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Women, STEM Careers and a More Receptive Industry

Context:

- On World Youth Skills Day 2025, India faces a key challenge: despite women making up 43% of STEM graduates—the highest globally—only 27% work in STEM roles.
- While female labour force participation has risen to 41.7% (PLFS 2023-24), rural women show higher engagement than urban women due to formal employment barriers.
- Globally, only 31.5% of researchers are women (UNESCO 2021), highlighting the education-employment gap.
- Closing this gap could add up to \$700 billion to India's GDP by 2025 (McKinsey), with the World Bank noting a potential 1% GDP growth boost if female participation reaches 50%.

Government Vision for STEM Skilling and Women's Empowerment

- The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has laid a foundation for improving STEM education access and retention in India, integrating academic learning with skills development and life skills training.
- The Ministry of Education is focusing on revitalising Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and expanding vocational skilling, especially in rural areas, making quality technical education more accessible to youth across India.
- **Viksit Bharat and Gender Budgeting**
 - This effort aligns with the Prime Minister's vision of Viksit Bharat, where women's economic participation is seen as essential for inclusive growth.
 - Reflecting this, the share of the gender budget has increased from 6.8% in 2024-25 to 8.8% in 2025-26, with ₹4.49 lakh crore allocated toward gender-focused programmes.
- **Union Budget 2025-26 Initiatives**
 - The Union Budget 2025-26 introduced term loans for women entrepreneurs, new National Skill Training Institutes, and investments in technology-driven skilling.
 - Together with policies like Skill India, Digital India, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and PM Vishwakarma Yojana, the framework is geared toward empowering women through skills and opportunities.
- **The Role of Industry**
 - Despite government efforts, policy alone cannot fully bridge the education-to-employment gap for women in STEM.
 - Industry must take an active role, not just as recruiters but as partners in enabling women's career transitions through mentorship, reskilling, and workplace inclusivity.

Industry as the Missing Link in Women's STEM Careers

- While government policies focus on skilling, industry plays a crucial role in ensuring women transition from education to employment.
- Persistent social norms—such as viewing **technical trades as masculine**—create invisible barriers that discourage women from entering or staying in STEM fields.
- Studies by the World Bank and UNESCO show women leave these fields not due to a lack of ability, but because of unwelcoming workplaces, lack of family support, and deeply gendered roles.

Addressing Workplace and Social Barriers

- To truly unlock women's potential, issues like workplace safety, equitable pay, and support for career breaks related to marriage or caregiving must be addressed.
- Changing perceptions within families and communities is as important as providing skills.

Private Sector Initiatives and Community Engagement

- India's private sector is beginning to take responsibility through mentoring programmes, industry-linked training, and partnerships with educational institutions.
- A notable example is **UN Women's WeSTEM programme**, run in collaboration with the Governments of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, with support from the Micron Foundation.
- WeSTEM not only provides skills but also engages families, promotes workplace safety, and introduces women role models, recognising that mindsets must evolve for skilling efforts to succeed.

A Blueprint for Industry Leadership in Women's STEM Careers

- To bridge the gap between education and employment for women in STEM, industry must take proactive leadership.
- This includes partnerships with educational institutions, structured mentorship networks connecting professionals with students, and workplace policies that support life transitions such as marriage, childbirth, and caregiving, while ensuring safety and inclusivity.

Conclusion

- The real question is not whether India can afford to invest in women's STEM careers, but whether industry can afford not to.
 - Equipping women with skills and opportunities strengthens not just individual careers but the fabric of society itself.
 - When women earn, their influence extends from homes to industries and policy decisions. Their empowerment is central to building a future-ready, inclusive, and economically strong India.
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The India Inequality Debate - Misinterpretation of Gini Index and the Clash of Data Credibility

Context:

- The article critically analyses the **ongoing debate** on inequality in India, especially in light of the claim that **India is among the most equal societies in the world** based on the **Gini index of consumption**.
- The controversy highlights **significant misinterpretations and inconsistencies** among the Government of India, World Bank, media, and independent researchers regarding how inequality is measured.
- This discussion on measuring inequality in India (whether through consumption, income, or synthetic data), is particularly relevant due to its implications on **data integrity, policymaking, and socio-economic analysis**.

Understanding the Gini Index:

- The Gini Index is a simple yet powerful way to **understand how equally income, wealth or consumption is distributed** across households or individuals in a country.
- It ranges in value from **0 to 100**. A score of 0 means perfect equality. A score of 100 means one person has all the income, wealth or consumption and others have none, hence absolute inequality.
- The higher the Gini Index the more unequal the country.

Misinterpretation of India's Inequality Ranking - Claim vs Reality:

- According to the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), India is the world's **"4th most equal society."**
- In fact, India had the **lowest consumption Gini** (25.5) in 2022-23, making it the most equal in terms of consumption, not fourth.
- India has **no official data on income inequality**, hence no global ranking in that category.
- Distinction between income Gini and consumption Gini is critical in socio-economic analysis.

Government and Media Missteps - Faulty Endorsement:

- Government agencies and political parties endorsed the false claim of India being the 4th most equal, **confusing social equality with consumption equality**.
- Critics rightly pointed out this misinterpretation, but many fell into similar traps.

Flawed Data Sources and Comparisons:

- The critics question the government for flawed comparisons based on **WID** (World Inequality Database) synthetic data, which is **based on assumptions**, not official surveys.

- WID data is widely questioned in top academic circles for its **reliability**, as survey data (like those used in Poverty Inequality Platform – PIP) are considered more credible.

Role of the World Bank and PIP Database:

- **Credible data via PIP:**
 - The World Bank's Poverty Inequality Platform (PIP) **compiles verified official survey-based consumption and income data** across 167 countries.
 - India's consumption Gini (25.5 in 2022-23) is the **lowest** globally, while South Africa's (63.0) is the highest.
- **No official income data:** India and South Africa lack official income surveys, hence no income Gini is reported by PIP.

Contradiction and Credibility Crisis:

- **World Bank's paradox:** Despite publishing official consumption Gini data, the World Bank quotes WID's synthetic income Gini (62 for India in 2023), leading to a paradoxical portrayal of India as both highly equal (consumption) and highly unequal (income).
- **Credibility questioned:** This contradiction raises serious questions about data interpretation, credibility of global institutions, and their methodological consistency.
- **Historical benchmark:** Earlier World Bank research indicated that income Ginis are typically 6 points higher than consumption Ginis, yet the current 36-point gap for India (62 vs 26) defies this precedent.

Conclusion - A Lesson in Data Discipline:

- There is an urgent requirement for India to **conduct official income surveys** to ensure meaningful comparisons.
 - The episode reflects the significance of data transparency, methodological rigour, and accurate socio-economic assessment.
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The Importance of India and Europe Walking in Step

Context

- In an era increasingly defined by geopolitical uncertainty and fractured alliances, the **India-Europe relationship** emerges as a **beacon of strategic potential and diplomatic renewal**.
- Rooted in deep civilisational ties but infused with contemporary significance, **this partnership reflects both the turbulence of global power dynamics and the opportunities such flux affords**.
- As traditional alliances face erosion and new constellations of power take shape, **India and Europe are uniquely positioned to forge a purposeful and multifaceted engagement** grounded in shared values, mutual interests, and complementary strengths.

The Evolution of India-Europe Partnership

◦ From Passive Observers to Active Partners

- Historically, **India and Europe have often occupied peripheral** roles in each other's strategic imagination.
- However, shifting global paradigms **now demand a recalibration of this aloofness.**
- The **diplomatic engagements** of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar **signify India's deliberate pivot towards Europe**, not out of nostalgia for European influence, but as a pragmatic response to a world in disarray.
- Simultaneously, **European states, themselves reassessing their foreign policy bearings in the wake of diminishing American predictability** under President Donald Trump's administration, are looking eastward with renewed seriousness.
- **Europe's quest for strategic autonomy**, once a rhetorical flourish of French policy, is **now echoed across capitals from Berlin to Warsaw.**

◦ Converging Visions for a Multipolar Order

- At the heart of the India-Europe engagement lies a **mutual desire to champion a multipolar global order** rooted in international law, inclusive institutions, and pluralistic values.
- This **convergence manifests across multiple fronts.** Institutionally, the EU and India have expanded dialogue beyond conventional trade and diplomacy, into domains such as climate change, digital governance, and security.
- Bilaterally, **India has cultivated deeper strategic ties with key European states, France, Germany, Italy and is making notable inroads** into the Nordic and Eastern European spheres.

◦ Economic Synergies and the Promise of Trade

- Economically, the **India-Europe corridor** is witnessing a moment of significant promise.
- With **EU foreign direct investment in India increasing by 70% between 2015 and 2022**, and France's contribution soaring by 373%, the numbers tell a compelling story of trust and opportunity.
- The **doubling of EU imports from India over the past three years highlights New Delhi's growing appeal** as an economic partner.

New Frontiers in India-Europe Partnerships

◦ Digital and Technological Cooperation:

- **India's prowess in software, digital public goods**, and scalable innovation platforms **aligns naturally with Europe's strengths in deep tech, digital manufacturing**, and semiconductors.
- Both view **digital infrastructure as a public good** rather than the private preserve of Big Tech monopolies.
- This **shared philosophy can drive global leadership in areas such as clean energy, biotechnology**, ocean sustainability, and resilient healthcare.

- **Defence, Security, and Shared Strategic Imperatives**

- Defence cooperation, **particularly through co-development and technology transfer**, holds enormous promise in an era where both regions seek self-reliance, India under its Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative, and Europe through its **ReArm 2025 strategy**.
- Joint efforts in **maritime security, cyber resilience, space exploration, and counter-terrorism** can lay the foundation for a durable strategic trust.
- **Europe must also exhibit greater political resolve** in confronting Islamist extremism, including Pakistan's enabling role, which has impacted both regions.
- **Security cooperation cannot remain a technical discourse**; it requires political will and normative clarity.

Future Potential of India-Europe Partnership and The Way Ahead

- **Shared Responsibility of Global Governance**

- Beyond bilateral concerns, **India and Europe have a shared responsibility to safeguard the global rules-based order**.
- This is **not a nostalgic yearning for a liberal utopia, but a realist strategy** to ensure stability through multilateralism, not coercion.
- Their **joint leadership in institutions like the United Nations, WTO**, and emerging governance platforms for technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) **can offer inclusive, human-centric alternatives to authoritarian models**.
- Both regions are also **uniquely positioned to act as bridges to the Global South**, advocating for frameworks that are not only rule-bound but also equitable and development-friendly.

- **Need for a Cultural and Perceptual Shift**

- However, **strategy alone cannot sustain a relationship**. Public sentiment, media narratives, and political discourse must evolve in tandem with policy intent.
- **Europe must discard outdated stereotypes of India as a hesitant or parochial actor**, while India must approach Europe's internal transformations with greater nuance and empathy.
- Recent initiatives such as **the Raisina Dialogue in Marseille and high-level diplomatic visits reflect this renewed cultural diplomacy** and signal a maturing relationship that values sustained engagement over episodic encounters.

Conclusion

- The **India-Europe relationship is no longer an option but a necessity**, not just for the prosperity of the two regions but for the stability of the world order at large.
- Their **shared democratic ethos, pragmatic realism, and economic and technological complementarities form the bedrock of a partnership** based not on convenience, but on conviction.
- By stepping beyond the limitations of historical inertia and embracing a future-oriented vision, **India and Europe can together offer a compelling model of cooperation**.

