

# Women Empowerment in Uttar Pradesh: Sn Overview in Reference to India

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## Abstract

Gender equality and women empowerment have been on the top of the agenda globally. Various efforts and initiatives have been taken at global, regional and local level to eliminate gender inequality. Many schemes have been launched by central and state governments to emancipation of women. Women empowerment means women gaining more power and control over their own lives. This paper is an attempt to examine the status of women in Uttar Pradesh and the state as they recognized as an empowered women in reference to India. The study is descriptive in nature and based on secondary data, all the data collected from official report, records, articles and published and unpublished materials, whenever relevant. We examine some indicators as; educational empowerment explore with women literacy rate and female gross enrollment in higher education, economic indicator as working women ratio and for political empowerment we explore women voters turnout and participation in Lok-Sabh and State Assembly, for social condition we explore crime against women and women empowerment in decision making. For health condition; mortality rate indicators and consumption of iron folic acid we explore. We find that the consequences of the gender discrimination are server. The low workforce participation rate of women in Uttar Pradesh is a significant indicator of the socio-economic challenges faced by women and girls in the state. The sex ratio indicates a significant gender imbalance, which can be attributed to various factors, including sex-selective practices and societal preferences for male children. The suggestive framework emphasizes the multi-faceted approach needed to empower women by both governmental action and grassroots movements. Increasing awareness among women about their rights can significantly contribute to their empowerment and effective participation in various spheres of life. Efforts should focus on education, community engagement and supportive policies to ensure sustained progress towards gender equality.

**Key words:** women empowerment, gender inequality, awareness, socioeconomic,

## 1. Introduction

Gender equality and women empowerment have been on the top of the agenda globally. Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls has been mentioned by the United Nations in its sustainable Development Goals as a target. Various efforts and initiatives have been taken at global, regional and local level to eliminate gender inequality. Many schemes have been launched by central and state governments to emancipation of women. However the patriarchal mindset still exists and gender biasness is still experienced by women both in public and private space. Due to economic empowerment women participate, contribute and benefit from development process which recognize their contribution, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fair distribution of the benefits

of development. Economic empowered women contribute to the well being of their families and their husband and are in the position to raise income through entrepreneurship. An increase in income utilize towards improving the family wellbeing. As a consequence of economic empowerment women increase confidence and are be in a position to rises their voices, and be able to contribute in social and political matters that affect their daily life.

## 2. Theoretical Background

The major defining terms of empowerment are challenges to inequality and oppression, exercising options and choices, participation, control over lives etc.,(Batliwala,1994;Rowlands,1996;Sen g.,1997; Oxaal & Badan,1997; Kabeer,1999;Lindberg, Athreya, Vidyasagar, Djurfekdt & Rajgopal,2011). Although theorists put forward various theories on empowerment, most of them agreed that empowerment is the process of exercising power by those who were denied to do so. It is the process through which people can exercise strategic life choice that include the choice of livelihood, mobility, decision making etc. People exercise these choices based on certain resources, including conventional economic resources, social, human and natural resources (Kabeer1999). Therefore, empowerment is a process that expands the “capability of people that enable them to make decisions or make choices with far-reaching consequences which was earlier denied to them” (Kumar & Sreedhar, 2006, p.147). Women empowerment is the product of post-1975 women’s movement(Banerjee,1994; Sen A.,2000/2012), yet theorists has not agreed on one straight forward definition of women empowerment and its various dimensions(Batliwala,1993;1994;Suijders,2009; Das S K,2011).Women empowerment defined as a change in the context of a women’s life, which enables her increased capacity for leading a fulfilling human life. It gets reflected both in external qualities (viz. health, mobility, education and awareness, status in the family, participation in decision making and also at the material security) and internal qualities (viz. self awareness and self confidence) [Mathew (2003)]. The term women empowerment is highly contextual to the society which makes difficult for the theorists to come into consensus (Suijders, 2009). Gender equality and women empowerment have been on the top of the agenda globally. Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls has been mentioned by the United Nations in its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-5) as a target. Amartya Sen had argued that if we wish to measure women’s empowerment, we should examine four sets of indicators: their educational level; their ability to earn independently; whether they work outside the home (not merely an unpaid labour); and their ownership of assets. However they agreed to one thing that women empowerment is a process that focuses on structural changes in patriarchal structure (Batliwala,1994; Beck & Steclner,1997; Kabeer,1999) through “increased control over their own lives, bodies and environment”( Gupta & Kishor,2004p.695) among the women. Economic progress can result from the employment of women, and this can go both ways. When women are empowered they have access to other components of development such as health and education, as well as equitable employment possibilities and political engagement (Duflo 2011).Empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors is essential to shape up resilient economies as it betters the sustainability, and improves the quality of life. However, empowerment is multifaceted, multi dimensional and multilayered conception, which requires women to undertake greater share of control over resources like- money. Women with the access to money providing them with the control over the decision at home, community, society and nation, and encourage them to participate in the growth process. This will subsequently improvise women’s control over economic resources and strengthening women’s economic security. Besides being a very populous

state, Uttar Pradesh also has some of the poorest development indicators, especially with regard to the status of women and girls.

### 3. Objectives and Methodology of the Study

Women empowerment means women gaining more power and control over their own lives. The empowerment of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important and in itself. (Latha b.r., 2022 April). This paper is an attempt to examine the status of women in Uttar Pradesh and the state as they recognized as an empowered women in reference to India.

Five types of indicators (Bansal, 2017) are selected to explore the study. The study is descriptive in nature and based on secondary data, all the data collected from official report, records, articles and published and unpublished materials, whenever relevant. We examine some indicators as; educational empowerment explore with women literacy rate and female gross enrolment in higher education, economic indicator as working women ratio and for political empowerment we explore women voters turnout for general election (2014-2024) and participation in 18<sup>th</sup> Lok-Sabh and State Assembly (2012 - 2024). To understand social condition we focus on crime against women and women empowerment in household decision making. For knowing health condition of the women we focus on mortality rate indicators and consumption of iron folic acid for 180 days in a year.

#### Data Exploration

India continues to fair poorly internationally, when it comes to women’s rights, with the global gender equality index ranking the country 95<sup>th</sup> out of 129 countries, behind countries like Ghana, Rwanda and Bhutan(24 Nov 2023, Hindustan Times). According to the World Bank, out of total Indian population, 48% are females (Trading Economics, 2022). The sex ratio of India increased from 933 females per 1000 males in 2001 to 940 females in 2011 and 945 females in 2021 though reflects the relative neglect of women’s condition and their social subordination. Many Indian women go through life in a state of nutritional stress, have little control over their own fertility and reproductive health, and face violence inside and outside the family.

Besides being a very populous state, Uttar Pradesh also has some of the poorest development indicators, especially with regard to the status of women and girls. The gender gap was the highest for Rajasthan (23.2), followed by Bihar (19.2) and Uttar Pradesh (18.4). In rural areas, the highest gender gap was observed in Rajasthan followed by Uttar Pradesh (20.1).

	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Male	Female	Gender Gap	Male	Female	Gender Gap	Male	Female	Gender Gap
India	81.5	65.0	16.5	92.2	82.8	9.4	84.7	70.3	14.4
Uttar Pradesh	80.5	60.4	20.1	86.8	74.9	11.9	81.8	63.4	18.4

Source: NSS 75th Round, Jul. 2017-Jun. 2018, National Statistical Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation

The literacy rate for person of age 7 years and above has increased from 67% to 73.5% in rural and 84.3 to 87.7% to in urban areas during 2007-8 to 2017-18 for India. According to the National Family Health

Survey-5 (2019-221), the female literacy rate in Uttar Pradesh is increased to 66.1%; however this still lags behind the national (71.5%). The gender gaps explore the need to do more specially the growing state like Uttar Pradesh.

<b>Gender parity index</b>															
	2017-18					2020-21					2021-22				
	Pri mar y	Up per pri ma ry	Seco ndar y	Hig her seco ndar y	Hig her educ atio n	Pri mar y	Up per pri ma ry	seco ndar y	Hig her seco ndar y	Hig her educ atio n	Pri mar y	Up per pri ma ry	seco ndar y	Hig her seco ndar y	Hig her educ atio n
Ind ia	1.0 0	1.0 2	.99	1.01	1.01	1.0 2	1.0 1	.99	1.03	1.05	1.0 3	1.0 0	1.00	1.02	1.01
Utt ar Pra des h	1.0 1	1.0 2	1.02	1.07	1.09	1.0 5	1.0 2	.90	.93	1.09	1.0 4	1.0 2	.92	.92	1.02

Source: UDISE plus, department of school education & all India survey on higher education, ministry of education

Data explore the gender parity index for Uttar Pradesh in reference to India is not as per the state resourcement and requirement so that it can contribute to empower women of high populated state. It is notable that the secondary education enrolment in India was barely 58% in 2010, jumped to 78% by 2015; but has since stagnated. While enrollment in India was good but it was only 66% (68% for boys and 63% for girls) in Uttar Pradesh during 2019-20. The shares of women literacy among all women was 66% in comparison to 82% of men in Utter Pradesh during 2021 according to NFHS5, but those who are working actually falling. The share of women with greater than 10 years of education is from 33% to 39% from 2015-16 to 2019-21, but not converted into trained work force or self employed at all. Raising education has meant the share of regular salaried workers has gone up, since 2012, however the quality of employment in urban Uttar Pradesh not so good, as share of regular worker especially women with no written job contract was 53% in 2011-12 and 55% in 2018-19. With per capita income growth to 0.43% per year over 2017-21, millions of migrants returning to work again in agriculture from their city work after pandemic, the resulting fall in wages is bound to have raised poverty in rural Uttar Pradesh. Only the positive trends we find that dropout rate under secondary education among females has decreased from 20.93% to 15.05 during 2013-14 to 2019-20.

<b>Worker Population Ratio for Persons Aged 15 Years &amp; Above (%) (2019-20)</b>									
	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	female	Person
India	74.4	32.2	53.3	69.9	21.3	45.8	73.0	28.7	50.9
Uttar Pradesh	74.2	18.7	46.4	67.0	12.0	40.9	72.4	17.2	45.1

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS, July 2019- June 2020), National Statistical Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (The figures represent size of workforce as percentage of population)

The workforce decline in Uttar Pradesh is of a far higher magnitude compared to the national level. Uttar Pradesh economy had grown barely by 0.43% per person 2017-18 and 45.1% in 2019-20. From 2012 to 2019, the worker participation rate (share of working age population) fell sharply in Uttar Pradesh from 54% to 46%, specially decline in female is the question of concern though the share of rural females who were self-employed unchanged.

<b>Labour Force Participation Rate (2019-20)</b>									
	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	female	Person
India	56.3	24.7	40.8	57.8	18.5	38.6	56.3	24.7	40.8
Uttar Pradesh	51.9	13.5	33.1	54.9	10.1	33.7	51.9	13.5	33.1

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS, July 2019- June 2020), National Statistical Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (The figures represent size of workforce as percentage of population)

Women’s participation in labour force in Uttar Pradesh is nearly 9%; as per official data 91% of women are out of labour market in 2009-10 but later it gradually improving. Against the national rate of 39.80% in 2022-23; Uttar Pradesh reported 32.10% rate of women labour force participation.

<b>Maternal Mortality Ratio (2004-2020)</b>									
	2004-06	2007-09	2010-12	2011-13	2014-16	2015-17	2016-18	2017-19	2018-20
India	254	212	178	130	130	122	113	103	97
Uttar Pradesh	440	359	292	201	201	216	197	167	167

Source: Sample Registration System, Office of the Registrar General of India

In many households across the state, boys generally enjoy preference over girls in the matter of nutrition, education, health care etc, result mortality rate among females of Uttar Pradesh are higher than the country average. High maternal mortality rates indicate poor maternal health services in the state.

<b>Maternity care indicators (2015-2021)</b>									
	Mothers who had maternal check up in first trimester (%)		Mothers who had at least 4 prenatal care visit		Mother who consumed iron folic acid for 100 days during pregnancy		Mothers who got post natal care within 2 days of delivery		
	NFHS-4	NFHS-	NFHS-4	NFHS-	NFHS-4	NFHS-	NFHS-4	NFHS-	NFHS-

	(2015-16)	5 (2019-21)	(2015-16)	5 (2019-21)	(2015-16)	5 (2019-21)	(2015-16)	5 (2019-21)
India	58.6	70.0	51.2	58.5	30.3	44.1	65.1	81.7
Uttar Pradesh	45.9	62.5	26.4	42.4	12.9	22.3	58.8	79.3

Source: National Family Health Surveys - NFHS-5, Factsheets (2019-21), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

In many households across the country, boys generally enjoy preference over girls in the matter of nutrition, education, health care etc. this situation is more prevalent in the northern states like Uttar Pradesh; as a result, mortality and morbidity rates among females are higher and forms of protein calories malnutrition are more prevalent in girls than in boys.

<b>Anemia among Women and Children (2019-20)</b>						
	Non-pregnant women aged 15-49 years who are anemic (<12.0 g/dl) (%)		Pregnant women aged 15-49 years who are anemic (<11.0 g/dl) (%)		All women aged 15-49 years who are anemic (%)	
	NFHS-4 (2015-16)	NFHS-5 (2019-21)	NFHS-4 (2015-16)	NFHS-5 (2019-21)	NFHS-4 (2015-16)	NFHS-5 (2019-21)
India	53.2	57.2	50.4	52.2	53.1	57.0
Uttar Pradesh	52.5	50.6	51.0	45.9	52.4	50.4

Source: National Family Health Surveys - NFHS-5, Factsheets (2019-21), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

Anemia among women (in the age-group 15-49 years) has increased from 53.1% in 2015-16 to 57% in 2019-21. In all states of India, anemia prevalence has been found to be lower in pregnant women than non-pregnant women. The girl who is under nourished in her preadolescent age is likely to give birth to a undernourished child.

<b>Percentage of women aged 20-24 years married before age 18 years</b>		
	2015-16	2019-20
India	26.8	23.3
Uttar Pradesh	21.1	15.8

Source: NFHS 5, 2019-21, Factsheets of States, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

The percentage of ever –married women who have experienced spousal physical or sexual violence is higher in Uttar Pradesh (42%) than entire country (37%). In the state, more than three-fifths of women (64%) who have only daughters have a desire for more children, compared to one-fourth of the women who already have 2 sons. A high proportion of girls continue to get married before the legal age of

18(18<sup>th</sup> National Family and Health Survey round 2-3). Where 68% of women age 20-24 had married before 18 and a third had married before 15 years of age. Only one-third of girls' ages 15-17 are in school and almost 72% of girls discontinue their schooling in rural areas. Women's rate of participation in Uttar Pradesh workforce is very low (17%) and varies across the districts. These development indicators reflect the low status of women and girls in the state.

Rate (per Lakh Women) of Incidence of Various Crimes Committed against Women(2019-20)												
	Rates of Crimes							Incidence of Crimes		Total Crime against women in the State as a % of All India total Crime against Women	Crime against women to Total Crime within State (%)	
	Rape	Kidnaping & Abduction of Women	Dowry deaths	Cruelty by husband & his Relatives	Assault on Women with intent to outrage her modesty	Insult to the modesty of Women	Dowry Prohibition Act	Total crimes against women	Total crimes against women			Total cognizable crimes
India	4.3	9.5	1.1	17.0	13.0	1.1	1.6	56.5	371503	6601285	100.00	5.63
Uttar Pradesh	2.5	8.3	2.1	13.2	9.0	0.0	2.8	45.1	49385	657925	13.29	7.51

Source: Crime in India, National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs

NCRB statistics show that domestic violence, sexual violence, kidnapping and abduction are the highest contributors to crime against women (Association for advocacy and legal initiatives 24N0v2023). Uttar Pradesh rank first in gender-based violence in the country. During 2020, the highest share of women crime against the total women crime was observed in the states of Uttar Pradesh(13.29%) followed by West Bengal(9.81%), Rajasthan(9.3%), Maharashtra(8.6%) and Assam (7.09%).

<b>Women’s Participation in Decision Making (2015-17)</b>				
	India		Uttar Pradesh	
	Women participation	Women participation (%)	Uttar Pradesh	Uttar Pradesh (%)
Representation of Women in the Central/state Council of Ministers (2017)	9(6+3)	12		
Women Judges in Supreme Court/High Courts (2017)	75(1+74)	6.88	6	6
Women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) (2016-17)	1345990	46	297235	41
Data compiled on the bases of periodic survey ,ministry of home affairs				

Representation of women in central and states varied and governed by political advocacy for women empowerment. In Judicial system also, the women participation as judges is very marginal in 2017, only 1 (out of 25) women judge is there in Supreme Court 3(out of 29) in 2022. In all the High Courts of the country, only 11% (74 females against 613 males) judges are females in 2017 while in 2022 it increase by 14%. In 2016, at all India level 46% of the elected representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions were women. As per data of Periodic Labour Force Survey, among the officials working at managerial positions in India, 18.8% were women in 2020 and 18.1% in 2021

<b>Women’s Participation in Household Decision Making (2015-16)</b>				
	Currently married women who usually participate in household decisions (%)	Women of age 15-49 who are allowed to go alone to three places (market, health facility, and outside the community) (%)	A bank or savings account that they themselves use (%)	
India	36.7	36.8	16.2	
Uttar Pradesh	33.7	23.4	13.2	
Reference: Bharti shukla –The status and role of women in Uttar Pradesh,IJRCS Nov-2017,vol-1 issue-9				

The percentage of currently married women who usually participate in household in decisions is less in Uttar Pradesh than the national average. However, the women who are allowed to go alone to three places (market, health facility and outside the community) is less and they need a guardian in most places to take decision. Similarly, the percentage of women having a bank or saving account that they themselves use is less than the national average.



Political presence of women in ( Lok-Sabha) India (2014-2024)												
	2014-18				2019-24				2024-29			
	Voters	Vote r%	Electe d in Lok Sbha	Electe d in Lok Sabha (%)	Voter s	Vote r%	Electe d in Lok Sabha	Electe d in Lok Sabha (%)	Vot ers	Vote r%	Electe d in Lok Sabha	Electe d in Lok Sabha (%)
India	200565022	65.63	64	11.76		67.01	78	14		66.07	74	13.6
Uttar pradesh	36114683	57.42	13	2.39	3994059	64.39	11	2.02		59.53	7	1.28
Political presence of women in (State Legislative assembly Uttar Pradesh (2012-2022)												
	2012-17				2017-22				2022-27			
	Voters	Vote r%	Electe d in L- assem bly	Eelect ed in L- assem bly (%)	Voter s	Vote r%	Electe d in L- assem bly	Electe d in L- assem bly (%)	Vot ers	Vote r%	Electe d in L- assem bly	Electe d in L- assem bly (%)
Uttar pradesh		41.92	35	8.68		63.4	42	10.42		62.2	48	11.66
Source: Compiled data on the basis of Election commission and media reports												

The number of women contesting general election has increased from 2.9 % in 1957 to 10% in 2024 (7% in 2009, 8% in2014 and 9% in 2019). Even with more women registering to vote, female voter turnout declined in 2024 compared to 2019, widening the gender gap in political participation indicates the systemic disempowerment of women. Despite the increase in female participation, India still trails behind other nations in gender representation in parliament. India’s global ranking for women representation in lower house of parliament fallen to 143 out of 185 countries, according to the Inter Parliamentary Union’s pervasive database 2023-24.

### 5. Findings

The consequences of the gender discrimination are server. The low workforce participation rate of women in Uttar Pradesh is a significant indicator of the socio-economic challenges faced by women and girls in the state. The sex ratio of 108.635 males for every 100 females indicates a significant gender imbalance, which can be attributed to various factors, including sex-selective practices and societal preferences for male children. Data from NFHS (2021) and other sources paint a complex picture of women education and employment in the state. While there are some positive trends, there are also concerns about the quality of employment and the conversion of education into meaningful work opportunities. The total Indian fertility rate has noticed a declining trend from 2.7 in 2005-06 to 2.1 in

2019-20 (Arora, 2021), but with state fertility rate of 3.1, which exceeds the national average of 2.1, there are implications for maternal and child health. Girls facing under nutrition during their formative years are more likely to birth to undernourished children, perpetuating a cycle of poor health and malnutrition across generations. Uttar Pradesh has consistently ranked first in gender-based violence, accounting for a significant share of total crimes against women in India. Women's participation in public decision making is gradually improving on national level but on house hold level still the picture is not growing especially of Uttar Pradesh. The decline in the number of women MPs from Uttar Pradesh falling from 13 in 2014 to just 7 in 2024; raises concerns about the political engagement of women in one of India's most populous states. With over six crore voters, the underrepresentation of women in parliamentary roles suggest systemic barriers that prevent women from participating fully in the political process. Women in politics often face harassment and character attack designed to undermine their credibility.

## 6. Suggestions

Status of women in any society depends on her recognized rights, duties, liberties and opportunities chiefly in the domestic, economic, social, political and religious spheres (J. Cooper). To improve women's empowerment initiatives in Uttar Pradesh, future studies should:

- Implemented integrated awareness initiatives to educate women about their rights, focusing on those of weaker sections.
- Prioritize women's education as a fundamental step. Accessibility and quality education will empower women and create a foundation for their rights and self-sufficiency.
- Ensure strict enforcement of existing laws and programs protect women's rights and combat societal malpractices and to promote safe environments for women, ensuring they have equal opportunities, fair wages and support in the workplace.
- Encouraging women's active involvement in politics at local, national and global levels. Political parties should advocate for greater participation in decision making roles. Early implementation gender quotas in political parties and legislative bodies to ensure a minimum representation of women.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of recent government programs using rigorous impact assessment methodologies and to explore the role of technology and digital literacy in enhancing women's economic and social empowerment.
- Conduct longitudinal studies to trace changes in women's empowerment over time across generations.

By focusing on these areas, society can make significant strides towards gender quality and uplift the status of women in Uttar Pradesh and other states of India. Further collaborations among governmental bodies, NGOs, and communities are vital for sustainable change.

## 7. Conclusion

It is observed that women are disempowered in two major domains: resources (access and decision making) and leadership (group membership) (Gupta 2017). For increasing productivity and reducing poverty, women's empowerment is recognized as an important tool by policy makers and practitioners (Quisumbing, 2022). The central and state governments have been taking various steps in the form of laws, policies, schemes etc; to improve the status of women,(Uttar Pradesh government launched a

comprehensive campaign- Mission Shakti at all level of education.); but the government initiatives alone would not be sufficient. The framework emphasizes the multi-faceted approach needed to empower women by both governmental action and grassroots movements. There is a need to investigate the inter-sectionalism of gender with other social factors like caste, religion and economic status in shaping empowerment outcomes. Increasing awareness among women about their rights can significantly contribute to their empowerment and effective participation in various spheres of life. Efforts should focus on education, community engagement and supportive policies to ensure sustained progress towards gender equality. To bring empowerment really every woman needs to be aware about her rights from her own end.

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