

Explain the changing status of women in Indian society. Assess the challenges that still hinder gender equality.

Question Understanding - Finding Information

- **Precise Syllabus Mapping:** Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

(GS Paper – I)

- **Marks and Words Limit:**

- The marks-oriented approach to answering **(10-mark, 150-word)** questions is to use **Bullet Points** (one idea per bullet point), **Brainstorming**, or a combination of both.
- The way to score good marks in questions worth **(15 marks. 250 words)** is to use the **Heading** and **Subheading** method while writing your answers.

- **Directive words**

- Explain → Describe changes with causes and examples
- Assess → Evaluate persisting challenges with judgement

- **Focal points of the questions:**

- Changing status of women (historical → contemporary)
- Current challenges to gender equality

Do's & Don'ts: *Balance progress + persistence of inequality.*

Answer Writing Structure (Outline)

A. Introduction Paragraph

- Acknowledge historical context
- Indicate transformation over time

B. Body Paragraph

a. Changing Status of Women in Indian Society

Do's & Don'ts: Use dimensions of change, not just chronology

- **Legal and Constitutional Empowerment**
 - Equality before law and fundamental rights
 - Progressive legislations for protection and rights
- **Educational and Economic Participation**
 - Increased female literacy and higher education
 - Growing participation in workforce and entrepreneurship
- **Political Representation**
 - Entry into electoral politics
 - Role in local self-governance institutions
- **Social Awareness and Agency**
 - Assertion against social evils
 - Rise of women's movements and civil society activism

b. Challenges Hindering Gender Equality

- **Patriarchal Norms and Social Attitudes**
 - Son preference and gender stereotypes
 - Unequal division of unpaid care work
- **Economic Inequalities**
 - Low female labour force participation
 - Wage gap and informal sector dominance
- **Safety and Violence**
 - Domestic violence and sexual harassment
 - Under-reporting due to stigma

- **Health and Nutrition Deficits**
 - Maternal health issues
 - Anaemia and malnutrition
- **Implementation Gaps**
 - Weak enforcement of laws
 - Limited access to justice in rural areas

C. Conclusion (Max. 40 words):

- Synthesis of progress and challenges
- Forward-looking tone

Dos & Don'ts

- **Do for Maximum Marks**
 - ✓ Can use Brainstorming Idea: Legal reforms → Social change → Persisting gaps
 - ✓ Maintain balanced tone (neither celebratory nor pessimistic)
 - ✓ Use multi-dimensional analysis
 - ✓ Link social change with institutions and attitudes
 - ✓ Keep examples general, not anecdotal
 - ✓ Use gender-neutral academic language
- **Don't do these Common Mistakes**
 - × Don't write only about inventions Don't write scheme-heavy answers (GS-II/III)
 - × Avoid emotional or activist language
 - × Don't ignore intersectionality (rural, caste, class)
 - × Avoid listing laws without analysis
 - × Don't conclude without forward linkage

Notes Oriented Content for Writing Answer

The status of women in India has evolved from traditional confinement to increasing participation in education, workforce, and politics, driven by legal reforms (like the Constitution, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act) and social movements, yet significant challenges like patriarchy, gender-based violence, economic disparity (pay gaps, "pink-collar jobs"), and underrepresentation in leadership persist, demanding sustained efforts for true equality.

The Changing Status of Women in Indian Society

The evolution of women's status has moved from traditional confinement toward multi-dimensional empowerment across various sectors.

- **Political Empowerment:** Transition from minimal representation to active grassroots participation. Approximately 46% of elected representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions are women. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam 2023 mandates a 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
- **Educational Gains:** Female literacy has risen to approximately 77%. At the elementary level, the Gross Enrolment Ratio for girls (94.32%) now slightly exceeds that of boys.
- **Economic Shifts:** Increased participation in the formal sector, gig economy, and STEM fields. Programs like PM Mudra Yojana have supported nearly 1.92 crore women-led MSMEs.
- **Health and Survival:** Institutional deliveries have reached 88%, and the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has declined significantly to 97 per 100,000 live births.
- **Legal Protections:** A robust framework exists, including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2013.

Challenges Hindering Gender Equality

Despite progress, "entrenched patriarchy" and structural barriers continue to stall full parity.

- **Entrenched Patriarchal Norms:** Deep-seated "son preference" remains, leading to adverse sex ratios at birth (approx. 929 per 1,000 males as per NFHS-5) and "missing women".

- **Economic Disparities:** The Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) remains low at 37%–41.7%, well below the global average of 48.7%. Women also face a stark gender pay gap, earning only 18% of the total labor income.
- **Unpaid Care Economy:** Indian women bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic work, estimated to contribute roughly ₹19 lakh crore to the economy annually.
- **Safety and Violence:** Crimes against women rose by 4% in 2022. Nearly 30% of married women have experienced spousal violence, according to the National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5).
- **Digital Divide:** A significant gap in technology access exists; for example, 51.6% of rural women do not own a mobile phone.
- **Proxy Politics:** In local governance, the "Sarpanch-Pati" system often sees male relatives exercising actual power behind elected women.
- **Health Concerns:** Persistent high rates of anemia (57% among women aged 15-49) reflect nutritional neglect and health disparities.

Way Forward

- **Shift from Welfare to Empowerment:** Move from seeing women as "passive recipients" to "architects of development".
- **Behavioral Change:** Focus on social campaigns at the micro-level to challenge traditional stereotypes.
- **Intersectional Approach:** Address the specific needs of Dalit, tribal, and rural women who face multiple layers of disadvantage.

As noted by Amartya Sen, true empowerment transitions women from "passive recipients of welfare to dynamic promoters of social transformation". Achieving the SDG 5 (Gender Equality) target is not just a moral imperative but a national economic strategy; closing the gender gap could add an estimated \$770 billion to India's GDP by 2030. A holistic approach—combining legal enforcement (like the POSH Act) with a "cradle-to-grave" shift in societal mindsets—is essential for India to achieve its vision of a Viksit Bharat by 2047.
