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**INDIAN WOMEN: FROM THE MODERN AGE TO THE DIGITAL ERA**

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**Abstract**

The paper will discuss this revolution of Indian women in education and work, how they have evolved since the modern era, up to the modern digital. The position of Indian women has always been historically bound by patriarchy, but the position started to change with the constitutional guarantees and policy programs that were targeted to encourage education and participation in the working force post-independence. The liberalization of the economy in 1990s further opened opportunities, especially in the service sector; however, there were systemic issues. Following the introduction of the digital revolution, the turning point has been identified as the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) being powerful forces of empowerment. Digital platforms have made education more democratic, designed flexible work patterns, and encouraged entrepreneurship, which helps women to break conventional barriers. Nonetheless, this development has been accompanied by major adversities such as the existence of a digital gender gap, the safety concerns of online society, and the necessity to keep on upskilling in an economic sphere fueled by AI. In this paper, an in-depth study of the current literature will help in analyzing the multi-dimensional impact of these changes. It states that although the digital age presents women with more opportunities than ever before, to make the potential reality, policymakers, industry, and society must work together to establish an inclusive, equitable, and safe digital ecosystem. The dream path will be determined by closing the digital divide and using technology to break the inequalities rooted in years of tradition so that every Indian woman could have access to the benefits of the digital age.

**Keywords:** Indian women, women's empowerment, education, employment, digital era, ICT, gender equality, Digital India, artificial intelligence.

## Introduction

The story of Indian women is of massive change, it is a story of endurance, struggle and incredible improvement in the context of a well-established social and cultural system. The purpose of women in India, over centuries, was limited to the household, their opportunities to education and economic self-sufficiency, strictly restricted by the patriarchal system. With the advent of the modern age especially after independence, a major ideological change emerged. The Indian constitution of 1950 became a document to reckon upon as it ensured that all people were equal and no one could be discriminated against on the basis of sex, hence creating a legal foundation towards a more equal society. It was the time when there was a start to a variety of government policies and programs to enhance female literacy and health, as well as to involve them into the life of the general population (Singh, 2020).

The road between the sworn equality under the constitution and its practical manifestation has been a lengthy and winding process. The second part of the 20 th century recorded a gradual yet consistent rise in female school attendance and the slow diversification of their work beyond agriculture and household work. The Indian economy was liberalized in the 1990s, which served as a breakthrough as numerous services-sector workers were generated, and many educated women found their jobs there (Kumari, 2023). It was a period of apparent change where women had moved into the workplace in more engaging fields such as information technology, banking and education.

Nevertheless, the digital revolution of the 21 st century has brought with it the most radical and far reaching changes. The spread of the internet, mobile technology and the digital arena has significantly revolutionized the education and working environment. This online age is a two-fold sword to Indian women. On the one hand, it provides unexampled possibilities to get past geographical, social, and

economic boundaries. The Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been a potent source of empowerment, and access to online learning, remote work, virtual markets and venues of social and political expression (Manoj et al., 2023). Conversely, it has also introduced new kinds of inequalities, the most notable of them being the digital gender divide when compared to women, especially those in rural and marginalized societies, women are less likely to have access to and use digital technologies (Iyer, 2017).

The paper is an attempt to discover the diverse process of Indian women in relation to education and employment and how the transformations have been established during the era of modernity to the radical changes brought about by the modern digital era. It will synthesize the literature with the current knowledge of the key drivers of change, opportunities created and the challenges that have persisted and emerged. The thesis statement is that despite the fact that the digital transformation can have a gigantic potential when it comes to the acceleration of female empowerment, the positive gains thereof are not evenly distributed so far. The paper will end by studying the future path, specifically in the age of AI-driven economy and emphasize the urgent necessity of inclusive policies to ensure that the digital revolution will turn into the actual and universal empowerment of all Indian women.

## Literature Review

### 1. Historical Context and the Dawn of Modern Education

The pre-modern India was a complicated and varied position of women, depending on the parts of the country and the communities, yet the majority of them were marked by their subordination to the patriarchal system. Formal education was a privilege of a very small elite, and the rest of women were confined to the domestic chores with no or minimal economic and social liberty. The social activists like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Savitribai Phule led the social reform movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that promoted the cause of female education as pre-

requisite to social progress. This was the preliminary of the intellectual preparation of change, to resist the traditions of the past, and establish women to the right to knowledge.

The period of independence was a way of breaking off with the past and the new government put into place the profession of the gender equality objective through its institutions. New Five-Year Plans had some objectives of women development and this new vision was put on the foundation of the Constitution of India. Education policies like the National Policy on Education (1986) gave much attention to the removal of gender disparity in access and achievement of education. At the grass root level education was also brought in order to empower women through the introduction of similar schemes such as Mahila Samakhya. Even though such state-centered efforts, as interpreted by Singh (2020) monumentally were (destined to be implemented, it was regularly only partially frozen by bureaucratic wastefulness and the ongoing societal resistance. The cultural values which were deeply rooted in the culture, use of child marriage and a particular approach to the female education continued to be a significant barrier. However, these problems have been overcome due to the developments that had been achieved during the modern era, and the literacy rate of women rose by impressive percentages, and the number of 8.86 in 1951 was replaced by over 65 percent by the turn of the century. This was quite a slow intellectual floor, yet a most urgent prerequisite of the women getting into the formal work force. As Sharma and Iyer (2025) note, it was at this period that the production of educated women slowly began to venture into the sphere of men dominating professions; i.e., teaching, nursing and government services, disaggregating the gender roles and creating new role models to the society.

## **2. The Economic Liberalization Era and its Impact on Women's Employment**

The changes in the economy that had been brought with the year 1991 was a turning point in the Indian economy and had far reaching impacts to the employment of women. Liberalization of an

economy that was once under state ownership to a market economy led to the rapid growth of the private economy particularly of the service and export based sectors. The outcome of this was the necessity of employing individuals to fill these new labour spots and the educated women constituted a large group of individuals who could fill these spots. Emerging Information Technology (IT) industry and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry, in particular, happened to be among the most important employers of young and urban and educated women. These were the jobs that gave them not only economic independence but also a certain degree of social mobility and exposure to the world work culture, which was a game changer to a number of them (Kumari, 2023).

However, the effect of liberalization was not as positive. It not only created opportunities but it enhanced inequalities that were there. Women were also limited to the menial jobs within the service industry that were characterized by poor working hours, stress, and low advancement in the career. Unequal pay was being practiced between men and women in areas. To an even greater extent, this economic boom, as Kumari (2023) explores extensively on an interstate, intersectoral level, just urbanized more and educated women, and left behind a vast number of rural and less-educated women in precarious, low-waged, and informal employment. The working mothers were still left with the task of being a professional and homemaker who had to continue with her usual domestic and care giving services without adequate support systems like child care centers or her work schedules. Singh (2020) also thinks that despite the increasing contribution of women to the economy, they remained disempowered as they did not have control over their circumstances at home or even at the workplace. Liberalization period was therefore a contradiction of its own because it empowered a visible population of urban professional women and at the same time empowered the weakness of people in the informal world.

### 3. The Digital Revolution and ICT as a Tool for Empowerment

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been seen to grow at a high rate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that has fundamentally changed the opportunity frontier of Indian women. The project Digital India was launched in 2015 to transform the nation into a digitally empowered society and a knowledge economy; during the project, one of the key elements was the digital literacy. In female case, ICTs have turned out to be a major tool to shatter the past limitations in terms of mobility, safety and information access (Manoj et al., 2023). Women are able to gain new skills and qualifications in the comfort of their home on the digital platforms both in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as well as e-learning resources, and at a low cost, which is usually free. It is particularly significant to the probable individuals who have dropped out of the formal education system due to marriage or family related reasons.

Digitization has brought forth new possibilities as far as employment is concerned. The introduction of the gig economy and online platforms of freelancing feminists has provided women with an opportunity to work in a flexible setting that can be adjusted according to their house duties (Bhatia, 2024). The e-commerce platforms provide the female entrepreneurs a chance to bypass the middle men in the market especially in rural areas where they can sell their products directly to a national and even international market. Dhanamalar (2020) underlines that female empowerment, which is one of the crucial aspects of empowerment, has been provided by mobile banking and government programs through digital and financial literacy. Moreover, social media has provided women with a powerful networking and advocacy instrument besides awareness creation on gender based issues. Karan and Mathur (2022) in their study of women empowerment with the use of ICT found out that not only does ICT access enhance opportunities of success in the economy, but it also enhances self-confidence and social interaction. The digital empowerment, however, will be determined by the gap of digital gender divide bridged or not. Iyer (2017) still states that even in rural India, there are still strong disparities between mobile phone-ownership and internet access between men and women due

to such reasons as affordability, illiteracy, and the various restrictions imposed on them by the society (Iyer, 2017).

#### 4. Contemporary Challenges and Future Trajectories in the AI-driven World

The women opportunities and challenges have shifted as India goes into the digital era. The ICTs have presented numerous threats as they have been transformative. Most of the cybercrimes committed against women, including online harassment, trolling, non-consent sharing of intimate images, among others, have been caused by the anonymity of the internet, which has led to an unfavorable online environment that may put women away (Choudhary and Patidar, 2024). The digital gender gap remains a very intense impediment and a significant segment of the female populace is still to reap the advantages of the digital economy. This disparity is not only on access of gadgets but also on wisdom of utilizing digital world efficiently and securely.

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation in the future is a challenge and an opportunity. It is fair to say that automation would not favor women as the majority of the woman jobs in such sectors as the BPO and the data entry are susceptible to automation. This highlights the urgency of the upskilling and reskilling initiatives that will prepare women with future-oriented roles that will require higher skills of cognitive skills, innovativeness and technological know-how. In the meantime, there is an enormous possibility of AI enhancing economic inclusion of women. Saivasan (2024) mentions that AI may be utilized to create more inclusive hiring by minimizing unconscious bias, offer personalized education and skills training to groups of people, or develop technological approaches to the health and safety of women. Bhatia (2024) emphasizes the significance of online platform in providing employment, as well as, community-building and support networks that play a huge role in the empowerment of women in general. The digital world will have an impact on the future development of Indian women based on how the society will succeed in combating these threats. It requires a multi-pronged strategy, which will combine investment in online infrastructures

and literacy, effective legal frameworks to make the world online safe as well as proactive strategy to give women skills that would help them to survive in the world controlled by AI (Sharma and Iyer, 2025).

## Conclusion

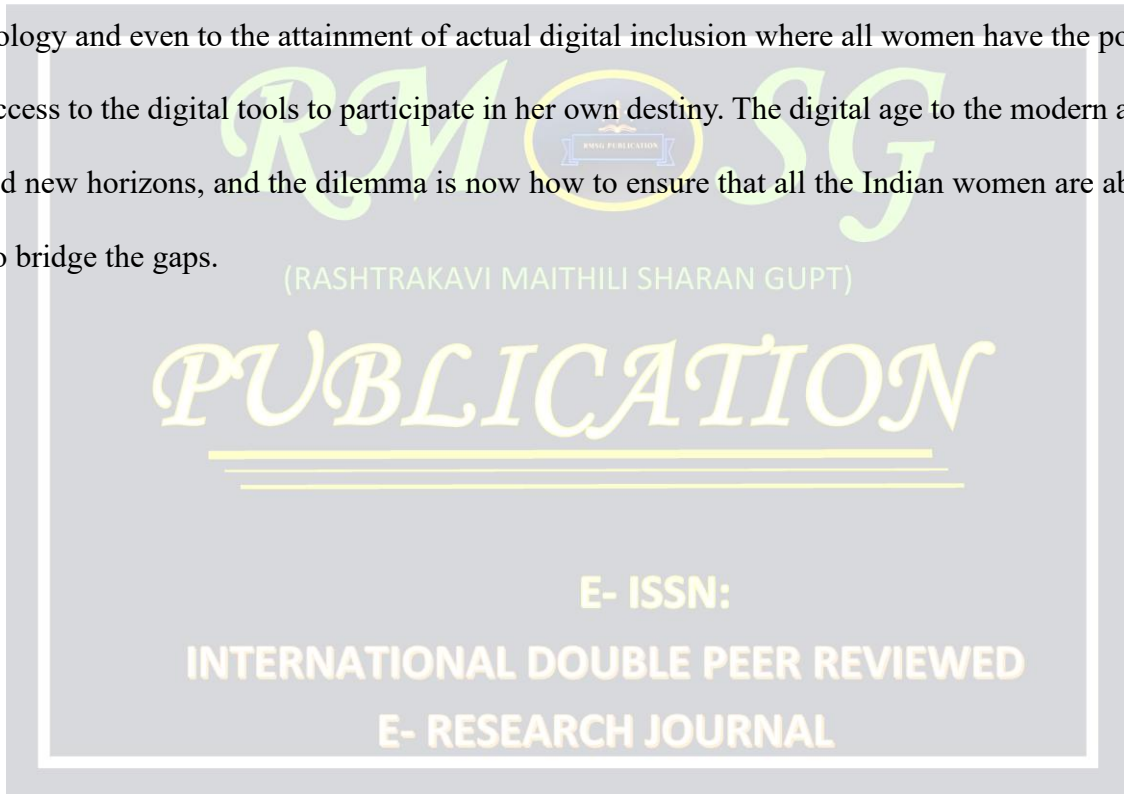
The struggle of Indian women across the obstacles of the pre-modern world to the prospects of the digital world is the testimony of the eternal soul and dynamical impact of education and economic independence. The contemporary era, where the constitution has guaranteed and government sponsored programs has succeeded in doing this by to a large extent improving the literacy levels of women and the home no longer serves as the sole domain of women. This was what economic liberalization of the 1990s was founded on that resulted in a new breed of professional woman and her representation in the formal labour force became more visible, albeit with their benefits largely concentrated in the cities.

The digital revolution today is the most radical and disruptive phase in the history of this evolution. The ICTs have served as a force multiplier that has created the channels of education, work, and entrepreneurship that could never have existed previously. The online media has offered the freedom, liberalized access to information and markets and gave the women a powerful voice in the social sphere. Digital India movement and the development of mobile technology have contributed to an even greater expansion of this shift and now the promise of empowerment is closer to a reality of many.

However, this perfect tale is stained with ongoing issues and evolving issues. The most delicate dilemma is the digital gender gap, which will create a threat of the new hierarchy of exclusion, where women who neither use nor comprehend technology will be excluded. It is a significant problem that must be tackled both in the short and the long term since it poses the threat of cyber bullying and the

future loss of workplaces due to robotization driven by AI. It is undeniable that this development is not only indisputable but also unsatisfactory.

Lastly, the story of the Indian woman in the digital age is a story to be read. The women empowerment process based on technology utilization requires a coherent drive to be able to realize the full potential. These not only imply access to technological means but also a digital literacy ecosystem, safety online as a result of good legal frameworks and a prudent allocation of up-skilling programs that would suit the needs of the new economy. This must be directed at pursuing more than access and availability to technology and even to the attainment of actual digital inclusion where all women have the potential and access to the digital tools to participate in her own destiny. The digital age to the modern age has offered new horizons, and the dilemma is now how to ensure that all the Indian women are able and free to bridge the gaps.



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