

**Transformation of Women’s Role in Society**  
**Prof. Pooja Ashok Kamble** Kanya Mahavidyalaya Miraj

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**Abstract**

The role of women in society has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past two centuries. From being confined to domestic responsibilities to actively participating in politics, education, and the workforce, women have fought for and secured significant rights. This paper explores key historical milestones, challenges, and the future of women’s empowerment. While progress has been made, persistent issues such as gender pay gaps, political underrepresentation, and gender-based violence highlight the ongoing struggle for equality. Furthermore, the role of intersectionality, cultural differences, and emerging global trends in feminism will be examined to provide a more nuanced understanding of women’s evolving status.

**Key words** – Transformation, feminism, suffrage, empowerment.

**Introduction**

Throughout history, women have been limited by societal norms, with restricted access to education, employment, and political power. However, over time, women have challenged these norms, advocating for their rights and achieving significant legal and social victories. This transformation has been shaped by industrialization, feminist movements, and legal reforms. Despite progress, gender disparities remain, requiring continued efforts toward true equality. As different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds shape women’s experiences uniquely, it is crucial to address how these factors intersect to either hinder or support gender equality efforts. The paper will also explore the modern challenges women face in digital spaces, the gig economy, and environmental movements.

**Historical Evolution of Women’s Roles**

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century: The Rise of Feminism and Industrialization.

**Industrialization and Workforce Entry**

The Industrial Revolution (18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century) opened limited economic opportunities for women in factories, textile mills, and domestic service. Although working conditions were harsh and wages were low, this period marked the beginning of women’s financial independence and labour rights activism.

However, the opportunities were not the same for all women. In Western societies, middle- and upper-class women were still expected to adhere to traditional domestic roles, while working-class women faced gruelling labour conditions. Meanwhile, in many non-Western societies, colonial and economic systems reinforced existing gender roles, limiting women’s ability to participate in industrial work.

**Women’s Suffrage and First-Wave Feminism**

The first wave of feminism emerged in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, focusing on securing legal and political rights, particularly voting rights.

**Landmark events included:**

- Seneca Falls Convention (1848, USA): The first organized women’s rights meeting.
- New Zealand (1893): First country to grant women voting rights.
- United Kingdom (1918, full suffrage in 1928): Led by the suffragettes.
- United States (1920): The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment granted voting rights.

While these victories were crucial, many women of color and indigenous women were still excluded from these rights, demonstrating the limitations of early feminism. In many African and Asian nations, colonial rule continued to restrict women's participation in politics and society, delaying suffrage movements.

### **The 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Political and Economic Inclusion**

#### **Women's Role During the World Wars**

During World War I and II, women stepped into roles previously dominated by men, working in factories, medicine, and military support services. While many were forced to return to domestic life post-war, these experiences fuelled demands for workforce equality.

In many cases, women in colonized nations contributed significantly to war efforts, serving as nurses, spies, and resistance fighters. For example, women in India played crucial roles in the independence movement, with figures like Sarojini Naidu and Rani Lakshmi Bai leading protests and military campaigns against British rule.

#### **Second-Wave Feminism and Legal Reforms**

The second wave of feminism (1960s–1980s) expanded beyond suffrage, focusing on workplace discrimination, reproductive rights, and gender equality in education.

##### **Key legal victories included:**

- Equal Pay Act (1963, USA): Banned gender-based wage discrimination.
- Title IX (1972, USA): Guaranteed equal educational opportunities.
- Roe v. Wade (1973, USA): Legalized abortion, granting reproductive autonomy.

During this period, feminist movements became more diverse, addressing race, class, and sexuality. Women in the Global South began advocating for rights beyond Western feminist concerns, including access to clean water, education, and land ownership.

#### **Women's Role in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

##### **Women in Leadership and Politics**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen an increase in women's participation in government, though progress remains slow.

##### **Key figures include:**

- Angela Merkel (Germany, 2005–2021): One of the most influential global leaders.
- Kamala Harris (USA, 2021–present): First female Vice President of the U.S.

Despite these successes, women still hold only 26.5% of parliamentary seats worldwide (World Economic Forum, 2023). In many Middle Eastern, African, and Asian nations, political participation remains challenging due to cultural and legal restrictions.

#### **Economic Disparities and Workforce Challenges**

##### **Despite legal advancements, wage inequality persists:**

- Women earn 16% less than men for the same work globally.
- Women make up only 28% of STEM professionals, highlighting continued gender disparities in high-paying fields.

In addition, the gig economy and digital workspaces present both opportunities and risks. Women are increasingly entering freelancing and remote work, but they often face job insecurity and lower pay compared to male freelancers.

#### **Emerging Challenges and Future Prospects**

##### **Digital Feminism and Technology**

Digital feminism has emerged as a powerful force, using social media platforms to advocate for gender equality. Hashtags like #MeToo, #TimesUp, and #HeForShe have fueled global movements against harassment and discrimination.

However, online harassment has also surged, with female journalists, activists, and public figures facing cyber threats, doxxing, and deepfake technology. Stronger digital protection laws are needed to address these risks.

### **Healthcare Disparities and Women's Rights**

Despite medical advancements, women still face healthcare disparities, particularly in developing nations where maternal mortality rates remain high. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that 295,000 women died from pregnancy-related complications in 2017, most of which were preventable.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated gender-based healthcare disparities, limiting access to contraception, prenatal care, and mental health support while increasing rates of domestic violence during lockdowns.

### **Women in Artificial Intelligence and Future Technologies**

With AI and automation shaping the future of work, gender bias in technology is a growing concern. AI algorithms trained on biased datasets can reinforce discriminatory hiring practices.

Initiatives like Women in AI, Black Girls Code, and Girls Who Code are pushing for greater female representation in AI development to ensure technology is built with inclusivity in mind.

### **Environmental and Climate Change Advocacy**

Women play a critical role in environmental movements, particularly in developing countries where they are responsible for resource management. Greta Thunberg has been a prominent voice in climate activism, inspiring young women to lead sustainability initiatives.

Many indigenous women have also been key activists in land and water conservation, particularly in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. However, they often face persecution and violence for their environmental work.

### **Conclusion**

The evolution of women's roles in society is a testament to their resilience and determination to achieve equality. While significant strides have been made, challenges remain in the form of political underrepresentation, wage inequality, digital harassment, healthcare disparities, and biases in emerging technologies.

The future of gender equality will depend on sustained advocacy, legal reforms, and technological advancements. With increased representation in leadership, STEM, and activism, women will continue to shape societies and create a more inclusive world for future generations.