenges remain.

Women in India face barriers in education, employment, and economic participation. Only about one-third of women have completed secondary education or higher, which limits their employment opportunities.

State-wise analysis shows significant variations in empowerment levels. West Bengal ranks relatively low in the Women Empowerment Index compared to states such as Goa and Himachal Pradesh.

Despite these challenges, government programs such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Skill India, and Self-Help Groups have improved women's access to education and employment.

## **4. Women Empowerment in West Bengal:**

West Bengal has implemented several initiatives to promote women empowerment, including education schemes, Self-Help Groups, and skill development programs.

### **4.1 Educational Empowerment:**

The female literacy rate in West Bengal is approximately 70.54%, showing significant improvement but still lower than male literacy.

Education enhances women's social awareness and employment opportunities.

### **4.2 Role of Self-Help Groups:**

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) play a major role in empowering women economically and socially. SHGs provide financial support, skill development, and income opportunities. Their objectives include poverty reduction, financial empowerment, and social awareness.

West Bengal has over 3.68 lakh women SHGs, benefiting millions of women economically and socially.

Programs such as Anandadhara have mobilized women into SHGs, promoting income generation and self-employment.

#### **4.3 Government Initiatives: Kanyashree Prakalpa**

Kanyashree Prakalpa is a major initiative to empower adolescent girls through education and financial support. The program promotes education, delays early marriage, and enhances financial literacy.

The scheme has received national and international recognition for improving girls' education and empowerment.

### **5. Women Empowerment in Murshidabad District:**

Murshidabad is one of the economically and socially backward districts of West Bengal. Women empowerment in this district is influenced by education, employment, health, and social factors.

#### **5.1 Educational Status:**

Female literacy in Murshidabad is approximately 63.09%, which is lower than the state average.

Only about 22% of women in Murshidabad have completed ten or more years of education.

Low literacy limits employment opportunities and social participation.

#### **5.2 Economic Empowerment through SHGs**

Murshidabad has over 94,822 Self-Help Groups, indicating significant participation of women in economic activities.

SHGs provide income opportunities, financial independence, and social empowerment.

Government initiatives such as marketing hubs and skill development programs have enhanced employment opportunities for women in Murshidabad.

#### **5.3 Health and Social Challenges:**

Women in Murshidabad face health challenges such as anemia and early marriage, which affect empowerment and well-being.

Early marriage reduces educational attainment and employment opportunities.

### **6. Factors Affecting Women Empowerment:**

#### **6.1 Education:**

Education is the most important factor influencing empowerment. It enhances knowledge, skills, and decision-making ability.

#### **6.2 Economic Opportunities:**

Employment and financial independence improve women's social status and empowerment.

#### **6.3 Social and Cultural Factors:**

Traditional gender roles and social norms limit women's freedom and opportunities.

## **6.4 Government Policies:**

Government programs such as SHGs, education schemes, and financial assistance promote empowerment.

## **7. Impact of Women Empowerment:**

Women empowerment has positive impacts on individuals, families, and society.

### **7.1 Economic Development:**

Empowered women contribute to economic growth through employment and entrepreneurship.

### **7.2 Social Development:**

Empowered women promote education, health, and social progress.

### **7.3 Family Welfare:**

Empowered women improve family health, education, and living standards.

## **8. Challenges to Women Empowerment:**

Despite progress, several challenges remain:

- Gender discrimination
- Low literacy levels
- Poverty and unemployment
- Early marriageLack of awareness

These challenges limit women's empowerment.

## **9. Suggestions for Improving Women Empowerment:**

The following measures can improve women empowerment:

- Promote female education
- Provide skill development programsStrengthen Self-Help Groups
- Increase employment opportunities
- Improve health services
- Promote gender equality awareness
- Strengthen government policies

## **Conclusion:**

Women empowerment is essential for achieving social justice and sustainable development. India has made significant progress through education, economic programs, and government initiatives. West Bengal has implemented successful programs such as Self-Help Groups and Kanyashree Prakalpa.

Murshidabad district has shown improvement in women empowerment through SHGs and education programs. However, challenges such as low literacy, poverty, and early marriage remain. Education,

financial inclusion, and social awareness are key factors in empowering women. Strengthening government programs, promoting education, and improving employment opportunities can enhance women empowerment in India, West Bengal, and Murshidabad district. Women empowerment is not only a social necessity but also a fundamental requirement for national development.

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