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8th March 2025



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8th March 2025

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Prelims Saarthi

- Subhadra Scheme
- Mukhyamantri Ladki Bahin Yojana

Inclusion in public spaces – from fear to freedom

Why in News?

- Women Empowerment + Gender Equality + Role of Public Spaces in Urban Planning

Syllabus

- **GS Paper 1 – Indian Society**
- **GS Paper 2 – Governance & Social Justice**

Inclusion in public spaces – from fear to freedom

India is often considered to be one of the most unsafe countries for women, a reality that demands urgent and deliberate change. India was ranked 128 among 177 countries rated in Women, Peace and Security Index 2023. While deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that lead to violence cannot be dismantled overnight, meaningful progress can be made by challenging the everyday barriers that women face. On International Women's Day today, it is crucial to reflect on a fundamental but an often-ignored issue – the accessibility of public spaces for women.

While the topic is deeply studied and researched in the academic world, very little has changed practically. For instance, how many women do we see on roads when compared to men at any given point of time? Which are the spaces where they are more visible? And which are the areas which they completely avoid? How freely can women walk on the streets? Or do women consciously regulate their body language to conform to the male gaze?

Gendered spatial control

It is important to understand them because public spaces serve as arenas where socio-economic life thrives and evolves through mutual interactions and collective experiences, shaping community identities and social dynamics. It is where people cultivate political identities, build livelihoods, and actively engage in community life. By enthusiastically participating in the everyday nuances of public spaces, individuals get more integrated into societal processes. Moreover, a key indicator of a place's safety is the presence of women freely choosing to relax and enjoy themselves there.

What impacts women's mobilities? Studies indicate that public spaces are both gendered and political where a majority of women are mostly confined to the private and domestic sphere. This gendered spatial control takes place in many ways. According to National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS-4) data (2015-16), 54% of Indian women had the freedom to visit markets alone, while 50% could access health-care facilities independently, and 48% were permitted to travel outside their village or community unaccompanied.

Also, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2023-24 indicates that the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for women is 35.6%. Even though it has risen significantly over the years, unfortunately, this highlights that more



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than half the female population remains outside the workforce. Therefore, while a majority of women are confined to private spaces, there is a rising number of women who are using public spaces.

However, for working women, public spaces primarily serve as transitional zones, facilitating their commute between home and workplace. These spaces are rarely utilised for leisure or recreation. Consequently, women's engagement with public spaces is purpose-driven and time-bound, reinforcing spatial restrictions that limit their presence to functional necessities rather than unrestricted social participation.

A space is truly safe and inclusive when women can navigate it freely and without hesitation. As argued in 'Why Loiter?' (Phadke, Ranade, Khan, 2011), reclaiming public spaces is not just about necessity but also about leisure and uninhibited presence. When women can move without a purpose, without urgency, without having to conform to the male gaze, they assert their right to belong, transforming public spaces into shared, equitable environments. Simply put, women should be able to just exist in public spaces.

The issue of safety

During such instances, the issue of women's safety becomes a pressing concern. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that violence against women is not confined to public spaces as many face threats even within their homes which is considered to be a comparatively safer space. In open spaces, the risk of gendered violence from multiple strangers is high. This has reinforced the belief that women need protection, ultimately restricting their autonomy. As a result, women are largely found in curated spaces such as malls, theatres, and cafes, where the likelihood of violence is perceived to be lower. But what about women on footpaths, bus stations, or narrow streets – just a group of girls sitting around and having fun?

Street amusement where women are the participants is not a normal sight. Everyday public spaces – those that men navigate freely – continue to be unwelcoming to women. The fact that women cannot simply exist in these spaces without discomfort or fear raises a critical question. What is fundamentally flawed in the design of public spaces that prevents women

from fully claiming and navigating them as their own? It is here that the community and the government can be great enablers. As a society, we must acknowledge and accept the fact that public spaces offer a sense of freedom. Yet, this very freedom often translates to a loss of control for families over women's mobility. Risk is inevitable but avoiding public spaces is not the solution. Men are subjected to street violence as well, even though their nature of vulnerability is different from that of women. Women need to reclaim these spaces with the same ease as men, fostering autonomy rather than restriction. For this, women should have more conversations about this problem, take out time to go around and 'hang out' and have fun in public spaces. Normalising a woman's use of public space for leisure can contribute to this shift.



Policy level changes

At the policy level, the government can drive change by reimagining public space planning and design. This includes improving street lighting, ensuring safe and

accessible public toilets, installing more recreational spaces tailored for women. Another critical area requiring government intervention is strengthening public safety through stringent laws and their effective enforcement to address crimes against women in public spaces. How many men are actually punished for gender-based violence in public spaces? How many secure bail, only to repeat their crimes? The low conviction rate remains a glaring issue that must be addressed. Even today, women are often blamed for being in the "wrong place at the wrong time", shifting the focus from the perpetrator to the victim. Society places the burden of safety on women while simultaneously excusing or downplaying the actions of offenders. This not only fosters a culture of impunity but also reinforces a gendered fear that serves as a tool for patriarchal control.

So, by consciously reshaping public spaces, we can create environments where women feel safe and truly welcome. While centuries of patriarchy cannot be dismantled overnight, meaningful change begins with small, everyday actions. From the built environment of public space to societal attitudes, every shift, no matter how gradual, brings us closer to an inclusive society where women can navigate and own public spaces freely, without fear or restriction.

Public spaces, which are arenas where socio-economic life thrives, need to be reshaped where women feel safe and welcome





Key Takeaways from the Article

- **India's Women Safety Ranking:**
 - ◆ India ranks 128 out of 177 countries in the **Women, Peace, and Security Index 2023**, highlighting concerns about women's safety.
- **Patriarchy and Gendered Spaces:**
 - ◆ Deeply entrenched patriarchal norms contribute to the **lack of women's presence and freedom in public spaces.**
 - ◆ A significant gendered spatial control exists where **public spaces are largely maledominated**, limiting women's freedom to move freely.

India Ranks 128th in Women Safety Index



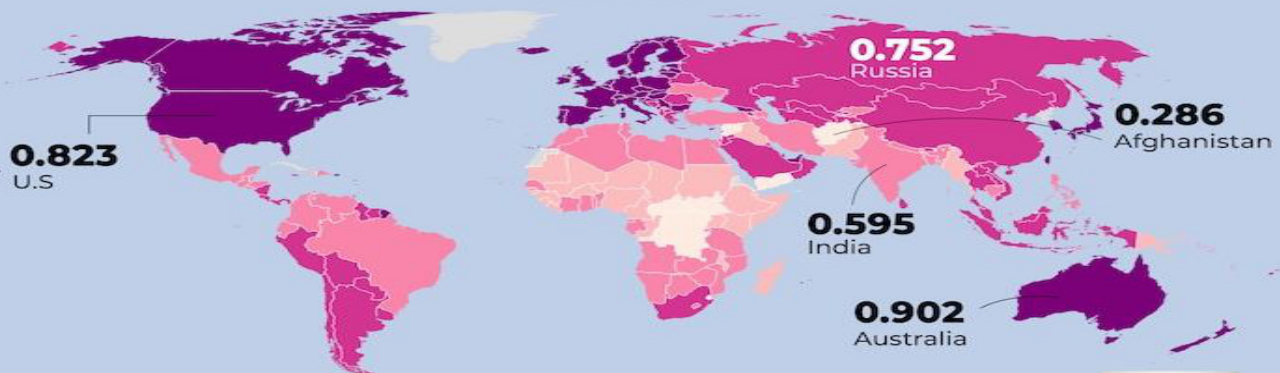
India rebounds in 2023 in the Women Peace and Security Index after ranking dropped to 148 during the previous period

Ranking rebound with a surge in 2023



The Women Peace and Security Index around the World

● Less than 0.42
 ● 0.42 to 0.54
 ● 0.54 to 0.67
 ● 0.67 to 0.8
 ● More than 0.8
 Poor ← Index score → Good

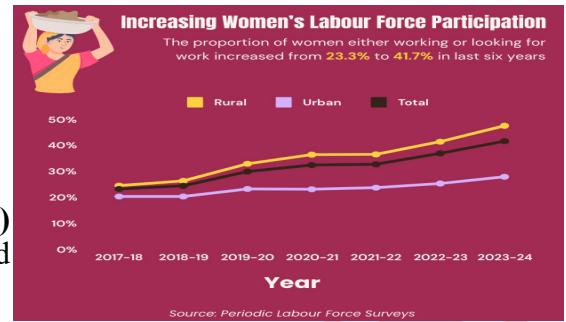


Source: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security
Graphic: Jaipal Sharma & Subham Singh

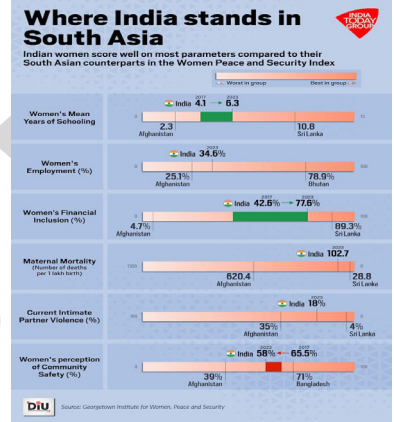




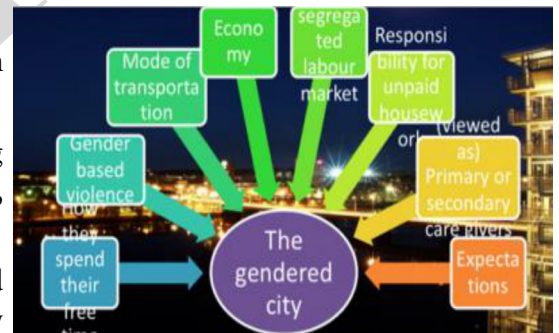
- According to NFHS-4 data (2015–16):
 - ◆ 54% of Indian women can visit markets alone.
 - ◆ 50% can access healthcare independently.
 - ◆ 48% can travel outside their village unaccompanied.
 - ◆ The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for women in 2023-24 is 35.6%, showing limited participation in the workforce.



- Women's Public Space Engagement
 - ◆ Women primarily use public spaces for functional purposes like **commuting to work**.
 - ◆ Public spaces are rarely used by women for **leisure, reinforcing spatial restrictions**.
 - ◆ Reclaiming public spaces for leisure is essential for gender equality, where women can engage without the need to conform to the male gaze.
 - ◆ Women's presence is often restricted to **“safe” curated spaces like malls, cafes, etc.**, while streets, footpaths, and bus stations remain largely **male-dominated**.



- Need for Policy Change:
 - ◆ The **design of public spaces** is flawed, making them **unwelcoming and unsafe** for women.
 - ◆ There is a need for inclusive planning, including **better street lighting, more public toilets, benches, and recreational spaces**.
 - ◆ Strict enforcement of laws against genderbased violence is required, including addressing the **low conviction rate for crimes against women**.



Way Forward

- ◆ To redesign public spaces to ensure they are **safe, accessible, and inclusive** for women.
- ◆ To enforce **stricter laws against gender-based violence** in public spaces and ensure better conviction rates.
- ◆ To initiate public campaigns to normalize **women's use of public spaces for leisure and socializing**.

An equitable future for women in science, in India

Why in News?

- ◆ Gender Equality + Women Empowerment + Inclusive Participation of Women in Science





Syllabus

- ◆ **GS Paper 1** – Indian Society
- ◆ **GS Paper 2** – Governance & Social Justice
- ◆ **GS Paper 3** – Science & Technology

An equitable future for women in science, in India

Women in science navigate a minefield of challenges that often start early. Educational barriers, such as limited access to quality schools and gendered societal norms, can discourage girls from pursuing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). For those who persist and are fortunate to get past these early hurdles, cultural expectations frequently demand that they prioritise family over careers, severely jeopardising professional growth. Gender stereotypes further restrict opportunities, affecting hiring, promotions and funding. Harassment and discrimination in academic settings add another dimension of hostility that push many women out of the field.

A study of STEM scientists

Globally, as well as in India, we see similar patterns. A study of STEM scientists across 38 countries reveals higher attrition rates for women, driven by non-inclusive workplaces, work-life balance struggles, and limited access to high-impact research.

These barriers slow career progression and reduce access to senior roles and professional networks, increasing dropout rates. The postdoc-to-faculty transition is especially challenging for women, with familial responsibilities, low confidence, and a lack of female role models cited as key factors, as highlighted by research from the National Institutes of Health.

These barriers compel us to consider why it is vital to prioritise the retention of women in science. Diverse teams drive creativity and innovation, leading to breakthroughs by integrating multiple perspectives. More women in science also results in role models for future generations, inspiring girls to pursue STEM. Promoting equity ensures that women can contribute fully to scientific progress, enriching society with a more inclusive workforce.

This conversation has progressed little over the centuries. The “Matilda Effect” – named after 19th-century feminist Matilda Joselyn Gage – describes the tendency to downplay or overshadow women’s scientific contributions in favour of their male colleagues, highlighting the



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With India continuing to push the boundaries of scientific and technological advancement, it must ensure the full inclusion of women in this journey

historic struggle for proper recognition of women’s innovations. Nearly 200 years later, gender inequity in STEM persists. Jacob Clark Blickenstaff’s “leaky pipeline” metaphor describes women dropping out of STEM due to biased pedagogy, a lack of role models, and hostile workplaces. Critiqued as somewhat simplistic, this model does not consider systemic power dynamics. A more recent “Chutes and Ladders” model focuses on broader structural and environmental barriers, highlighting how mentorship, access to hidden knowledge, and career disruptions disproportionately hinder women, minorities, and marginalised groups, emphasising the need to address inequities within academic systems.

A survey across India

Examining these concepts is particularly valuable in the context of India, where conservative attitudes abound. In an extensive survey across 98 institutions across India conducted in 2020-21, the proportion of women faculty members across all the fields was a mere 17%, ranging from 23% in biology to 8% in engineering. The proportion was even lower within higher-ranked institutions, with dwindling ratios within senior career faculty. The data showed that women scientists were vastly under-represented at conferences and often overlooked in career-enhancing activities.

Addressing these challenges demands a reimagined approach that embraces diverse career paths and involves policymakers, institutions, and the scientific community in fostering inclusivity, particularly for underrepresented and economically disadvantaged women. Approaches vary based on the timing of intervention. Early intervention, engaging parents, educators, and the broader social environment, is key to lasting impact.

We propose three key recommendations to improve the retention of women in STEM at the early- and mid-career levels. First, institutional changes such as flexible work options, affordable childcare, and policies supporting work-family integration are essential. Second, public

recognition of both triumphs and obstacles is crucial. Showcasing successful women in science challenges stereotypes, inspires the next generation, and reinforces the need for greater visibility and representation. At the same time, calling out setbacks, as exemplified by BiasWatchIndia, can drive incremental progress by exposing gender inequities in academia. Finally, a nuanced approach across career stages is crucial, eliminating age restrictions on grants, fostering mentorship networks, supporting career re-entry after a break for family or personal reasons, and amplifying senior women’s voices in leadership and decision-making.

Interventions

The Indian government has taken significant steps to advance gender equity in science and technology. The Department of Science and

Technology (DST) launched the Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions (GATI) pilot in 2020 to foster an inclusive environment for women and gender-diverse individuals in STEM, supporting participation-boosting initiatives such as the Women in Science and Engineering-Knowledge

Involvement in Research Advancement through Nurturing, or WISE-KIRAN, and the Women Scientists Scheme (WOS) programmes. Noteworthy efforts include the Department of Biotechnology’s Biotechnology Career Advancement and Re-orientation (BioCARE) programme, which supports women scientists returning to research after career breaks.

Additionally, the Indian Council of Medical Research spearheads several programmes promoting women’s health and training for women scientists. While these initiatives reflect progress, they must scale into broader reforms to ensure that women scientists are recognised, empowered, and valued.

As India continues to push the boundaries of scientific and technological advancement, the full inclusion of women in this journey is not only a matter of fairness but also an example of true progress that can set a powerful example for the world to emulate.



Key Takeaways from the Article

- **Challenges for Women in STEM:**
 - ◆ **Early educational barriers and gendered societal norms** discourage girls from pursuing STEM fields.





- ◆ Cultural expectations often demand **women prioritize family, impeding career growth.**
- ◆ Gender stereotypes limit opportunities in **hiring, promotions, and funding** in academic settings.
- ◆ **Harassment and discrimination** further contribute to attrition rates.

● **Global and Indian Context:**

- ◆ A study across 38 countries reveals higher attrition rates for women in STEM due to **non-inclusive workplaces and work-life balance struggles.**
- ◆ A 2020-21 survey across 98 institutions in India showed only **17% of women faculty** in STEM fields, with the **lowest representation in engineering (8%).**
- ◆ **Women scientists are underrepresented** at conferences and often excluded from careerenhancing activities.

● **Importance of Retention:**

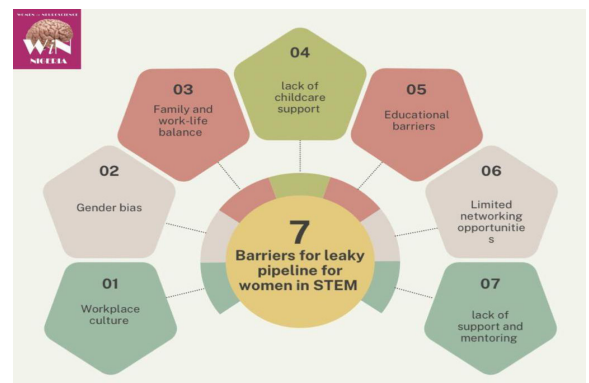
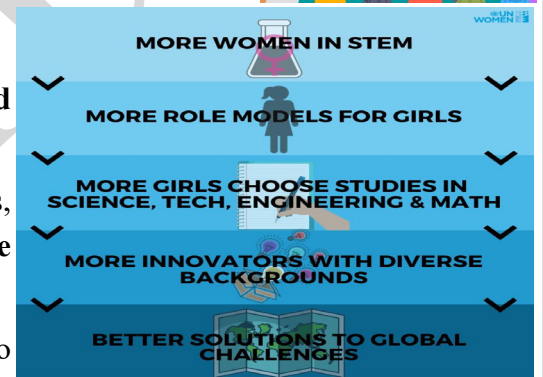
- ◆ Diversity in science teams drives **creativity and innovation.**
- ◆ Having women in science serves as role models, encouraging **future generations of girls to pursue STEM.**
- ◆ **Ensuring equity** enables women to contribute fully to scientific progress and enrich society.

● **Matilda Effect & Structural Barriers:**

- ◆ The **“Matilda Effect”** refers to the historical tendency to overlook women’s contributions in science.
- ◆ The **“leaky pipeline”** and **“Chutes and Ladders”** models highlight the systemic barriers and lack of support, mentorship,
 - ◆ and access to high-impact research, especially for women.

● **Government and Institutional Interventions:**

- ◆ The Department of Science and Technology (DST) launched the Gender Advancement for Transforming Institutions (GATI) pilot in 2020 to create an inclusive environment in STEM.





- ◆ Other initiatives like WISE-KIRAN, Women Scientists Scheme (WOS), and the BioCARE program support women scientists and those returning to research after breaks.

- **Recommendations for Improvement:**

- ◆ Institutional changes such as **flexible work options, affordable childcare, and work-family integration policies.**
- ◆ **Public recognition of women’s achievements** in science and exposure to setbacks to challenge stereotypes.
- ◆ A nuanced approach across career stages, including **eliminating age restrictions on grants** and supporting career re-entry after family breaks.
- ◆ Amplification of **senior women’s voices in leadership and decision-making.**



Subhadra Yojana (Odisha)

- ◆ The **Subhadra Yojana** is a flagship welfare scheme launched by the **Government of Odisha.**
- ◆ It aimed at empowering women through **financial assistance** and promoting **digital literacy.**
- ◆ The scheme targets women aged between **21 and 60 years**, with a focus on those from economically weaker sections.

Shri Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

Shri Mohan Charan Majhi
Chief Minister, Odisha

On International Women's Day
2nd Instalment of
SUBHADRA
by
Shri Mohan Charan Majhi
Chief Minister

About
₹5,000 Crore
Financial Assistance to about
1 Crore Women
8 March 2025, Berhampur

Enhanced Participation of Women
in the State's Economic Growth

One Initiative, One Vision
Women's Empowerment
through 'SUBHADRA'
GHARE GHARE SUBHADRA





Prelims Practice Question

Question: The Subhadra Scheme, a women empowerment initiative providing financial assistance to women, is implemented in which of the following states?

- (a) Tamil Nadu
- (b) Maharashtra
- (c) Odisha
- (d) Uttar Pradesh

Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana (Maharashtra)

- ◆ The **Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana** is a welfare scheme launched by the **Maharashtra government**, aimed at empowering women economically, improving their health and nutrition, and strengthening their role in the family.
- ◆ Women aged between **21 and 65 years**, who are residents of Maharashtra.
- ◆ Women will receive **₹1,500 per month** as financial assistance, credited directly to their bank accounts.
- ◆ This support is designed to help women improve their financial status and become **more self-reliant**.

Ladki Bahin Yojana: ₹17,500 cr. disbursed to 2.38 crore women

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government disbursed ₹17,500 crore to 2.38 crore women under the Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana till December 2024, stated the Economic Survey tabled in the State Assembly on Friday.

"The State launched the Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana in June 2024 with the objective of promoting rehabilitation, economic development, and empowerment of women and girls in the 21 to 65 age group. Under this scheme, financial aid of ₹17,505.90 crore was provided to 2.38 crore women beneficiaries up to December 2024," the Economic Survey stated.

Through disbursement of monthly aid of ₹1,500, the scheme intends to rehabilitate women economically and socially to make them self-reliant, promote empowerment, and improve the health and nutritional status of the women and children dependent on them, the report stated.

The details come amid criticism that the scheme was introduced by the ruling Mahayuti for electoral gain ahead of last year's Assembly election and a dip in the number of eligible



The Economic Survey was tabled in the Maharashtra Assembly on Friday. FILE PHOTO

beneficiaries in the State.

The Economic Survey stated that the allocation for the gender budget was increased. "The share of the gender budget in the total State budget was 3.1% in 2023-24 and 3.3% in 2024-25," it stated. In 2023-24, the allocation was ₹20,391 crore, which increased marginally to ₹21,951 crore in 2024-25.

Dip in expenditure

However, expenditure on certain women-specific schemes in the State saw a dip. For example, expenditure on women shelter homes, government women hostels, and protective homes recorded a drop from ₹15.31 crore in 2023-24 to ₹9.82 crore in 2024-25 (up to December 2024). Beneficiaries also dipped from 6,654 in 2023-24 to 4,527 in 2024-25.

