

Need and status of women veterinarians for Viksit Bharat @ 2047

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Abstract

India has long been a developing country. To change this, the government has aimed to transform into a developed nation by 2047. One of the key challenges in achieving this vision is women's empowerment and increasing their involvement in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. Despite the increased literacy rate over the decades, women are underrepresented in these fields. This gap stems from societal and cultural norms discouraging women from pursuing STEM careers. The traditionally male-dominated veterinary profession significantly shifted, with female students outnumbering males. The progress can be attributed to the government initiatives and schemes aimed at educating the girl child, such as Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, and *Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra*. However, women are still facing challenges like gender bias, work-life balance struggles, and misconceptions about the profession, particularly in rural areas. Encouraging women to participate in leadership roles and explore entrepreneurship in the veterinary sector, contributing to economic and gender equality.

Introduction

Viksit Bharat@2047 is an ambitious government initiative to transform our nation into a developed entity by its 100th Independence Day. This initiative addresses key development areas, including economic growth, social progress, environmental sustainability, and good governance. The government is focusing on four major groups, namely 'Garib' (Poor), 'Mahilayen' (Women), 'Yuva' (Youth), and 'Annadata' (Farmer). Efforts are being made to strengthen these four pillars, but cultural and societal norms have created a significant gender gap in economic contributions, hindering balanced progress across the sectors. Women in India were mostly confined to their homes in previous times, as they were idealized as powerless. In the recent past, this scenario has changed, and many women are breaking these barriers and

are excelling in their respective fields of work. One such field is Veterinary science, which has traditionally been male-dominated. Today, however, women surpass men in enrollment at educational institutions in this field and contribute to animal health care, research, and education. This change highlights women's role and how they are becoming more influential in shaping the profession's future and aligning with the broader goals of Viksit Bharat.

Constitutional and legal provisions for women in India:

India's constitution grants women equality through its fundamental rights, duties, and principles. It also encourages the state governments to empower women by neutralizing their socio-economic, educational, and political disadvantages. Some key constitutional provisions include:

Table 1: Acts and their article number

S.No.	Act	Article
1.	Right to equality	Article 14
2.	Prohibition of discrimination	Article 15(i)
3.	Equality of opportunity for all citizens relating to employment	Article 16
4.	Right to education	Article 21A
5.	The right of children to free and compulsory education Act	RTE Act, 2009
6.	Fundamental duty	Article 51A

To uphold the constitutional mandate, the states have made several legislative measures to ensure equal rights, to overcome social discrimination, and to address various atrocities. Some of the laws to safeguard women are:

Table 2: Acts and their year number

S.No.	Act	Year
1.	The Employees' State Insurance Act	1948
2.	The Special Marriage Act	1954
3.	The Maternity Benefit Act	1961
4.	The Equal Remuneration Act	1976
5.	The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act	2005

Initiatives for women:

Since independence, the state and central government have implemented various initiatives to enhance women's education, reduce the gender gap, and increase their contribution to the nation's economy. The recent initiatives that the government has started were national commission for women, reservation for local self – government, the national plan for the girl child national policy for the empowerment of women, *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*, *Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra*, women helpline scheme etc., are few schemes that help women in improving the women empowerment and supporting their development.

History of women in the veterinary field

In India, the doors for women to pursue veterinary education opened in 1948, when Madras Veterinary College at Vepery, Chennai, provided admissions for girls. Dr. Sakkubhai Ramchandran is the first woman vet of India to graduate in 1952 and later assumed many prestigious posts and retired as a scientist from IVRI. Later, following in her footsteps, Dr. Puspha Ranaparkhe and Dr. Amritha Patel have paved the way for the youngsters. Indian Association of Women Veterinarians was formed on 2nd October, 1985, providing a platform for women veterinarians to exchange thoughts and ideas about veterinary careers. Currently, female students outnumber male students in college admissions. This is leading to a change in gender dynamics within the profession.

Status of women veterinarians in India

According to World Bank data, the female literacy rate was around 8-9% when India gained independence in 1947. However, over the decades, this has improved significantly. As of 2023, it has increased to 70.3%. Creating awareness about the importance of the girl child has

been the government's priority since independence, and it has made notable progress in educating and empowering women through various government initiatives, policies, and social campaigns. This helped break the cultural and societal educational barriers and promoted gender equality. This has led to an increase in the admissions of girl students in higher education institutions, including veterinary institutions. Even though challenges like gender bias and work-life balance exist, women are moving and advancing towards empowerment, further highlighting their role in shaping India's future. In recent years, there has been a significant rise in the number of women enrolling in veterinary colleges, with many states' agricultural universities reporting that over 50% of their veterinary students are female. Despite this encouraging trend in education, women's participation in field-level veterinary jobs remains limited. Several factors contribute to this gap, including safety concerns, societal expectations, limited mobility, and inadequate infrastructure in rural areas where much veterinary work is required. Furthermore, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions within veterinary institutions, research organizations, and policy-making bodies, highlighting the need for systemic changes to ensure equitable opportunities across all levels of the profession.

The need for women in the development of the animal husbandry sector:

The animal husbandry sector is an integral part of agriculture. This sector contributes about 4.11 per cent of GDP and 25.46 per cent of total Agricultural GDP (Dash S, 2017). Most farmers rely on livestock rearing or their subsidiary income, which complements their agricultural activities. In rural areas, most livestock are managed by women. They are involved in

daily routines like feeding, milking, and ensuring the health and welfare of animals. Government initiatives and awareness campaigns improve productivity, contributing to the nation's economic growth.

An increase in the female literacy rate has contributed to the rise in the working force within the animal husbandry sector. Women veterinarians play a pivotal role in developing the animal husbandry sector through their commitment to innovation and research, which has led to significant advancement that directly impacts the nation's productivity and economic growth. Women tend to be empathetic and compassionate towards the suffering of the livestock and the challenges faced by the farmers in rearing them. This also contributes to the well-being and welfare of the animals. Women are also contributing to research and development by taking part in advanced technologies to enhance the productivity of livestock farming. As they work closely with the farmer, they can develop rapport with rural women and act as an extension agent in disseminating innovative technologies. Rural women also feel comfortable sharing their concerns and seeking advice related to livestock management, fostering greater knowledge exchange.

The integration and empowerment of women in animal husbandry are a matter of equity and a strategic imperative for sustainable rural development. By recognizing and supporting their role, India can unlock significant potential in economic growth and social transformation within the agricultural sector.

Way forward: women veterinarians' empowerment

Realizing the role of women veterinarians in making India a developed country, it is essential to develop strategies to empower women. Their involvement may

improve animal health care, rural development, and the nation's economy.

Policy development: The government should initiate policies and schemes to decrease the gender gap and support women's empowerment. Reducing this gender gap empowers women and contributes to a nation's economic growth. **Gender gap:** Even though female students outnumber males, there is a considerable gender gap. Due to societal norms, many are not pursuing their careers. The change in this ideology helps increase women's participation in the workforce and promotes gender equality.

Remove misconceptions about the profession: There are several misconceptions about the veterinary profession in rural areas, such as that it is only for males. This mindset should be changed by educating communities and promoting women veterinarians' success stories to break the profession's stereotypes.

Promoting leadership: While women are increasingly visible in veterinary education, they are underrepresented in leadership roles. Women should be encouraged to actively participate in leadership roles and contribute to decision-making, strengthening their influence and impact in the veterinary field.

Encouraging entrepreneurship: Women veterinarians should be encouraged to take entrepreneurial roles, such as establishing veterinary clinics, starting livestock farming ventures, and providing employment to rural women. The government should also provide support, such as finance and resources, to establish their business and contribute to the economy and rural development. **Work-life balance:** Balancing work and family responsibilities is a significant challenge for women in the veterinary profession. Creating flexible work schedules, parental leave, and improved work environments, like remote consultation services options, helps them excel in the profession without compromising family responsibilities.

Conclusion:

Women's empowerment is crucial for achieving Viksit Bharat @2047. The shift in gender dynamics in the veterinary profession represents a significant transformation. However, the challenges, such as gender bias and work-life balance, are hindering the full participation of women in their respective fields. To address these issues, the government should implement initiatives and schemes to reduce the gender gap and discrimination, encouraging women to engage in decision-making, enhancing their influence in the veterinary sector, and contributing to societal progress. In conclusion, this leads to gender equality, contributing to development and economic growth regardless of gender. By empowering women and addressing the barriers they face, India can move towards its goal of becoming a developed country by 2047.

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