Women Empowerment in India
(A State Level Analysis)

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1. INTRODUCTION

‘EMPOWERMENT’ may be described as the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you. Empowerment of women means raising women as more aware individuals, who are economically productive and independent and are able to make their own decisions related to education and their own health. The main objective of women empowerment is to ascertain gender equality. Thus, making sure that women workers are provided with equal facilities in terms of their overall welfare and safety at work places.

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian constitution. The constitutions not only grants equality to women, but also give them fundamental rights to not be discriminated on the grounds of sex and get equal protection under the law. Indian constitution allows states to adopt measures in favor of women to improve their socio-economic and health conditions. It also imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce practices which are derogatory to the dignity of women. (Ministry of Women and Child Development)

In India disparities exist between men and women in education, health, employment and income opportunities, and control over assets, personal security and participation in the political process in the country (Varghese 2011). The empowerment of women is one of the solutions to the problems of inequality, subordination and marginalization. India has improved upon some aspects of women empowerment like literacy rate, sex ratio at birth, chronically energy deficient women % MMR. However, various aspects of empowerment of women are yet to be achieved like women are often kept out of decision making or they are dependent on their husband, father or brother for crucial decisions. Hence, in order to change this situation, it is necessary that women have to realize their own nature and understand the value of their own existence. This will lead to confidence in women and improve their participation in decision making. In other words, to solve the problems of the woman, and in order to empower her it is also necessary that the society has to change and give women a chance to rise independently.

Empowering women is one of the most crucial concerns of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. The United Nations and its agencies have set the agenda for the world community to discourage the gender stereotypes and to strengthen the status of women within the family and in the society. At the 2005 world summit, governments of all nations agreed that —progress for women is progress for all. Since then a new era started for the empowerment of women in all the countries. Policies related to women’s rights have a positive impact in the past few decades with the central government launching progressive schemes and to advance women empowerment in economic and social arenas.

Many studies have shown that when women do well, the economy does well (Varghese, 2011) and countries should make participation and involvement of women in all spheres of life. One of the national priorities and goal under SDGs (Goal 5) is to ‘Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; it includes the vision of development of women, upgrading the status of women and facilitating their integration into the social development’.
The government of India has two main bodies to look after the status of women: The Ministry of Women and Child Development and the National Commission for Women, which is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Both bodies work on national and state level legal and social policies to advance and empower women.

Various indicators reflect the level of women empowerment in the country. For example, participation of women in decision making, women access to money and credit, women’s freedom of movement, ownership of assets by women and cash earnings of women etc.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Empowerment of a women is a process that leads women to claim their rights to have access to equal opportunities in economic, cultural, social and political spheres of life and realize their full potential. This progress has to be accompanied by their freedom in decision making both within and outside their home with the ability to influence the direction of social change.

Various attempts have been made in the literature to develop a comprehensive understanding of empowerment through breaking the process down into key components. The framework (Varghese, 2011) suggests that women’s empowerment needs to occur along the following dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, familial/interpersonal, legal, political, and psychological. However, these dimensions are very broad in scope, and within each dimension, there is a range of sub-domains within which women may be empowered. So, for example, “economic” dimension covers a range of sub-domains, like participation of women in decision making, cash earnings and assets own by women. Hence it is important to identify few indicators that can reflect level of empowerment in various dimensions.

Women make enormous contributions to the economy, whether in business, on farms, as entrepreneurs or employees, or by doing unpaid care work at home. A study in Nepal (Acharya and Bennett, 1983), used different dimensions like role in farm management, domestic work, and resource allocation to assess the empowerment of women by taking the independent variables as market labor and unpaid family labor. They came to a conclusion that, bringing women into the market economy positively affects their influence in resource allocation and domestic decision-making.
Towfiq et al., (2007) studied on three dimensions of domestic empowerment of women. (1) Role of economic decision – making power, (2) role of household decision making power and (3) physical freedom of movement in Bangladeshi women. The study constructed a women empowerment index and elucidated the relation of empowerment of women with social aspects like age, age at marriage and age difference between spouses... etc. The study found that urban women are more empowered than rural women and older women have more independence and empowerment than younger women because of their life experiences. The study also found that women in urban region are more aware about women rights their fundamental needs.

As India poises itself to increase economic growth and foster development, it is necessary to ensure that its labor force become fully inclusive of women. (De Souza 1975) studied the struggle of women for better economic status and the structure of employment opportunities for women in rural as well as urban area, he concluded that, in spite of over two decades of planned economic development the structure of employment opportunities for women in rural areas remain relatively unchanged. Nearly 80 per cent of the total female workforce is employed in agriculture but very little attention has been paid in practice by social planners to improve the social situation of these women.

One of the national priorities and goals of the SDGs (Goal no. 1 and 2) is to ‘Achieve ZERO poverty and NO hunger’. Agricultural development is necessary for reducing poverty and food insecurity. Women are already engaged in farming and seeking ways to increase their production and earnings. However, they are often marginalized in business relations and have minimal control over access to factors of production like land, inputs such as seed and fertilizer, credit and technology.

Another study on women empowerment in Bangladesh (Ackerly, 1995), used different dimensions like accounting knowledge, ability to provide information on inputs cost, product field and profitability of the loan funded activity through studying the factors, the loan characteristics and women’s involvement in market activities funded by loans. They found that women gain knowledge and empowerment through market access, but it rarely occurs. A recent FAO study found that if women received the same education and similar inputs and assistance as men, overall farm yields could rise by as much as 22 percent (FAO Women and Population Division, 2007). Hence it is important to bring policy attention towards economic empowerment of women in agriculture.

Micro-credit facility is an important pathway for the empowerment of women in rural areas. It is the extension of very small loans to impoverished borrowers who typically lack collateral, steady employment or a verifiable credit history. A study in Bangladesh by (Hashemi 1996) used different indicators of empowerment like empowerment in household and community spheres by taking the independent variable as microcredit participation and women contribution to household. Finding of the study was that microcredit empowers women by giving them greater economic value to their life. Lending to women has become an important principle in micro-credit. Women continue to make up 75% of all micro credit recipients worldwide. (Beatriz, 2005)

Providing credit to poor women has been accepted as a means of economic development to empower women. It is believed that providing women with the proper resources can help whole family and the entire communities escape poverty. Many evaluations have shown that microfinance services have a positive impact on women.
Pitt and Khandker (1998) found that when women are participants of a credit program, it has a larger effect on the consumption behavior of poor households in Bangladesh. They also found that annual household consumption expenditure increases $0.22 for every additional $1.22 borrowed by women from credit programs, compared with $0.13 for men. In her study, Ackerly (1995) noted that underpinning most credit interventions in Bangladesh was an implicit model of the empowered woman: Empowered, the borrower wisely invests in a successful enterprise, her husband stops beating her, she sends her children to school, she improves the health and nutrition of her family, and she participates in major family decisions.

Mayoux (2001) noted that control of women over income and development of collective social and economic activities. The independent variables were microcredit participation and social capital, i.e., kinship, neighborhood, and market networks. The study found that use of existing forms of social capital to channel microcredit limits benefit to women, especially the poorest one.

As India strives towards equal rights, a change in society towards women’s participation in various spheres of life to reduce gender disparity is required. Manson, (1998), studied on probability samples of urban households in Pakistan, India, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, regarding women empowerment. The dimensions of women empowerment they took are women’s role in household expenditure and decision making. The study have taken independent variables as social context in terms of gender and family systems, women’s land assets, participation in waged work, and wife’s rank relative to husband. They found social context has a direct and indirect effect on women’s economic power.

The Ministry of women and child development (India), has taken a number of initiatives to empower women and to ensure their safety. For example, (1) PMMVY (Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana), which provides cash incentive to pregnant women and lactating mothers. (2) MSK (Mahila Shakti Kendra), to empower rural women. (3) Women Helpline, to provide emergency response to women with a 24×7 service. (4) Swadhar Greh, a scheme that caters to primary needs of women in difficult circumstances and various others.
3. DATA SOURCE AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary data. The data is mainly collected from NFHS-4 report (2015-2016).

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) is a large-scale, multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households throughout India. All National Family Health Surveys have been conducted under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, with the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, serving as the nodal agency. ICF International (USA) provided technical assistance for the surveys.

The fourth National Family Health Survey was conducted in (2015-2016), and it is the first NFHS series that collected data in each of India’s 29 States and all 7 Union Territories. In NFHS-4, women aged 15-49 years and men aged 15-54 years are interviewed.

Women empowerment in India depends upon different indicators, namely Employment Status of Women, Women access to money, credit and freedom of movement, Ownership of assets by women, Participation of women in decision making, Control over cash earnings of women, Knowledge of contraceptive methods, Health insurance coverage, Prevalence of anemia, Food consumption of women and Nutritional status of women under the three dimensions namely Economic, Decision-Making and Health and Nutrition.

Mostly, empowerment is examined with the help of method of ranking of states in these different dimensions. Rankings are assigned from the best to the worst performing states. However, in case of the negative parameters like Prevalence of anemia, Women with chronic energy deficiency (Nutritional Status of Women) and Percentage of not employed women (Employment status of Women) where high values are unfavorable for the society different formula is used to measure it accordingly.

3.1 STANDARDIZATION OF DATA

As all listed parameters are measured in different units, they are not directly additive. Therefore, it is necessary to convert them into standard comparable units, to eradicate any bias of the initial scale. Each data point is standardized according to the equation (1) for positive indicators and equation (2) for negative indicators.

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X_{ij} = \frac{(x_{ij} - \text{x}_{\text{min}})}{(x_{\text{max}} - \text{x}_{\text{min}})} \quad \text{...... (1)}
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X_{ij} = \frac{(x_{ij} - \text{x}_{\text{max}})}{(\text{x}_{\text{min}} - x_{\text{max}})} \quad \text{...... (2)}
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i = 1, 2, 3 \ldots ... 24 \quad \text{(Parameter No.)}
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j = 1, 2, 3 \ldots ... 31 \quad \text{(State/Union Territory No.)}
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\[X_{ij}\] is the original value of the \(i\)th parameter for the \(j\)th state/union territory, \(x_{\text{min}}\) is the minimum value, and \(x_{\text{max}}\) is the maximum value of the \(i\)th parameter for all 31 states/union territories considered in the study.
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The women empowerment in India is examined on the basis of following dimensions.

4.1 ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:

Women’s economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to strengthening women’s rights and enabling women to have control over their lives and exert influence in society. It is just about creating equal and impartial societies. Women often face discrimination and persistent gender inequalities. Women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development, pro-poor growth and the achievement of all the MDGs. Indicators used in this study to govern the economic conditions of women are Employment Status of Women, Women access to money, credit and freedom of movement, Ownership of assets by women. These indicators are characterized by different parameters.

Various indicators used to govern the economic conditions of women are Employment Status of Women, Women access to money, credit and freedom of movement, Ownership of assets by women. These indicators are characterized by different parameters which are given in figure 1.
Figure 1: Representation of various economic empowerment indicators and their parameters used in the study.
4.1.1 **EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF WOMEN**

India is among the developed countries to give women equal franchise and has a highly credible record with regard to the enactment of laws to protect and promote the interests of women, but women continue to be denied the right to work. Though they are considered to be equal partners in progress, yet they remain subjected to repression and exploitation. (Amartya Sen, 1990) advocated that independent earning opportunities reduce the economic dependence of women on men and increase her bargaining power in the family. This bargaining power depends on the nature of work she is employed in. But the income earning activities increase the workload of a woman unless the man accepts an increased share in domestic work.

In India men are traditionally being offered new scopes of learning and training. Consequently, female workers are joining the informal sector or casual labor force more than ever before due to new technological inputs brought by globalization. Moreover, Indian culture hinders women’s access to jobs in stores, factories, and the public sector, the informal sector becomes more hunk dory for women to get employed. The informal sector includes jobs such as domestic servant, small trader, artisan, or field laborer on a family farm. Most of these jobs are unskilled and low paying and do not provide benefits to the worker.

In our study, percentage of women who are between age (15-49) and are not employed in 12 months preceding the survey as a parameter to measure employment status of women in India were considered. Here, higher values of the parameter represent unemployment. Thus, making employment status of women a negative indicator to measure economic empowerment. According to our analysis, Jammu & Kashmir (0), Punjab (4.2), and Bihar (6.6) are the states having lesser scores in employment status of women as compared to other states whereas Manipur (100), Telangana (87.12) and Mizoram (84.73) are among the top scorers.

4.1.2 **OWNERSHIP OF ASSETS BY WOMEN**

Women’s lack of property ownership is important because it contributes to women’s low social status and their vulnerability to poverty. It also increasingly is linked to development-related problems, including hunger, urbanization and domestic violence. Women who do not own property are far less likely to take economic risks and realize their full economic potential.

The international community and policy makers are aware that guaranteeing women’s property and inheritance rights must be a part of any women development agenda. But no single blueprint can address the complex inheritance practices that are cultural- and country specific

In our study percentage of women who are between age (15-49) and who own a house, land alone or jointly and have a mobile phone that they themselves can use were considered. Ownership of assets of women is a positive indicator to measure economic empowerment, as higher values of the parameters signifies the growth in the status of women economically. According to our analysis, Arunachal Pradesh (243.9), Manipur (234.6), Meghalaya (232.8) are performing well on the indicator of ownership of assets by women whereas Chhattisgarh (58.1), West Bengal (68), and Rajasthan (72.7) are the states where ownership of assets by women is comparatively low than other states.
4.1.3 WOMEN ACCESS TO MONEY, CREDIT AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Women access to finance and financial services in general, has in the recent past been cited as the major challenge to the participation of women in economic development. Women in India continue to face challenges in accessing financial products and services. Finance can be used as an oil that lubricates smooth economic growth and therefore any impediments to access this important resource has an adverse impact on the country’s economic growth prospects.

Freedom of movement of women is as important as women’s access to money and credit. In many parts of the world women are unable to move freely. Freedom of movement is not only a human right but also an economic imperative. When countries impose legal restrictions on women’s mobility to move freely and do not provide workplace flexibility for parents with children, women’s economic empowerment is impaired.

Percentage of women age (15-49) who have money, bank or savings accounts that they themselves can use, have taken a loan from micro-credit programme and are allowed to go to their specified places alone are considered in our analysis. High levels of women access to money, credit and freedom of movement are favorable. Union territories like Goa (269.6), Chandigarh (269.0), have high scores in women access to money, credit and freedom of movement as compared to other states like Tamil Nadu (236.2), Sikkim (234.8), whereas states like Bihar (68.2), Nagaland (71.5), Manipur (79.6) are under performers in this indicator.

Graph 1: Economic Empowerment Index
4.2 DECISION–MAKING
The women’s household decision-making refers to women’s involvement alone or jointly with their husbands in making large household purchases, daily household purchases, determining own health care, and visiting family or relatives. Women have the right to participate in decisions that affect their life. The equal participation of women with men at all levels of decision making is then considered as vital for effective action in all aspects of sustainable development. Decision-Making is an important dimension in measuring women empowerment, especially for developing countries. As discussed earlier, women empowerment begins at home. Various indicators which are used to represent the household condition of a women are namely control over cash earnings of women, and participation of women in decision making. These indicators are characterized by different parameters which are given in figure2.

**Figure2:** Representation of various Decision-Making indicators and their parameters used in the study.

### 4.2.2 CONTROL OVER CASH EARNINGS OF WOMEN:
For women, a key element of empowerment is gaining greater control over the circumstances of their lives. Only then women fully recognize and exercise their right to shape their own lives. Monetary independence is essential for the development of women. In our analysis control over cash earnings of women is measured by whether women decide alone or jointly with their husband how their husband’s income is used and earn more or about the same as their husband.

Sikkim (155.7), Nagaland (153.0), and Jharkhand (127.8) are the states where women earns as much their husband earns and decide alone or jointly with their husband how their husband’s income is used while the states like Bihar (33.8), Jammu and Kashmir (34.4), Tripura (38.9) are the underperforming states.
4.2.3 PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING:

Participation of women in decision making in simple terms mainly indicates female autonomy. Along with the direct benefit of their increased status in the society, there are several positive side effects associated with female autonomy, like reduction of fertility and infant mortality rates, improvement of sex ratio, betterment of child health and education etc. At the same time, violence against women gets limited when women have more power and in this sense society becomes much more balanced. So, female autonomy is very much associated with development of a country and empowerment.

Given the positive impacts of female autonomy for the entire society, it is important for us that we study the main important factors explaining female autonomy in India.

In our analysis, percentage of women between age (15-49) who make major household purchases and are independent to visit her family and relatives were considered. High level of female autonomy is good, therefore making it a positive indicator to measure women empowerment. States like Bihar (3.6), Haryana (8.5) and Union territories like Delhi (13.8) are the underperformers in participation of women in decision making whereas states like Nagaland (200), Sikkim (189.8), Mizoram (167), are the states with highest scores in participation of women in decision making.

Graph 2: Decision-Making Index
4.3 **Health and Nutrition:**

Health and Nutrition status of women is considered crucial for the outcomes of the women’s empowerment. Since women are often primary caregivers, they can also influence their children’s nutrition indirectly through their own nutritional status as well as directly through childcare practices. Women are clearly the most critical target group from a nutrition standpoint. So many adverse health outcomes like stunting are determined by the health and nutritional status of women and adolescent girls. Women are also critical to food and nutrition security. The Health and Nutrition Status of women in India along with all 31 states and union territories are given in Table 3. Various indicators which are used to represent the Health and Nutrition Status of women are namely Knowledge of contraceptive methods, own health care, health insurance coverage, nutritional status, prevalence of anemia and women food consumption. These indicators are characterized by different parameters listed in the Figure 3.

4.3.1 **Knowledge of Contraceptive Methods:**

The ability to decide freely the number, spacing and timing of one’s children is a basic human right. When girls are informed about their bodies, they are better able to avoid teenage pregnancy, stay in school and find better jobs. This can break the cycle of poverty and improve livelihoods and opportunities for successive generations. Ministry of Women and Child Development is taking major strides to improve the health of a pregnant women by various schemes like Pradhan Manti Matru Vandana Yojana. It is a scheme to implement Maternity Benefit Programme for eligible Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers.

*“Every pregnancy should be intended, and every childbirth should be safe”*

West Bengal (137), Punjab (131.3), and Union Territory Chandigarh (139.9) are the states highest scorers in percentage of women between age (15-49) who have contraceptive knowledge, whereas Manipur (19.4), Nagaland (27.8), Bihar (32.2), are the states with lesser scores.
Figure 3: Representation of various Health and Nutrition indicators and their parameters used in the study.
4.3.2 **OWN HEALTH CARE:**
Women make most of the health care decisions for their families and put their health at last. A woman can experience different symptoms related to a health issue than a man. For example, women's heart attack symptoms often include sweating, nausea and back pain instead of chest or arm pain. Since women often feel these symptoms for other reasons, like PMS or menopause, it's easy to dismiss them. Women are more likely to be insured through their spouse’s employer than own. This makes them more likely to lose their coverage if they're divorced or widowed. Without insurance, getting the care they need can be too expensive.

In our analysis, percentage of women in age (15-49) who take decision about their own health care were considered. Nagaland (100), Sikkim (94.1), and Chandigarh (97.2) are the states/union territory with better scores and Bihar (0), Andhra Pradesh (4.9), Delhi (6.6), are the states with lesser scores of women who taking care of their own health.

4.3.3 **NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN:**
Women play a central role in the nutritional status of children. Thus, highlighting the urgent need to address the public health problem of under nutrition in women. The causative factor of under nutrition in women is not limited to access to adequate and diversified food but is influenced by early marriage and conception, education, empowerment and decision making power, domestic violence. These factors directly or indirectly impact on the nutrition situation of women. Nutritional Status of Women can be measured by considering parameters like prevalence of anemia in women, having lower chronic energy deficiency levels and are covered by a health scheme or insurance.

Kerala (227.6), Arunachal Pradesh (227), Mizoram (215.4) are the states with highest scores of nutritional status in women, whereas Jharkhand (31.2), Bihar (44.7), Madhya Pradesh (73) are the states who have comparatively lesser scores than other states/union territories.

4.3.4 **WOMEN FOOD CONSUMPTION:**
A balanced diet is a cornerstone of health. Women, like men, should enjoy a variety of healthful foods from all of the foods groups, including whole grains, fruits, vegetables, healthy fats, low-fat or fat-free dairy and lean protein. But women also have special nutrient needs, and, during each stage of a woman's life, these needs change. Nutrient-rich foods provide energy for women’s busy lives and help to reduce the risk of disease. A healthy eating plan regularly includes:

1. Protein such as lean meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, beans or peas, nuts and seeds.
2. Fruits — fresh, frozen or canned without added sugar.
3. Colorful vegetables — fresh, frozen or canned without added salt.

To measure, women food consumption parameters like percentage of women age in (15-49) consuming milk, curd, dark green, leafy vegetables, fish, meat, pulses, beans and fruits.
Karnataka (439.8), Sikkim (427.2), Goa (422.1) are the States/Union Territories with higher scores of women food consumption whereas Rajasthan (152.4), Jharkhand (168.8), Mizoram (193), are the states/union territories where pattern of women food consumption is not good as compared to other states.

Graph 3: Health and Nutrition Index

CONCLUSION

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT INDEX:

Women Empowerment Index (WEI) is a composite index designed such that it can measure progress in the multi-dimensional aspects of women empowerment. This index considers empowerment to be a factor of (1) women’s economic status, (2) participation in decision making and (3) health conditions as well as nutritional intake of women. WEI measures progress on women’s empowerment by aggregating results obtained through these three dimensions. Each dimension is comprised of a series of indicators which describes performance in the respective dimensions. States of North-eastern region Sikkim (1576.7), Meghalaya (1309.8), Arunachal Pradesh (1283.6) and the Union Territories Goa (1450.4) and Chandigarh (1328.0) are the top scorers in women empowerment whereas northern states like Jharkhand (874.1), Haryana (858.8), Uttar Pradesh (776.4), Rajasthan (753.9), and Bihar (658.9) are the states having lesser scores in women empowerment. Ranking of STATES/UNION TERRITORY on the basis of aggregated result of all the indicators considered are given in Table 1.
• North Eastern states are the highest scorers in women empowerment but these states have lesser scores in health and nutrition of women.
• States like Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh lack in economic empowerment of women and decision making capacity in household, but are good scorers in health and nutrition of women.
• Not all north eastern states excel in women empowerment. States like Assam, Nagaland have comparatively lesser scores, than other North-Eastern states.
• In the union territories considered, Chandigarh is performing better than most of the states, But Delhi is scoring less in all the indicators of women empowerment.
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<th>States/Union Territory</th>
<th>ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT INDEX</th>
<th>DECISION-MAKING INDEX</th>
<th>HEALTH AND NUTRITION INDEX</th>
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• Raw data is not shared in the proposal because I have worked under the ministry of women and child development, New Delhi and we are in the process of obtaining the permission from government about sharing raw data.