

# Strategies and Challenges of Women Leaders in Indian Universities

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## Abstract

In India, during this period of industrialisation and globalisation, women leaders are emerging in various sectors even they are facing traditional cultural challenges. In this modern era, women are educated and qualified also they have the courage to break the “societal lock”. However, women leadership positions in higher education institutions are measurably low when compared to the rate of men. The studies revealed that even though more women are working as university faculties while, not in the leadership role.

**Keywords:** women leaders, women enhancement, gender equality

## Introduction

Women leaders are facing various challenges especially the country like India (Smetana et al., 2018). The society prejudice about the status and result of women’s performance also they have lesser scope for making mistakes (Banker, 2023). Moreover, women are struggling to balance their career and family as like women in the globe (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2022). However, in Indian tradition men has more societal power than women and the families giving more importance to the women’s marriage than career development (Smetana et al., 2018). Additionally, the society making boundaries for the women to maintain their network and the inclusion of caste as consequently influence their career development. As per the studies, below 1% leading roles in the universities are performing by women (Gandhi & Sen, 2021). In this count, only 3 number of women performing the role of university vice chancellor. The major central universities had not any history of female vice chancellor (Gandhi & Sen, 2021).

## Importance of women leaders

Gender equity and inclusion are more relevant in this era. The women leaders in the male-dominated society can inspire and motivate the future generation to attain the key roles in higher education institution (Sanfilippo, 2024). The global studies stated that the role of women leaders in institutional growth, economic integrity, and social commitments (Banker, 2023). Therefore, identifying the possible strategies and understanding the challenges of the women leaders in universities are prime element for the implementation of gender equality and inclusion in that area. Equalisation of gender and rejection of domination helps to obtain the diversified opportunities and developments in academic context (Vasavada, 2012). Furthermore, clearly identified challenges and possibilities would help to develop a balanced career pathway to women. Structural implication of strategies is beneficial for the next generation leaders become effective (Longman & Bray, 2024).

### **Significance for the enhancement of women leaders**

The systematic approach towards the challenges or obstacles faced by the women leaders in universities would be contributed to develop and maintain a structured inclusive and equalised policies. By analysing the studies regarding the successful history of women leaders can be inspired the future generation to pursue the leading roles in the universities. The historical role models can significantly influence the younger generation by contributing innovative pathways to overcome the barriers (Al Naqbi, 2023). The authorities can identify the obstacles such as gender discrimination, lack of network opportunities, and unequal treatments. The understanding and analysing those barriers can be helped to the policy formulation and implementation for the institutional as well as women's professional development. The study reported that the women empowerment towards the leading positions in the society positively correlated with the factors affecting upliftment of region (Jyoti, Sharma and Khan, 2018). Moreover, identified strategies and challenges of women leaders in Indian context can be applied all over the world to implement the gender equality in higher education institution. The several studies reported that the problem of dissimilarity rate of women representatives in the senior roles even the western countries (Raburu, 2015).

### **Theoretical Framework**

In India, a structured and recent study on challenges and strategies of women leaders in universities is conducted by (Chanana, 2022). In this study primarily focuses on leadership theories and gender inclusion in Indian context. The author critically analysing the barriers such as policy loopholes, socio-cultural barriers, institutional limitations for the women leadership roles in Indian universities as well as the possible strategies.

### **Challenges of women Leaders**

In the higher education policies are instructed to include women in at least 30 percent of the leading roles in an institution (Chanana, 2022). However, the Indian constitution implemented a "reservation system" in job sector based on caste, language, tribe, community, area, and financial capacity also this reservation not considering the status of gender (Business Today, 2019). This reservation is also applicable in the university jobs. Therefore, there aren't any kinds of recruitment priority to the women as per the policy implementation. Furthermore, the institutional bias restricts the women's eligibility towards the higher positions. Promotion is the main criterion to get the leading roles in the Universities. The women are struggling to perform their competitiveness and imitativity to generate historical milestones in the men leading institutions (Manfredi, 2017). Moreover, the women are successfully enhancing their career such as the way of higher research approaches, performing leading roles in decision making, and authoritative problem-solving roles are only happening in the universities led by women (Chanana, 2022). Additionally, the younger male generation have role models for the construction and development of their academic life, while the females have no older generation to exchange their academic networks (Chanana, 2022). The role models are necessary to identify the obstacles in the professional pathways for establishing innovative strategies (Hill and Wheat, 2017). These factors underlined the existing gender inequality in Indian Universities.

In India, as per the All-Indian Higher Education Survey more than 900 universities are functioning (Chanana, 2022). Only 15 universities are leading by women and this number is very lesser when compared to the number of women who enrolled for higher education in universities. Women's career is

going slowly when compared to men. Women are struggling with “slippery floors” and “ceiling limit” to attain their goals even they have the instinct capability (Chanana, 2022).

Moreover, various socio-cultural barriers limit the opportunities of women. The cultural factors like family pressures, societal boundaries are negatively influencing the women’s mental and physical capability to lead the higher roles as successfully (Gandhi & Sen, 2021). The study identified these barriers are invisible and cognitive bias (Chanana, 2022). The society inherently believes that males are more confident and cognitively able to do the leading responsibilities than women (Chanana, 2022). This cultural believes restrict the women to concentrate in domestic works than their professional life. Women performing various role such as a child carer, wife, sister and daughter for the household responsibilities (Smetana et al., 2018). Most of the time women became fail to attend the meetings, or other events due to this family responsibilities. The family do not support the women to create and maintain a networks even at casual situations (Jayatilake et al., 2014).

### **Strategies for gender equality**

Various adoptable strategies are discussing in this study. The career promotion priorities, rotation of leadership roles, mentorship programs for the training sessions, and reconstruction of policies are the innovative strategies to overcome the challenges (Chanana, 2022). The career promotion of women can be successfully conducting in women’s universities. Women’s universities are easily giving reasonable and proactive solutions for the problems and difficulties which are relating to education and career opportunities. Women’s universities are explicitly activating and promoting the future leaders (Renn, 2014). Women’s multitasking capacity and strict evaluation behaviours assist to maintain the institutional goodwill and academic quality (Banker, 2023).

Furthermore, the rotation of leadership roles is another approach to increase the opportunities for women. Experiences in leadership roles helps the females to successfully perform the responsibilities (Chanana, 2022). Taking initiatives and doing responsibilities at the time of performing rotative roles would increase the self-efficacy, it can be helped to exhibit more responsive and reactive decision making (Sarkar, 2022). This also facilitates to create and maintain a network between the participants. These networking helps to exchange the information regarding the opportunities and facilities. Networking is considered as one of the main factors in recruitment and promotion processes (Smetana et al., 2018). The Senior level persons inform the details to the candidates who relate to them.

Another strategy is making policy reconstruction and successful implementation for the gender equality and inclusion (Chanana, 2022). The authority can make policy reforms in the recruitment and selection process by considering the necessity of flexible working hours, women-friendly working environments, and rejection of gender bias (Smetana et al., 2018). Not only the opportunities motivate the younger women generation to go beyond the barriers but also the facilities and considerations such as equal pay scale and mental supportive system (Banker, 2023). The institutional excellence has been based on diversity of population (Smith, 2024). The implementation of policy such as equity of diversity can make long term changes and academic excellence in the higher education institutions. Furthermore, the authority should conduct awareness programs about the implemented policies for the women upliftment for the attainment of program objective (Reddy, 2015).

Finally, conducting the mentoring programs and training sessions in universities for the faculties, researchers, and junior level professors to enhance and motivate the leadership qualities and capabilities (Chanana, 2022). By attending various mentoring programs helping the participants to expand their

networks between different levels of persons such as Registrar of examination, managers, members of executives, vice chancellors, and chancellors (Hill and Wheat, 2017). Moreover, women mentors who are conducting these programs can easily attract and motivate the predecessors to uplift their career towards the leadership roles (Smetana., 2018). In this perspective, a program constructed in India under the authority of University Grants Commission (UGC) in the name of “Capacity Building of Women Managers in Indian Higher Education” to empower the women to cross their limitations, enhance their management skills, helps to identify the structural problems, and enact them to resolve the issues. The study revealed several positive real-life experiences from the participants (Chanana, 2022). From the responses, can identify the correlation between the professional successfulness of women and mentorship. On the other hand, these programs were ended and not existed for a long time.

### **Limitations of the strategies.**

This study basically explores the aspects of leadership theories and gender inclusion rather than evaluate the root causes. Based on the leadership theories, author identify the challenges and explain the strategies to overcome the obstacles. However, the implemented strategies had not existed for long term due to the improper evaluation. The higher education institutions should be taken in to account the continuous evaluation of impacts of implemented strategies and introduce systematic changes according to the globalised value (Haque, 2023).

### **Further Scope of research**

There is necessary to investigate and implement a long-term effective strategy for the gender equality and inclusion in Indian universities for the leading positions rather than focusing on leadership theories. Additionally, a diverse country like India, several factors such as caste, tribe, language, and region are important and influential for the women empowerment (Kapur, 2018). Additional research is required to identify the role of these factors in the women’s professional development. As a developing country, equalising the workforce opportunities is significantly important (Smetana et al., 2018). Therefore, there is a further scope for the evaluation of obstacles and strategies such as policy reforms, globalisation factors, and regional comparisons to make more inclusive strategies for the empowerment of women.

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