

## A Study on Women Empowerment as an Engine for Inclusive Growth

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### Abstract

Women empowerment has become a vital catalyst for inclusive growth in developing economies such as India, where persistent social and economic inequalities limit equal participation in development processes. Enhancing women's capabilities through skill development, entrepreneurship, and institutional support improves their socio-economic status while fostering sustainable growth and social equity. This study explores the role of women empowerment in promoting inclusive growth through a case study of Jilha Gramin Vikas Yantran, Solapur, an organization actively supporting women's livelihoods and self-reliance. It also incorporates insights from the governance model of Punyashloka Ahilyadevi Holkar, known for her emphasis on welfare, ethical leadership, and women-centric development. Adopting a descriptive and analytical research design, the study utilizes primary data from beneficiaries along with secondary sources such as reports and academic literature. The findings indicate that institutional initiatives have significantly strengthened women's economic participation, decision-making ability, social confidence, and psychological empowerment, thereby contributing to inclusive development at the grassroots level.

**Keywords:** *Women Empowerment, Inclusive Growth, Jilha Gramin Vikas Yantran, Ahilyadevi Holkar, Skill Development, Rural Development*

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### 1. Introduction

Inclusive growth has become a central objective of India's development strategy, focusing not only on economic expansion but also on the equitable distribution of opportunities and benefits across all sections of society. Among its key determinants, women empowerment holds a critical position, as women constitute nearly half of the population and significantly contribute to household welfare, community development, and national progress. However, persistent barriers such as limited access to education, skill development, financial resources, and decision-making power continue to restrict their full participation in the growth process. In this context, grassroots institutions and government-supported mechanisms play a vital role in promoting women empowerment, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Jilha Gramin Vikas Yantran (SHG) in Solapur serves as an important institutional framework by providing financial assistance, training, and market linkages that enhance women's entrepreneurial capabilities and livelihood opportunities, thereby facilitating their integration into mainstream economic activities (Kabeer, 1999). The philosophical foundation of women-centric development in India can be traced to the governance ideals of Punyashloka Ahilyadevi Holkar, whose administration emphasized welfare, justice, and self-reliance among marginalized sections, particularly women. Integrating such historical perspectives with contemporary empowerment initiatives offers a comprehensive understanding of inclusive and sustainable development. Accordingly, the present study examines women empowerment as a driver of inclusive growth through the case of Jilha Gramin Vikas Yantran, Solapur, while drawing inspiration from Ahilyadevi Holkar's leadership vision (Sen, 1999). Women's

empowerment is reflected through multiple interrelated dimensions. It enhances self-confidence and independence, enabling women to recognize their rights and effectively perform their responsibilities in both personal and social spheres. It strengthens decision-making capacity and autonomy across family, community, and institutional levels. Empowerment also operates across sociological, psychological, political, cultural, and economic domains, contributing to holistic development. Furthermore, it aims to eliminate gender-based discrimination embedded within social structures and institutions, thereby promoting equality and inclusive participation in development processes (Malhotra et al., 2002).

## **2. Background of Study**

Inclusive growth has emerged as a fundamental objective of India's development agenda, aiming to ensure that economic progress benefits all segments of society in an equitable manner. Despite rapid economic expansion, disparities based on gender, region, and socio-economic status continue to persist, limiting the participation of marginalized groups in development processes. Among these, women represent a significant demographic whose potential remains underutilized due to structural barriers such as limited access to education, financial services, skill development, and decision-making opportunities. Strengthening women's participation in economic and social spheres has therefore become a strategic priority for achieving sustainable and inclusive development in India (Klasen & Lamanna, 2009). The years, various government initiatives and institutional frameworks have been introduced to promote women empowerment, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. Programs such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs), microfinance schemes, and skill development initiatives have played a crucial role in enhancing women's economic independence and entrepreneurial capabilities. Institutions like Jilha Gramin Vikas Yantran in Solapur exemplify grassroots-level interventions that provide financial assistance, training, and market support to women, enabling them to engage in income-generating activities and improve their standard of living. Such initiatives not only contribute to individual empowerment but also strengthen community development and local economic growth (Deininger & Liu, 2013).

The conceptual foundation of women empowerment in India is deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts, including the governance model of Punyashloka Ahilyadevi Holkar, whose leadership emphasized welfare, justice, and self-reliance. Her approach to governance promoted inclusivity and supported the socio-economic upliftment of women and marginalized groups. Integrating these traditional values with modern development strategies provides a comprehensive perspective on sustainable empowerment. In this context, the present study focuses on examining women empowerment as a driver of inclusive growth through the case of Jilha Gramin Vikas Yantran, Solapur, highlighting its role in enhancing women's economic participation, decision-making capacity, and overall socio-economic well-being (Duflo, 2012).

## **3. Scope of the Study**

- Women empowerment initiatives in Solapur district
- Economic, social, and psychological empowerment outcomes
- Contribution to inclusive growth at the local level
- Contemporary relevance of Ahilyadevi Holkar's vision

## **• Limitations of the Study**

- The study is confined to Solapur district
- Limited sample size
- Time and resource constraints
- Possible personal bias in respondents' answers

#### **4. Objectives of the Study**

- To examine the role of women empowerment in promoting inclusive growth by analyzing how increased participation of women contributes to equitable development
- To analyze the socio-economic impact of empowerment initiatives on women beneficiaries
- To evaluate the psychological impact of empowerment programs on women
- To assess the role of Jilha Gramin Vikas Yantran (SHG) in facilitating women empowerment
- To examine the alignment of empowerment initiatives with the vision of Punyashloka Ahilyadevi Holkar

#### **5. Research Methodology**

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design, with a specific focus on a case study of women empowerment initiatives implemented by the Jilha Gramin Vikas Yantran in Solapur district. This methodological approach facilitates a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of empowerment outcomes at the grassroots level, particularly in terms of their role in promoting inclusive growth. Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized to ensure a holistic analysis. Primary data were collected from women beneficiaries associated with the programme through structured questionnaires, personal interviews, and informal discussions, enabling the researcher to capture nuanced insights related to income generation, skill development, self-confidence, and decision-making capabilities. Secondary data were sourced from books, research journals, government reports, policy documents, and relevant online resources, thereby providing a strong theoretical and contextual foundation for the study.

The sample design of the study is centered on Solapur district as the geographical area, with women beneficiaries of the Jilha Gramin Vikas Yantran forming the unit of analysis. A total of 103 respondents were selected using purposive sampling technique, ensuring that only relevant and information-rich participants were included in the study. For data analysis, a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques was employed to derive meaningful interpretations. Percentage analysis and average methods were used to quantify responses and identify trends, while qualitative interpretation was applied to understand the deeper socio-economic and psychological dimensions of women empowerment. This integrated analytical approach enhances the reliability and validity of the findings and supports a comprehensive evaluation of empowerment outcomes. The questionnaire is designed to measure Women Empowerment across three core dimensions: 1) Economic Empowerment, 2) Social Empowerment, 3) Psychological Empowerment. 5-Point Likert Scale is used. These techniques were used to assess changes in economic status, employment opportunities, social empowerment and Psychological empowerment.

#### **5. Review of Literature**

Women empowerment is widely acknowledged as a fundamental driver of inclusive and sustainable development, as it enhances productivity, reduces poverty, and ensures equitable distribution of

resources across society. Theoretical perspectives highlight that empowerment is a multidimensional process involving access to resources, decision-making power, and tangible outcomes that improve women's status in society (Kabeer, 1999). Expanding on this, Sen (2001) emphasized through the capability approach that true development lies in expanding human freedoms, and empowering women plays a central role in achieving this objective. When women actively participate in economic activities, it not only strengthens household welfare but also contributes to improvements in education, healthcare, and governance, thereby fostering inclusive growth at the national level.

Historical insights further reinforce the significance of women empowerment in development. The governance of Punyashloka Ahilyadevi Holkar is often cited as a model of inclusive and welfare-oriented leadership, where justice, compassion, and socio-economic security for women were prioritized (Gupta, 2025). Her initiatives, such as promoting skill development and employment opportunities for widows and disadvantaged women, created sustainable livelihoods and strengthened local economies. For instance, the promotion of weaving activities leading to the establishment of the Maheshwari saree industry demonstrates how empowerment can simultaneously uplift women and contribute to economic growth (Pramod, 2024).

From a socio-cultural perspective, women's status in India has evolved significantly over time. While women in ancient India enjoyed relatively higher social and educational status, their position declined in later periods due to social constraints and discrimination (Sobha Rani, 2024). Contemporary empowerment initiatives aim to restore this balance by enhancing autonomy, economic independence, and participation in decision-making processes. Government policies and schemes have further strengthened women's role in socio-economic and political spheres, reinforcing empowerment as a key instrument for achieving inclusive growth and sustainable development in modern India.

## **6. Research Gap:**

From the review of existing literature, it is evident that numerous studies have examined women empowerment, inclusive growth, and the role of NGOs. However, there is limited empirical research that integrates a localized case study of women empowerment institutions in Solapur district, and Historical leadership insights, particularly from Punyashloka Ahilyadevi Holkar's vision, within the framework of inclusive growth. The present study attempts to bridge this gap by analyzing Jilha Gramin Vikas Yantran, Solapur, as a model of women empowerment contributing to inclusive growth, while drawing philosophical and governance insights from Ahilyadevi Holkar's vision.

## **7. Discussion and Analysis**

Women empowerment is a multidimensional process encompassing economic, social, and psychological aspects that collectively contribute to inclusive and sustainable development. It involves enhancing women's ability to make strategic life choices by improving their access to education, skills, financial resources, and institutional support systems. Such empowerment enables women to achieve economic independence, generate income, and actively participate in development initiatives. Institutional mechanisms play a crucial role by providing training, market access, and decision-making platforms, which lead to increased employment opportunities, improved livelihoods, and greater social participation. Empirical observations indicate that empowered women contribute significantly to better family health, higher educational attainment among children, and overall poverty reduction, thereby strengthening the foundation of inclusive growth.

Inclusive growth, as emphasized by the World Bank, focuses on both the pace and pattern of development, ensuring that economic progress is equitably distributed across all sections of society. In this context, women empowerment becomes a key driver of balanced and participatory growth. Echoing this perspective, former President Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam highlighted that empowering women is essential for building a developed nation, as it leads to stronger families, stable societies, and sustainable national progress. Women’s perspectives, values, and contributions play a vital role in shaping social harmony and economic resilience. Therefore, promoting women empowerment is not only a matter of social justice but also a strategic necessity for achieving inclusive growth and long-term development.

**8. Data Analysis and Interpretation**

**a) Factor-wise Mean Score**

1. Economic Empowerment		2. Social Empowerment		3. Psychological Empowerment	
Statement	Mean Scores	Statement	Mean Scores	Statement	Mean Scores
Income increased	3.96	Consulted in family decisions	4.26	Comfortable expressing opinions	4.23
New skills acquired	4.19	Community participation	4.5	Proud of myself	4.35
Household contribution	4.37	Family respect	4.53	Responsibility for decisions	4.64
Savings & expenditure management	4.42	Freedom of movement	4.48	Freedom of choice	4.58
<b>Average Economic Mean Score</b>	<b>4.235</b>	<b>Average Social Mean Score</b>	<b>4.4425</b>	<b>Average Psychological Mean Score</b>	<b>4.45</b>

**Interpretation:** The factor-wise average means score analysis indicates that women exhibit a very high level of empowerment across all three dimensions. Psychological empowerment (4.45) emerged as the strongest dimension, followed closely by social empowerment (4.44) and economic empowerment (4.24). This reflects strong decision-making ability, social participation, and economic independence among the respondents.

**b) Factor-wise Analysis (Grouped Interpretation)**

Factors	Mean Score	Conclusion
<b>Economic Empowerment</b> (Income increase, household contribution, financial management)	3.96 – 4.41	Respondents are economically stable with good financial confidence.

<b>Social Empowerment</b> (Respect, participation in social activities, expressing opinions)	4.20 – 4.53	Employment/income has enhanced social respect and participation
<b>Psychological Empowerment</b> (Self-confidence, pride, responsibility, freedom of choice)	4.23 – 4.58	Very strong self-confidence, autonomy, and personal growth

All weighted mean scores are **above 3.9**, indicating **high overall agreement**. The strongest impact is seen in: Freedom of choice, Confidence in responsibilities, Respect and self-pride. The findings clearly show that the respondents experience economic, social, and psychological empowerment.

**c) Summary Interpretation of Women Empowerment Dimensions**

Dimension	Key Outcome	Interpretation
Economic	High agreement on income growth, employability, and financial management	Indicates increased economic independence and financial self-reliance among women.
Social	High participation in family decisions and community activities	Reflects improved social status, mobility, and inclusion in family and society.
Psychological	Strong confidence, self-expression, and decision-making ability	Demonstrates enhanced self-esteem, autonomy, and personal agency.
Overall	Predominantly positive responses	Confirms holistic empowerment contributing to inclusive growth.

**10. Conclusion**

The findings reveal that women’s empowerment is not limited to a single dimension but occurs simultaneously across economic, social, and psychological domains. This integrated empowerment contributes to enhanced autonomy, improved quality of life, and greater gender equity. The study confirms that women empowerment serves as a powerful engine for inclusive growth. The case of **Jilha Gramin Vikas Yantran, Solapur**, demonstrates that skill development, entrepreneurship promotion, and financial independence significantly enhance women’s economic, social, and psychological well-being. Integrating these findings with the visionary leadership of **Punyashloka Ahilyadevi Holkar** highlights the enduring relevance of women-centric, welfare-oriented governance in achieving sustainable and inclusive development. The strong outcomes in social and psychological empowerment closely align with **Punyashloka Ahilyadevi Holkar’s governance philosophy**, which emphasized dignity, self-reliance, moral strength, and women-led development. Institutions like **Jilha Gramin Vikas Yantran** operationalize these timeless ideals through modern empowerment mechanisms, reinforcing inclusive growth at the grassroots level.

**11. Suggestions**

- Strengthening access to microfinance and financial literacy
- Development of local and online market linkages
- Encouragement of social participation through self-help groups
- Continuous skill upgradation and psychological empowerment initiatives
- Replication of successful models like Jilha Gramin Vikas Yantran across region

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