



## Women empowerment in India: A Brief Discussion

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### Introduction

Women Empowerment in India is the most effective tool for development as these days; women across the world are actively working as a leader and surpassing others in all the spheres of life. Women empowerment in India is dependent up to a great extent on numerous different variables that encompass geographical setting (urban/rural), social status (caste and class), educational status, and age factor. Actions on the women empowerment exist at the state, local (panchayat), and national levels. However, women encounter differentiation in most sectors like education, economic opportunities, health and medical assistance, and political participation, which demonstrates that there are substantial gaps between strategy advancements and real exercise at the community level. The term women empowerment is all about authority, or the power embarked on women sharing indistinguishable rights. The term refers to the liberation of women from socio-economic restraints of reliance. Women comprise around 50% of the country's population, and a bulk of them stays economically dependent on each other without employment. In the age of feminism, a small portion of women in India are freed and can employ their free will and are permitted to carve out their lives the way they want. But there is a considerable division of the women in this nation who require optimistic support. In most Indian villages and semi-urban cities, women are still denied fundamental education and are never authorized to continue higher education despite amassing the understanding required. Women are known for delivering multiple roles effortlessly per day, and thus, they are considered the backbone of every society. Living in male-dominating societies, women play a wide range of roles, such as caring mothers, loving daughters, and capable colleagues. The best part is that they fit the bill perfectly in every role. Nonetheless, they've also stood as a neglected bunch of society in different parts of the world. In turn, it has resulted in women surviving the brunt of unevenness, financial trustworthiness, oppression, and distinct social evils.

## Women in India

Women's empowerment is an essential factor that works for the betterment and development of society, Community and Country. When it is to specifying women's population in the world we get the result of around 50%. But when we focus on the people of India, it happens to be a disproportionate sex ratio which means the female population is comparatively lower than the male. Comparatively the western part of the world is very liberal about women's empowerment but women's empowerment in India is the least concern of society because of gender biasness. If we pay more attention to how women's empowerment in India got momentum throughout the years, from the ancient to the modern period. Over time, Indian society has witnessed many uprisings and downfalls when it came to empowering women. What is women's empowerment? Ill treatment of women has been a ritual for men, for centuries this unjustified treatment is going on, and women are not allowed to have property, they will have no share in their own parents properties, and they never enjoyed their rights to vote and there was absolutely no freedom to choose their own way of lifestyle or job and so on. Now women's empowerment means exercising their power and their own actions. Which means having control over your own material assets, intellectual resources, and your own ideologies.

In ancient Indian culture, women were treated as equal to men, and there was no discrimination on the basis of gender. In Hindu scriptures women are considered as Devi. They used to enjoy their full basic rights where they were free to receive education, at that time the wives of the rishis could willingly take part in spiritual activities with their husbands, they were also known as the Ardhangini (better half) too. In the ancient text of the Vedas, the concept of human is a bedrock for society, in the Taittiriya Samhita women and men were considered as the two wheels of a cart. The integrity among the genders had room in the early Vedic period but somehow in the later Vedic period there was a decline in the integrity and equality among them, especially the position of the women which was equal in the early Vedic period. It is believed that foreign conquest is the main reason for the decline of women's status in that era. There was an erosion in the Rigvedic ideals of fairness and harmony, which deprives women to enjoy their rights to study the Vedas, recite Vedic mantras, and practice Vedic rituals. Women were forced to get married and or involve in domestic life and have an indisposable devotion to their husbands. At that time parents were ashamed of the time when women have born of a girl child. There came a time when women have adopted the "pardah" a veil that covers the body in a way it affects their freedom. This is the reason it gave birth to many other evils in society which made women's life more difficult to live. There were many restrictions like sati, Jauhar, and no education for girls, widow remarriage, child marriage and many more.

The status of women in India, through the past few millennia, has changed a lot. The whole 19<sup>th</sup> century is in one sense said to be the women's Century all over the world. In early 20th century it was rise of the National Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi who was in favour of removing all the disabilities of women. At the same time, Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Ishwar chandra Vidyasagan and Various other social reformers laid stress on women's education, prevention of child marriage withdrawals of evil practice of sati, removal of polygamy etc. The National Movement and various reform movements paved the way for their liberations from the social evils and religious taboos. In this context, we may write about the Act of Sati (abolish) 1829, Hindu Widow Remarriage Act' 1856, the child Restriction Act, 1929, Women Property Right Act, 1937 etc.

After independence of India, the constitution makers and the national leaders recognized the equal social position of women with men. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 has determined the age for marriage, provided for monogamy and guardianship of the mother and permitted the dissolution of marriage under specific circumstances. Under the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956, an unmarried women, widow or divorcee of sound mind can also take child in adoption. Similarly, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 says that any person who gives, takes, or abets the giving or taking of dowry shall be punished with imprisonment, which may extend to six months or fine up to Rs.5000/ or with both. The Constitution of India guarantees equality of sexes and in fact grants special favors to women. These can be found in three articles of the constitution. Article 14 says that the government shall not deny to any person equality before law or equal protection of the law. Article 15 declares that government shall not discriminate against any citizen on the ground of sex. Article 15(3) makes a special provision enabling the state to make affirmative discriminations in favor of women. Article 42 directs the state to make provision for ensuring just and human conditions of work and maternity relief. Above all, the constitution regards a fundamental duty on every citizen through Articles 15 (A), (E) to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

## **Review of literature**

Some studies on women empowerment dealt on methodological issue, some on empirical analysis and some others on the measures and tools of empowerment. We

have presented in their section some of the important studies which were undertaken at the international level followed by other studies conducted in India.

Moser (1993) focused on the inter relationship between gender and development, the formulation of gender policy and implementation of gender planning and practices. The work of Shields (1995) provided an exploratory framework to understand and develop the concept of empowerment both from a theoretical and practical perspective with a particular focus on women's perception of the meaning of empowerment in their lives. Anand and sen (1995) tried to develop a measure of gender inequality. Dijkstra (2000) while providing a critical review of both the measures identified the strengths and weaknesses of these and suggested a new measure called standardized Index of gender Equality (SIGE) which attempts to encompass all possible dimension of gender equality and avoids the conceptual and methodological problems of GDI and GEM. He further claimed that SIGE can serve as a first approximation of such an overall index. Barkat (2008) while discussing the present status of women in Bangladesh opined that although women as mothers are held in high respect at the individual level, there was an unclear understanding of empowerment of women as a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation in decision making and control over her own life. Klasen and schuler (2009) extended their previous works by way of suggesting concrete proposals for the two gender-related indicators and by presenting illustrative results for those proposed measures. The most important proposals included the calculation of a male and female HDI, as well as gender gap index (GGI) to replace the (GDI). Regarding the GEM, the most important change proposed were different ways to deal with the earned income component and also to replace it with a more straight forward procedure to calculate the measure. Using this proposed methods he founds different ranking of countries compared to that GDI and GEM. Karat (2005) in her work discussed the issues of violence against women, their survival, political participation and emancipation. Panda and Agarwal (2005) focused on the factor like Women's property status in the context of her risk of marital violence and opined that if development means expansion violence of human capabilities, then freedom from domestic violence should be an integral part of any exercise of evaluating developmental progress. Desai and Thakkar (2007) in their work discussed women's political participation, legal rights and education as tools for their empowerment. Deepa Narayan (2007) made an attempt to measure women empowerment for different countries and regions by using self assessed points on a ten steps ladder of power and rights, where at the bottom of the ladder stood, people who were completely powerless and without rights and on the top stood those who had a lot of power and rights. Sheriff (2009) suggested a specific measures for gender

empowerment for India keeping in view culture specific conditions prevalent in the country. The dimensions and factors used in his paper are very different from those identified by the Government of India (G.O.I.2009). Which is aligned with the UNDP concept but weak data support of suspicious quality. He indentified six dimensions for which dependable data are available from sample surveys and government records. The diminsions are literacy, work participation rate, decision making for own heath care, ownership of resources (immovable assets and bank accounts), reproduction and care (capacity to choose a modern contraceptive method and to ensure her own children completed with all essential dozes of immunizations) and political participation.

## Empowerment of women in India

The concept of empowerment follows from the power. It is vesting where it dose not exist or exist inadequately. Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self reliant, have positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in development activities. The empowerment women should be able to participate in development activities and should be able to participate in the process of dicision making. In India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development- (MHRD-1985) and the National Commission for Women (NCW) have been worked to safeguard the rights and legal entitlement of women. The 73<sup>rd</sup> 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided some special powers to women that the Reservation of seats (33%), whereas the reports HRD as March 2002, shows that the legislatures with the highest percentage of women are, sweeden 42.7% Denmark 38% Finland 36% and Iceland 34.9%. In India, “The New panchayati Raj” is the part of the effort to empower woman at least at the village level. The government of India has ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights to women. There are CEDAW (1993), the mexico plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the platform for action (1995) and other such instruments. The year of 2001 was observed as the year of women’s empowerment. During the year, landmark documents has been adopted, ‘the National Policy for the empowerment of women. ‘For the beneficiaries of the women, the government has been adopted different schemes and programs i.e. the National credit Fund for Women (1993), Food and Nutrition Board (FNB), information mass Education (IMF) etc.

The Most positive development last few years has been the growing involvement of women in the panchayati Raj institutions. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. At present all over India, there

are total 20,56,882 lacs gaon panchayati members, out of this women members is 47,455, (40.41%) and total zila parisad members is 11, 708 out of this women members is 4,923 (42.05%) At the Central and state level too women are progressively making a different. Today we have seen women chief minister, women president, different political parties leader, well establish businessmen etc. The most notable amongst there are Mrs. Protiva Devi Singh Patil, Shila Dexit, Mayawati, Sonia Gandhi, Binda karat, Nazma Heptulla, Indira Nuye (pepsi-co), BJP leader Sushma Swaraj, Railway minister Mamta Benarji etc. Women are also involving in human development issues of child rearing, education health and gender parity. Many of them have gone into the making and marketing of a range of cottage products-pickles, tailoring, embroidery etc. The economic empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a sine-qua-non of progress for a country, hence, the issue of economic empowerment of women is of paramount importance to political thinker, social, thinker and Reformers.

## **Reason for the empowerment of women**

Today we have noticed different Acts and schemes of the central government as well as state governments to empower the women of India. But in India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political, economics, participation access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. A few women are engaged in services and other activities. So, they need economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men. Other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literacy among men In India is found to be 76% whereas it is only 54% among women thus, increasing education among women is very important to empower them. It has also noticed that some of women are too weak to work, they consume less food but work more. Therefore, from the health point of view, women of village who are much weaker and need to made them stronger. Another problems is that workplace harassment of women, there are so many cases of rape kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment, and so on far these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their dignity.

To sum up, women empowerment can not be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate of women, and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

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