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GS Paper II: Polity

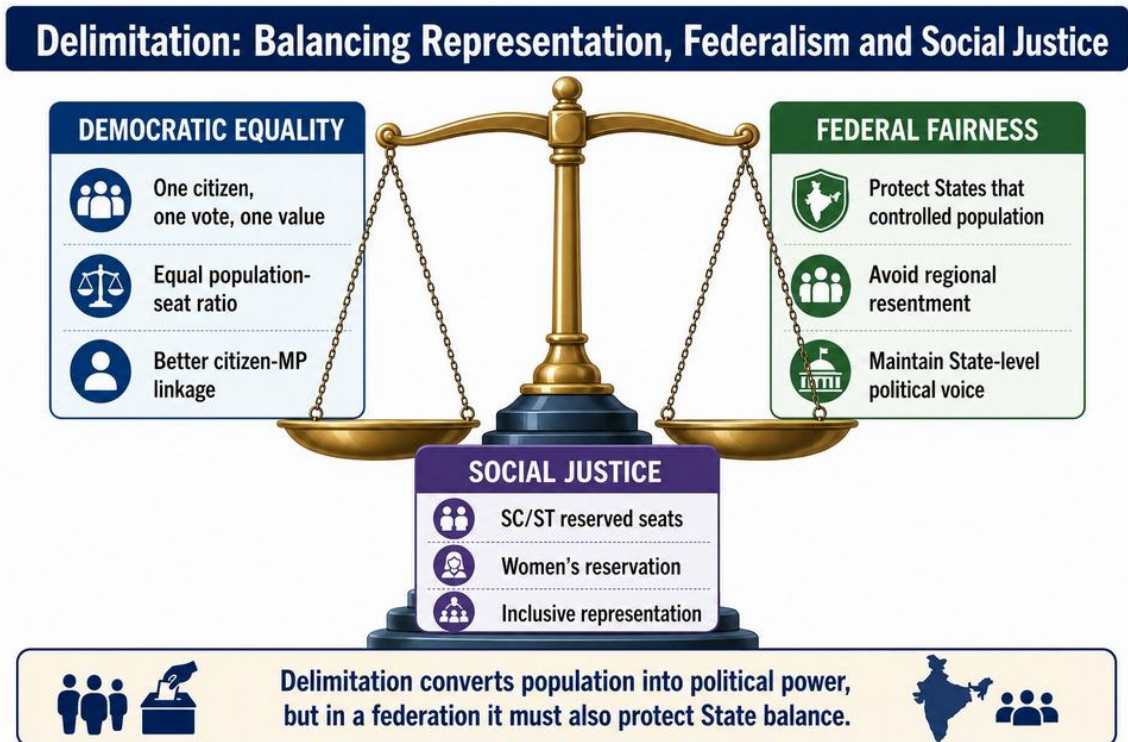
1. Delimitation and Lok Sabha Expansion

a. Introduction

Delimitation is one of the most sensitive issues in Indian democracy because it decides how citizens are represented in Parliament and how political power is distributed among States. At one level, it looks like a technical exercise of redrawing constituency boundaries. In reality, it raises deeper constitutional questions of democratic equality, federal balance, social justice and women's political representation.

The issue has become more important because the strength of the Lok Sabha has remained almost frozen for decades, even though India's population has grown substantially. The Constitution presently permits a maximum of 550 members in the Lok Sabha, while the actual elected strength is 543. The Constitution One Hundred and Thirty-First Amendment Bill, 2026 proposed to raise this maximum strength to 850, with up to 815 members from States and up to 35 from Union Territories. However, the Bill did not secure the required special majority in the Lok Sabha and therefore failed.

The linked Delimitation Bill, 2026 proposed the creation of a new Delimitation Commission to redraw constituencies and help operationalise women's reservation. This made the issue politically sensitive because three major questions came together: expansion of Lok Sabha seats, redistribution of representation among States, and implementation of women's reservation.



b. Meaning of Delimitation

Delimitation means fixing the number, territorial boundaries and reservation status of electoral constituencies. In simple words, it answers three basic questions:

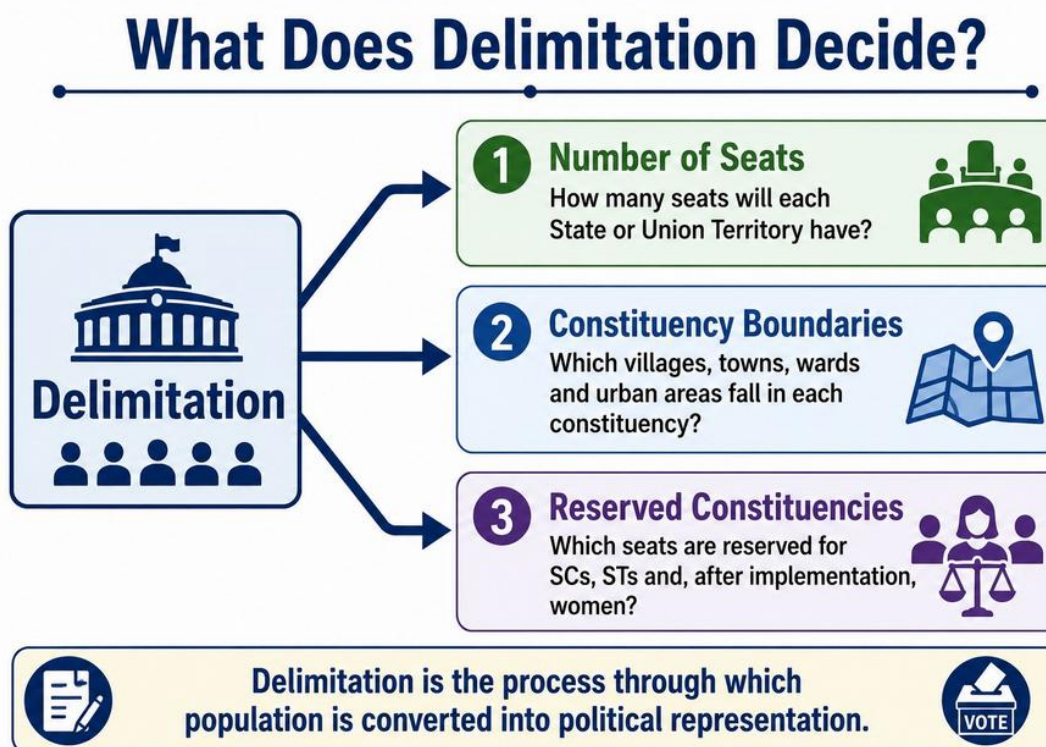
- **How many seats should each State or Union Territory have?**
This decides the numerical representation of each State in the Lok Sabha or State Legislative Assembly.
- **What should be the geographical boundary of each constituency?**

This decides which villages, towns, wards or urban areas will fall within a particular constituency.

- **Which constituencies should be reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes?**
This is decided according to the population distribution of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in different areas.

For example, if a State has forty Lok Sabha seats, delimitation decides the geographical area of each of those forty constituencies. It also identifies which among them should be reserved for Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes, depending on their population concentration.

Thus, delimitation is not merely a map-making exercise. It is the constitutional process through which population is converted into political representation.



c. Why Delimitation is Necessary

In a representative democracy, the vote of every citizen should ideally carry equal value. This principle is commonly expressed as “one citizen, one vote, one value.”

If one Member of Parliament represents thirty lakh people and another represents only eight lakh people, then citizens in the smaller constituency enjoy greater representational weight. This creates inequality in democracy.

Population, however, does not remain constant. Some areas grow rapidly because of natural increase, migration and urbanisation. Other areas grow slowly because of lower fertility rates or out-migration. If constituency boundaries are not revised periodically, the gap between constituencies becomes wider.

Delimitation is therefore needed for three reasons:

- **To restore equality of representation:** Each representative should speak for a broadly comparable number of citizens.
- **To update electoral geography:** Boundaries must reflect new realities such as urban expansion, migration, new settlements and demographic shifts.
- **To update reservation of seats:** Reserved constituencies for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes must reflect their actual population distribution.

In simple terms, delimitation keeps electoral democracy connected with demographic reality.

d. Constitutional Basis of Delimitation

The Constitution links representation with population, but it also allows Parliament to regulate the process through law.

- **Article 81:** Article 81 deals with the composition of the Lok Sabha. It expects a broad similarity in the population-seat ratio across States.
- **Article 82:** Article 82 provides that after every Census, Parliament may enact a law for readjusting Lok Sabha constituencies.
- **Article 170:** Article 170 performs a similar function for State Legislative Assemblies.
- **Articles 330 and 332:** Articles 330 and 332 provide for reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

The Delimitation Commission is created through a Delimitation Act passed by Parliament. It is usually chaired by a retired judge of the Supreme Court and includes the Election Commissioner and the concerned State Election Commissioners. Once its orders are finalised, they have the force of law and are not easily questioned in ordinary courts.

This gives the Delimitation Commission a special position. It is expected to work above day-to-day political pressure because its decisions shape the structure of electoral democracy itself.

e. Historical Background: Why Lok Sabha Seats Were Frozen

India undertook delimitation exercises after the 1951, 1961 and 1971 Censuses. After the 1971 Census, the elected strength of the Lok Sabha was fixed at 543 seats. At that time, India's population was around 54.8 crore. Since then, India's population has increased greatly, but the distribution of Lok Sabha seats among States has remained largely frozen.

The reason for this freeze was linked to population control.

Some States invested more effectively in education, health, family planning and social development. As a result, their population growth slowed down. If Lok Sabha seats were redistributed purely on the basis of later population figures, these better-performing States could lose relative influence in Parliament, while States with higher population growth could gain more seats.

Parliament therefore froze the redistribution of seats so that States would not be punished for successful population stabilisation.

This was a federal compromise. Democratic equality was partly postponed in order to protect population-control incentives and inter-State fairness.

f. The Core Problem Today

The present difficulty arises because India is trying to balance two constitutional values that do not always move in the same direction.

- **Democratic equality:** Every citizen's vote should have broadly equal value. If some MPs represent much larger populations than others, citizens in overpopulated constituencies become under-represented.
- **Federal fairness:** India is a Union of States. Parliament is not only a body representing individual citizens; it is also the national forum where States indirectly protect their political voice.

If seats are redistributed purely on the basis of current population, States that successfully controlled population growth may lose relative influence. This concern is especially strong among southern and some western States, which generally achieved demographic transition earlier.

Thus, delimitation creates a tension between the logic of population and the logic of federal balance.

A purely population-based formula may appear democratic, but it may create regional resentment. A continued freeze may protect federal balance, but it weakens equal representation among citizens.

g. The Constitution One Hundred and Thirty-First Amendment Bill, 2026

The Constitution One Hundred and Thirty-First Amendment Bill, 2026 proposed a major restructuring of Lok Sabha representation.

Its most important proposal was to increase the maximum strength of the Lok Sabha from 550 to 850 members. The proposed maximum included up to 815 members from States and up to 35 members from Union Territories.

The Bill also sought to change the manner in which women's reservation would be implemented. Under the Constitution One Hundred and Sixth Amendment Act, 2023, one-third reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies is to come into effect only after a delimitation exercise is conducted following the publication of figures from the first Census held after the commencement of that Act.

The 2026 proposal sought to remove this requirement and allow earlier implementation of women's reservation.

In simple terms, the amendment tried to do three things together:

- **Expand the Lok Sabha:** The maximum strength was proposed to be increased from 550 to 850.
- **Enable a new delimitation exercise:** This would allow fresh readjustment of constituencies.
- **Operationalise women's reservation earlier:** The Bill sought to remove the requirement of waiting for a future Census-linked delimitation.

However, the Bill failed in the Lok Sabha because it did not get the required special majority.

h. The Proposed Delimitation Bill, 2026

The Delimitation Bill, 2026 proposed to empower the Central Government to constitute a new Delimitation Commission. This Commission would have been responsible for carrying out the practical work of delimitation.

Its functions would have included:

- **Allocating seats among States and Union Territories:** This would decide how many seats each State or Union Territory would receive.
- **Redrawing constituency boundaries:** This would decide the geographical limits of each constituency.
- **Identifying reserved constituencies:** This would include constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women.
- **Supporting implementation of women's reservation:** Women's reservation cannot be implemented only by declaring a quota. Constituencies must be identified and rotated according to law.

Therefore, a delimitation mechanism becomes necessary to give practical effect to women's reservation.

However, because delimitation affects regional power and electoral competition, linking it with women's reservation made the proposal controversial.

i. Why an Increase in Lok Sabha Seats Was Proposed

The proposal to increase Lok Sabha seats had two major justifications.

Better Representation

India's population has increased many times since the 1971 Census, but the number of Lok Sabha seats has remained almost the same. As a result, each MP now represents a very large population.

This creates three difficulties:

- **Weak citizen-representative connection:** An MP representing a very large population may find it difficult to maintain direct contact with citizens.
- **Poor constituency-level responsiveness:** Local grievances, development issues and administrative concerns become harder to track.
- **Greater burden on MPs:** MPs are expected to legislate, participate in committees, represent constituency concerns and respond to citizens. A very large constituency makes this role difficult.

A simple analogy can help. A teacher handling thirty students can give more attention to each student than a teacher handling one hundred and fifty students. Similarly, an MP representing a smaller and more manageable population can engage more effectively with citizens.

Smoother Implementation of Women's Reservation

If one-third of seats are reserved within the existing strength of 543, many existing political constituencies would be affected sharply.

If the total number of seats increases, the transition may become politically and administratively smoother. A larger Lok Sabha creates a larger pool of seats, which may reduce the perception that women's reservation is only displacing existing political claims.

Thus, expansion was presented as a way to improve representation and facilitate women's reservation.

j. Government's Assurance and Opposition's Concern

The government reportedly indicated that the increase in seats would be done on a pro-rata basis. A pro-rata increase means that each State's seats would increase proportionately.

For example, if a State with ten seats receives a fifty per cent increase, it would get fifteen seats. A State with forty seats would get sixty seats. In such a model, the relative share of each State in the Lok Sabha would remain broadly unchanged.

The Opposition's concern was that such an assurance needed clear legal protection. An oral assurance, or even a provision in an ordinary law, was considered insufficient for an issue affecting federal balance.

The Opposition argued that if a pro-rata guarantee was intended, it should be written clearly into the constitutional amendment itself.

This objection was not merely procedural. It reflected a deeper fear that once the Lok Sabha was expanded and delimitation began, future seat allocation could shift more directly toward population. That could increase the political weight of high-population States and reduce the relative influence of States that had controlled population growth.

k. Why the Proposal Became Controversial

The controversy arose because three different issues were bundled together: women's reservation, increase in Lok Sabha seats and delimitation.

Each issue has its own logic, but combining them created political suspicion.

Concern over Delay in Women's Reservation

Many argued that women's reservation should not be delayed or made dependent on a contentious delimitation process.

The Constitution One Hundred and Sixth Amendment Act, 2023 had already provided for one-third reservation for women, but its implementation was linked to delimitation after the relevant Census figures were published.

Critics argued that women's reservation could be implemented within the existing Lok Sabha strength, at least as a transitional arrangement.

Concern over Federal Imbalance

States with lower fertility and slower population growth feared that population-based delimitation could reduce their relative voice in national decision-making.

This concern is important because Parliament decides national laws, taxation, welfare priorities, constitutional amendments and Centre-State relations.

Therefore, a change in seat distribution can alter the federal character of Indian politics.

Concern over Political Timing

Delimitation affects the basic structure of electoral competition. Redrawing boundaries may alter the social composition, caste profile, urban-rural balance and electoral outcome of constituencies.

Even if an independent Delimitation Commission conducts the exercise, political parties may fear that new constituency designs could benefit some regions or parties more than others.

Concern over Rushed Decision-Making

A change of this magnitude requires wide consultation with States, parliamentary committees, constitutional experts and civil society.

The Opposition argued that such a sensitive matter should not be rushed.

1. The Central Debate: Democracy versus Federalism

The delimitation debate can be understood as a clash between two valid constitutional arguments.

Democratic Argument

The democratic argument says that representation must follow population.

If one citizen's vote carries less weight simply because she lives in a more populous constituency, the system becomes unequal. From this perspective, delimitation based on updated population figures is necessary to restore democratic fairness.

This argument is based on the principle of equal citizenship.

Federal Argument

The federal argument says that India is not only a democracy of individuals but also a Union of States.

States that achieved population control through better health, education and social development should not lose political influence as a consequence of their success.

From this perspective, delimitation must not become a punishment for good governance.

Need for Balance

A mature constitutional solution must avoid both extremes.

- **India cannot indefinitely ignore population:** Doing so weakens democratic equality.
- **India cannot ignore federal consequences:** Doing so may create regional resentment.

- **India must design a balanced formula:** Such a formula should protect both citizen equality and State-level fairness.

The significance of delimitation lies precisely in this balancing role. It is not only about boundaries; it is about the distribution of democratic power.

m. Significance of Delimitation

Delimitation is significant for Indian democracy in several ways.

- **It Strengthens Representative Democracy:** Delimitation makes constituencies more equal in population. This improves the principle of equal representation.
- **It Improves Citizen-Representative Linkage:** Smaller and more balanced constituencies are easier to serve. MPs can remain better connected with citizens.
- **It Updates Electoral Geography:** India has witnessed rapid urbanisation, migration, metropolitan expansion and demographic shifts. Constituency boundaries drawn decades ago may no longer reflect present realities.
- **It Supports Social Justice:** Reserved seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes must reflect their population distribution. Delimitation helps update this representation.
- **It Enables Women's Reservation:** Women's reservation under the Constitution One Hundred and Sixth Amendment requires a delimitation-based mechanism for identifying and rotating reserved seats.
- **It Raises a Larger Constitutional Question:** Delimitation forces India to ask: how should a democratic federation distribute political power when different regions have followed different demographic paths?

n. Challenges in Delimitation

Unequal Population Growth

Different States have experienced different rates of population growth and fertility decline. This makes a single population-based formula politically difficult.

North-South Divide

Southern States generally achieved faster demographic transition. They fear losing relative influence. Northern and central States, with larger populations, argue that their citizens should not remain under-represented.

Delay in Women's Reservation

If women's reservation remains dependent on a politically difficult delimitation exercise, its implementation may be pushed further into the future.

Political Distrust

Delimitation can change constituency boundaries, caste composition, urban-rural balance and electoral profile. Therefore, political parties may suspect that the exercise could indirectly advantage their rivals.

Institutional Capacity

A larger Lok Sabha would require:

- **More seating space:** The physical and procedural capacity of Parliament must expand.
- **Stronger committee system:** More MPs should translate into better legislative scrutiny, not merely larger numbers.
- **More sitting days:** A larger House must have enough time for meaningful debate.
- **Better research support:** MPs need strong legislative and policy research assistance.

- **Improved digital infrastructure:** Modern parliamentary work requires better data systems, documentation and digital support.

o. Way Forward

Build Broad Political Consensus

India needs wide political agreement before undertaking a major delimitation exercise. The Union Government should consult State governments, political parties, the Election Commission, constitutional experts and civil society.

This is essential because delimitation affects not only elections but also the balance of power within the Union.

Refer the Matter to a Parliamentary Committee

A Joint Parliamentary Committee or a Standing Committee can examine different models, hear State-level concerns and recommend a balanced formula.

Such a committee-based process would reduce distrust and improve the quality of reform.

Provide Constitutional Clarity on Pro-Rata Protection

If a pro-rata increase is intended, it should be clearly written into the constitutional framework.

For an issue of such federal importance, oral assurances are not enough. Constitutional clarity can reduce suspicion and build trust.

Design a Balanced Formula

India should explore a formula that considers multiple factors:

- **Population:** Democratic equality requires attention to population.
- **Population-control performance:** States that stabilised population should not be punished.
- **Federal balance:** The relative voice of States must be protected.
- **Geography and administrative convenience:** Large, difficult and remote areas may need special consideration.
- **Social diversity:** Representation must remain inclusive.

A purely mathematical formula may not be sufficient for a diverse federation like India.

Avoid Indefinite Delay in Women's Reservation

Women's reservation should not become hostage to an unresolved delimitation debate.

If full delimitation becomes difficult, Parliament may consider a carefully designed transitional mechanism that allows women's reservation to begin without waiting endlessly for final seat redistribution.

Prepare Parliament for a Larger House

If expansion is eventually adopted, Parliament must prepare institutionally.

More members should mean better representation, stronger committees, deeper debates and improved legislative performance.

Conclusion

Delimitation is one of the most important questions in Indian constitutional politics because it determines how citizens and States are represented in the Lok Sabha.

The demand for increasing Lok Sabha seats arises from a genuine democratic concern: India's population has grown substantially, while parliamentary representation has remained almost frozen since the 1970s.

However, a purely population-based approach may create federal tensions. States that successfully controlled population growth should not feel that their reward is reduced political influence. At the same time, citizens in heavily populated constituencies should not remain permanently under-represented.

Similarly, women's reservation should not become hostage to an unresolved delimitation debate. The constitutional promise of women's political participation must be implemented with seriousness and timeliness.

The way forward lies in constitutional prudence. India must protect democratic equality, preserve federal balance, implement women's reservation and strengthen local democracy.

GS Paper III: Economics

2. Women's Economic Participation: From Workforce Entry to Leadership

a. Introduction

Women's participation in the economy is not merely a question of employment. It is closely linked with growth, dignity, equality, social justice and the quality of India's development. A country cannot fully realise its economic potential if nearly half of its population remains underused in productive work or excluded from positions of decision-making.

In recent years, India has witnessed an improvement in women's entry into the labour market. The Female Labour Force Participation Rate has risen, which shows that more women are either working or actively looking for work. This is a positive development. However, the deeper challenge is that women remain poorly represented in senior positions such as managers, legislators, senior officials, professors, board members and business owners.

The central issue, therefore, is not only that more women should work. The more important concern is that women should also rise to positions of authority, ownership and leadership. In simple terms, women are entering the economy in larger numbers, but they are still not reaching the commanding heights of the economy in sufficient numbers.

b. Understanding Female Labour Force Participation Rate

Female Labour Force Participation Rate refers to the share of women in the working-age population who are either employed or actively looking for employment.

In simple words, it includes two categories of women:

- **Women who are already working:** These include women engaged in salaried jobs, self-employment, agriculture, businesses, informal work, professional services or any other productive economic activity.
- **Women who are actively seeking work:** These are women who may not currently have employment but are willing to work and are searching for suitable opportunities.

For example, if there are one hundred women of working age and forty of them are either working or actively searching for work, the Female Labour Force Participation Rate would be forty per cent.

This distinction is important because the indicator does not count only women who already have jobs. It also reflects women's willingness and ability to participate in the economy.

c. Present Situation in India

India's Female Labour Force Participation Rate has improved in recent years: it increased from 33.9 per cent in 2022 to 40 per cent in 2025. This shows that more women are entering the labour market and women's economic visibility is gradually improving.

However, the gender gap remains large. Women's participation continues to be much lower than men's participation. More importantly, women's presence in ownership, senior management, academia, corporate boards and political decision-making remains limited.

This creates a major paradox. Women are increasingly present as workers, but they are not equally present as leaders. This gap between participation and power is the core theme of the issue.

Women's Economic Participation: From Entry to Leadership



d. Why Women's Economic Participation Matters

Women's participation in the economy is essential for India's development for several reasons.

It Supports Economic Growth

Women constitute almost half of India's population. If a large share of women remains outside productive economic activity, India cannot fully use its human capital.

Higher women's participation can increase production, household income, savings, consumption, tax revenue and national income. In simple terms, India cannot become a developed economy by using only half of its human resources.

It Promotes Inclusive Growth

Growth is meaningful only when its benefits are widely shared. If economic progress takes place while women remain excluded from jobs, assets and leadership, such growth remains incomplete.

Women's participation makes growth broader, fairer and more socially balanced.

It Improves Household Welfare

When women earn, the benefits often extend to the entire family. Their income is frequently used for children's education, nutrition, healthcare, sanitation, savings and elderly care.

Thus, women's work produces both economic and social gains.

It Strengthens Women's Empowerment

Employment gives women income, confidence and greater bargaining power within the household. It improves their ability to make decisions and reduces economic dependence.

Work, therefore, is not only a source of income. It is also a source of dignity, freedom and self-respect.

It is Linked with Viksit Bharat

India's aspiration to become a developed country by 2047 cannot be achieved if women remain outside formal and productive sectors in large numbers.

Women's economic participation is therefore central to India's long-term development vision.

e. The Main Paradox: Participation is Rising, Leadership is Not

The most important analytical point is the difference between participation and leadership.

- **Participation means economic presence:** Women may enter the economy as workers, employees, teachers, helpers, self-employed persons, agricultural workers or small entrepreneurs.
- **Leadership means economic power:** Women occupy leadership when they become chief executive officers, directors, professors, senior managers, legislators, senior officials and owners of enterprises.
- **The difference is crucial:** Participation gives women income. Leadership gives them influence. Participation improves presence. Leadership improves power. Participation is a necessary first step, but leadership is essential for real empowerment.

India's present challenge is that women's participation is increasing, but their leadership presence remains weak. This means women may be joining the economy, but they are still not adequately represented where decisions are made.

Female-owned establishments are around 27 per cent. Female faculty representation is around 16 per cent at IIT Bombay and 20 per cent at IIM Ahmedabad. The female-to-male ratio among legislators, senior officials and managers is only 13.1 per cent. These figures show that women are not absent from the economy, but they are still under-represented in positions of authority.

f. Women in Business Ownership

Business ownership is an important indicator of economic empowerment because ownership gives control over assets, income and decisions. A woman who owns an enterprise is not only a worker; she is also a decision-maker, employer and market participant.

However, female-owned establishments are only around 27 per cent. This shows that women's entrepreneurship remains limited.

Women entrepreneurs often face several barriers:

- **Limited access to credit:** Many women lack collateral, formal income records or independent financial history.
- **Weak property ownership:** Since many women do not own land or property, they find it difficult to secure loans.
- **Poor market networks:** Business growth often depends on contacts, mentorship, suppliers, buyers and informal networks. Women are frequently excluded from these spaces.
- **Family and social constraints:** Women may face restrictions on mobility, business travel, late working hours or independent decision-making.

This is significant because without ownership, women remain concentrated at the lower end of the economy. True economic empowerment requires women not only to earn wages, but also to own assets, manage enterprises and create employment for others.

g. Women in Corporate Leadership

Women's presence in corporate leadership has improved in some areas because of legal requirements, including provisions requiring certain companies to appoint women directors. However, representation on paper does not always mean real decision-making power.

In many cases, companies may appoint one or two women directors merely to satisfy legal requirements. When representation is visible but does not transfer real authority, it becomes tokenism.

Meaning of tokenism

Tokenism means giving symbolic representation without giving actual power.

For example, if a company appoints one woman director but excludes her from major strategic decisions, her presence may improve the company's image but not its decision-making culture.

Need for substantive representation

The real goal should be substantive representation. This means women should hold meaningful authority in boards, committees, management and executive positions.

Women must not be present only as symbolic members. They must be able to influence decisions, budgets, policies, hiring, workplace culture and future strategy.

h. Women in Academia

Women's under-representation in academia is a serious concern. The female faculty representation is around 16 per cent at IIT Bombay and 20 per cent at IIM Ahmedabad.

This is worrying because higher education institutions shape research, leadership, professional culture and future generations.

Women's low presence in faculty positions has several consequences:

- **Fewer role models for women students:** When women students do not see enough women professors, researchers or institutional leaders, they may find it harder to imagine themselves in similar roles.
- **Weak mentoring networks:** Women faculty often provide academic and career guidance to women students, especially in male-dominated fields.
- **Narrower research priorities:** Diversity among faculty members helps widen research questions, institutional priorities and academic debates.
- **Reproduction of inequality:** If women are under-represented in elite institutions, their absence is reproduced across knowledge systems, professional networks and leadership pipelines.

Therefore, women's participation in academia should not be understood only as a matter of employment. It is also a question of who shapes knowledge, who mentors future leaders and who influences institutional culture.

i. Women in Management and Senior Positions

The low female-to-male ratio among legislators, senior officials and managers shows that women are not adequately represented in decision-making roles.

This matters because senior positions decide:

- **Budgets:** Leadership decides where money is spent and which priorities receive attention.
- **Hiring and promotion policies:** Senior officials influence who gets recruited, promoted and trained.
- **Workplace norms:** Leadership shapes institutional culture, working hours, safety norms and grievance systems.
- **Gender-sensitive facilities:** Issues such as workplace safety, maternity support, childcare, flexible work, equal pay and gender-sensitive infrastructure often require leadership attention.

If women are absent from senior roles, institutions may fail to fully recognise women's concerns.

Leadership is therefore central to empowerment. Women must not remain concentrated only in entry-level, informal or low-paid work. They must be able to move into middle management, senior management and ownership roles.

j. Why Female Labour Force Participation is Rising

The rise in women's labour force participation can be explained through several factors.

- **Spread of Education:** More girls are completing school and college education. Education improves confidence, employability and awareness of opportunities.
- **Economic Pressure:** Rising costs of living, urbanisation and growing family aspirations are encouraging more women to work. In many households, a single income is no longer sufficient.
- **Growth of Self-Employment:** Many women are joining home-based work, small businesses, informal enterprises and local livelihood activities. Self-Help Groups have played an important role, especially in rural India, by improving women's access to savings, credit and collective economic activity.
- **Digital Economy:** Mobile banking, e-commerce, online work and digital platforms have allowed some women to participate in economic activity from or near their homes.
- **Government Schemes:** Government schemes related to skilling, loans, livelihoods and entrepreneurship have also contributed to women's economic entry.

However, a rise in participation does not automatically mean secure or dignified employment. Many women may be entering low-paid, informal or insecure work.

This is why the quality of work matters as much as the quantity of work.

k. Why Women Are Missing from Top Positions

The absence of women from leadership is not due to lack of ability. It is mainly the result of structural barriers.

Burden of Unpaid Care Work

Women spend much more time than men on cooking, cleaning, childcare, elderly care, water collection, fuel collection and household management.

This reduces their time for paid work, skill development, networking and career advancement.

Even when women work outside the home, they often continue to carry the main burden of domestic responsibilities.

Safety and Mobility Constraints

Women's employment choices are strongly shaped by public safety, transport safety and workplace safety.

Poor street lighting, unsafe transport, harassment, lack of secure accommodation and weak grievance redressal restrict women's mobility.

As a result, many women avoid jobs requiring night shifts, field visits, relocation or long travel.

Informal and Insecure Employment

Many women work in low-paid and insecure jobs without written contracts, maternity benefits, social security or promotion pathways.

Such work increases participation numbers but does not create a path toward leadership.

Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling refers to invisible barriers that prevent women from reaching top positions despite qualifications and ability.

These barriers include gender stereotypes, exclusion from informal networks, fewer promotions, lack of mentoring and assumptions about marriage, motherhood and family responsibilities.

Weak Career Pipeline

Leadership develops gradually through education, entry-level work, middle management and senior roles.

Many women drop out during mid-career because of childbirth, childcare, eldercare, family expectations or lack of flexible work. This reduces the number of women available for senior positions later.

Limited Access to Credit and Assets

Women often have limited ownership of land, property and financial assets. Without collateral and financial independence, they face difficulty in starting or expanding businesses.

Patriarchal Social Norms

In many families, men's work is seen as compulsory, while women's work is treated as optional.

Women may be discouraged from working after marriage or childbirth. Certain sectors such as manufacturing, technology, transport and construction may still be seen as unsuitable for women.

1. Quantity versus Quality of Women's Work

It is useful to distinguish between the quantity and quality of women's work.

Quantity of work

Quantity refers to the number of women entering the labour market.

A rise in Female Labour Force Participation Rate is positive because it shows that more women are economically active.

Quality of work

Quality refers to whether women receive decent jobs, equal wages, social security, safe workplaces, promotion opportunities and real decision-making power.

Why this distinction matters

If women are entering only low-paid, informal and insecure work, their economic empowerment remains limited.

Similarly, if companies appoint women directors only symbolically, leadership does not become meaningful.

True empowerment requires decent work and real authority. India must therefore move from merely counting women workers to improving the nature of women's work.

m. Government Measures

Several government and legal measures are relevant to women's economic participation.

- **Maternity Benefit Act:** It provides maternity leave and job protection in the formal sector.
- **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013:** It seeks to protect women from workplace harassment and create safer working environments.
- **Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana and National Rural Livelihoods Mission:** These promote Self-Help Groups and women's livelihoods, especially in rural areas.
- **Mudra Yojana and Stand-Up India:** These support micro-enterprises and entrepreneurship, including among women.
- **Skill India Mission:** It improves employability through skill development.
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao:** It supports girl child survival, education and social awareness.
- **Companies Act, 2013:** It requires certain companies to appoint women directors.
- **Women's Reservation Act, 2023:** It provides for one-third reservation for women in legislatures, subject to the required conditions for implementation.

These measures are important, but their impact depends on effective implementation, awareness, institutional capacity and social acceptance.

n. Challenges That Remain

Despite progress, several challenges continue to restrict women's economic empowerment.

- **Low Participation Compared to Men:** Women's labour force participation remains much lower than men's.
- **Under-Representation in Senior Roles:** Women remain poorly represented in management, academia, business ownership and decision-making.
- **Informal and Insecure Work:** A large share of women's work remains informal, insecure and poorly paid.
- **Heavy Unpaid Care Burden:** Domestic and care work continues to fall disproportionately on women.
- **Safety Concerns:** Unsafe transport, unsafe public spaces and workplace harassment restrict women's mobility and choices.
- **Wage Gaps:** Women often receive lower wages than men for similar or comparable work.
- **Digital Divide:** Limited access to smartphones, internet, digital literacy and online platforms restricts women's entry into modern job opportunities.
- **Tokenism:** Symbolic representation prevents women from gaining real decision-making power.
- **Weak Property Ownership:** Limited ownership of land, house and other assets reduces women's access to credit and entrepreneurship.

These challenges show that women's empowerment cannot be achieved through employment numbers alone. It requires changes in households, workplaces, markets, laws, institutions and social attitudes.

o. Way Forward

Create More Decent Jobs for Women

India must create more safe, formal and fairly paid jobs for women.

Labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, garments, food processing, electronics assembly, healthcare, education, tourism, care services and digital services can absorb large numbers of women if workplace conditions improve.

Reduce the Unpaid Care Burden

Affordable childcare centres, workplace crèches, elderly care support, flexible work options and parental leave for both men and women are necessary.

Care work should be treated as a shared social responsibility rather than only a woman's duty.

Improve Safety and Mobility

Safe public transport, better street lighting, last-mile connectivity, women's hostels near workplaces and strict enforcement of workplace harassment laws can increase women's freedom to work.

Move from Tokenism to Real Leadership

Women should be present not only as employees or symbolic directors, but also as senior managers, board committee members, chairpersons, chief executive officers and decision-makers.

Promotion systems should be transparent, and gender diversity should be treated as a serious institutional goal.

Support Women's Entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurs need collateral-free credit, property rights, financial literacy, digital training, mentorship, market access, e-commerce support and government procurement opportunities.

Women should become not only workers, but also owners, innovators and employers.

Improve Skilling for New Sectors

Skilling must focus on both traditional and emerging sectors.

Women need access to digital literacy, financial literacy, artificial intelligence, green jobs, healthcare, manufacturing, coding, technology and entrepreneurship.

This will help women move from low-value work to higher-value employment.

Ensure Equal Pay and Decent Work

Employment becomes empowering only when it provides dignity, security and fairness.

Equal wages, formal contracts, maternity benefits, social security, safe workplaces and grievance redressal are essential.

Strengthen Political Representation

Women's political empowerment and economic empowerment reinforce each other.

When women are present in legislatures and decision-making bodies, policies are more likely to respond to women's needs.

Conclusion

Women's economic participation in India is increasing, and this is a positive sign for inclusive growth. However, the low presence of women in leadership positions shows that deep structural barriers still remain.

The goal should not be limited to raising the Female Labour Force Participation Rate. India must ensure that women have access to decent work, equal wages, safe workplaces, credit, assets, career mobility and leadership opportunities.

For India to become a developed economy by 2047, women must move from the margins of the workforce to the centre of decision-making.

Reader's Note — About This Current Affairs Compilation

Dear Aspirant,

This document is part of the PrepAlpine Current Affairs Series — designed to bring clarity, structure, and precision to your daily UPSC learning.

While every effort has been made to balance depth with brevity, please keep the following in mind:

1. Orientation & Purpose

This compilation is curated primarily from the UPSC Mains perspective — with emphasis on conceptual clarity, analytical depth, and interlinkages across GS papers.

However, the PrepAlpine team is simultaneously developing a dedicated Prelims-focused Current Affairs Series, designed for:

- factual coverage
- data recall
- Prelims-style MCQs
- objective pattern analysis

This Prelims Edition will be released separately as a standalone publication.

2. Content Length

Some sections may feel shorter or longer depending on topic relevance and news density. To fit your personal preference, you may freely resize or summarize sections using any LLM tool (ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) at your convenience.

3. Format Flexibility

The formatting combines:

- paragraphs
- lists
- tables
- visual cues

—all optimised for retention.

If you prefer a specific style (lists → paras, paras → tables, etc.), feel free to convert using any free LLM.

4. Monthly Current Affairs Release

The complete Monthly Current Affairs Module will be released soon, optimized to a compact 100–150 pages — comprehensive yet concise, exam-ready, and revision-efficient.

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