

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: REALITY OR MYTH

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Abstract

An inferior status is given to women in our society. They are equal to men but not considered equal and discriminated in family and society. They face discrimination since they open their eyes in the world. That's why by seeing their low status, need to empower them was felt. Women empowerment means give power and equal status to women and make them able to face any challenge in society. Constitution of India provides various provision to ensure gender equality. By this, women have come forward and breached various stereotypes. They have proved that they are not inferior than men. Women's status in society is good as well as bad. Good for those who belongs to rich and respectable family and who have come forward to join various high occupations and bad for those who are poor and still limited to domestic responsibility, they are facing exploitation and discrimination and still living in a miserable condition. Women have empowered it is reality but all women have empowered is only a myth.

Keywords: constitutional provisions, empowerment, discrimination, status, women.

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is seen as a means of creating an environment to bring social change in which person can make choices and decisions collectively or individually. Empowerment may be described as a process which helps people to assert their control over the factors which affect their lives. It is a method of sharing and holding power in which attempts are made to control over resources. In this a person can become able to affect others by gaining power, knowledge and experience. The concept of empowerment was originated in U.S.A in 1960's civil rights movement. After that it was used across other areas in various fields with different meaning and explanation. Every person or every country describes it in a different way.

Empowerment can be seen as a change because it brings change in the life of people or group of people by making them empower. An empowered person can be able to take decision independently and have full control on their lives. According to the Merriam Webster new world college dictionary, 'to empower' means

- a. To give authority or power;
- b. To give capability,
- c. To enable.¹

Women Empowerment

women empowerment means give power to women, it is a process in which women gain control over the process of decision-making and can become able to influence that process. Also, empowerment of women means control over all types of resources, create a feeling of self-respect, develop a quality of leadership so that they can lead their life and family in a better way. Empowerment provides a strong base to women so that they can recognize their hidden potential and can become able to reduce the gender gap existing in the society which makes them marginalized and create obstacle in their development. Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam defined empowerment as “empowering women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their thoughts and their value systems lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately good nation”. Srilatha batliwala, a well-known women activist has defined women’s empowerment as, “the process by which women gain greater control over material and intellectual resources, and challenge the ideology of patriarchy and gender-based discrimination against women in all institutions and structures of society.”ⁱⁱ Empowerment of women means developing them as more conscious persons, who are economically fruitful, politically energetic, and self-dependent and intelligent to make bright argument in issues that touch them.ⁱⁱⁱ It enables person to solve their problems. In the vocabulary of gender literature, empowerment of women is newly described phrase. It is used in specific and general sense. In the general sense it provides opportunity and liberty to women to become self-dependent which was denied earlier for them and in a particular sense it states to improve the condition of women in societal structure.

Status of women

India is a land of villages, the main occupation here is farming, to get more production in farming all the people of family whether women or men, old or young works in the fields because farming is the only source of their earnings in villages. The structure of family was joint and patriarchal in which old person of the family gave instructions and orders to other members of the family. Every member obeyed the orders. In family women work morning till night inside or outside the home (fields). Women never get time to relax due to dual burden of household work. They did not get education and lost their existence. They became like a machine which work for 24 hours. They had no independent existence, no one can think about their independent existence, without having knowledge about their rights, equality and freedom. They were tortured in different ways and did not get opportunity to develop themselves.

In India over the past few millenniums the status of women has been issue to many countless changes. In Vedic period women enjoyed their rights fully but after that period the status began to deteriorate with the invasions of Mughals, Islamic invaders and Europeans. Women completely lost their identity but due to the efforts made by various social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Pandita Rama Bai, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Guru Nanak etc., their condition was somewhat improved. Britishers also helped these reformers in making various acts such as sati practice abolition act 1829, women property right act 1937, 1929 the child restriction act, Hindu widow remarriage act 1856 etc., to improve the condition of women. In free India an act recognized as the equal rights of women and men in the subject of divorce and marriage which is known

as Hindu marriage act. Hindu succession act provides equal rights of inheritance of property to women. Dowry has also criminalized. Various other act also enacted to protect the dignity of women. In order to politically empower women 73rd and 74th Amendment were passed which provide 33 per cent reservation to women at local level but 84th amendment which will provide 33 percent reservation to women in parliament and state legislature is still pending. Constitution of India provides equals status to both women and men. It also empowers the states to make some positive discernment in the favour of females.

Article: 14 Equality before Law “The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India”.

Article 15 “prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the ground of sex”.

Article 15 (3) “empowers the state to make positive discrimination in favour of women and child”.

Article 16 “provides for equal opportunity to all its citizens in matter of public employment.

(1) There shall be equal opportunity for all citizens in matters involving to employment to any office under the state.

(2) No citizens shall, on grounds only of religion, race, cast, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the state”.

Article 21 relates with safety of life and individual liberty.

“No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.

Article 23- “Prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour (1) Traffic in human beings and begar and other similar forms of forced labour are prohibited and any contravention of this provision shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. (2) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from imposing compulsory service for public purposes, and in imposing such service the State shall not make any discrimination on grounds only of religion, race, caste or class or any of them”.

Article: 243 D, relates with the Reservation of seats for women (1) Seats shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes,

“In every Panchayat and the number of seats filled by direct election in that Panchayat as the population of the Scheduled Castes and schedule tribes in that Panchayat area and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat”.

(2) “Not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or, as the case may be, the Scheduled Tribes”.

(3) “Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat”.

(4) “The offices of the Chairpersons in the Panchayats at the village or any other level shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the Legislature of a State”.

(5) The reservation of seats under clauses (1) and (2) and the reservation of offices of Chairpersons other than the reservation for females under clause (4) shall conclude to have effect on the end of the period stated in article 334.

(6) “Nothing in this Part shall prevent the Legislature of a State from making any provision for reservation of seats in any Panchayat or offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at any level in favour of backward class of citizens”.

Article: 243 T. Reservation of women seats.— “(1) Seats shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in every Municipality and the number of seats so reserved shall bear, as nearly as may be, the same proportion to the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in that Municipality as the population of the Scheduled Castes in the municipal area or of the Scheduled Tribes in the Municipal area bears to the total population of that area and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality”.

Therefore, Constitution provides equal chances for women obliquely as they are appropriate to all people regardless of gender. But the Courts comprehend that these Articles mere replicate de jure equivalence to females. As intended by the constitution women have not accelerate de facto equality. In actuality there is a substantial break between rights provided by constitution and their applicability in the everyday lives of maximum women. It is factual that females are working jobs which were dominated by males. But still women’s efficiency and capability are suspected to meet the challenges of the occupation allotted.

Women in free India has become empowered than before. They have achieved a superior status which was not better earlier. Women are holding various top positions. They are free to attain any occupation now. After independence women has become Prime Minister, Chief Minister, Governor, President, Speaker of Lok Sabha, Ministers etc., in the field of politics. Not only in politics they have also hold top position in private sector, an example of Chanda Kochhar, Indira Nooyi, Kiran Majumdar Shaw etc. can be seen. They have understood their value and breaking various shackles which creates obstacle in the way of their empowerment. They are winning gold medals in the field of games and education. Various famous Indian women players are defeating international players. They have achieved a reputed name by their efforts only and proved that they are not inferior. They have hold reputed position in film industry, space, medical line, engineering, politics, teaching and various other occupations. Some women have surprised the world by their talent and make a unique identity. From playground to space they are moving the pages of their names. There are some women who are more powerful than men. They have proved that not only they can handle the house but also, they can handle the country. They are not inferior than men at all but if get more opportunity they are four steps forward than men. There is no discrimination in attaining education, employment between women and men. They are free to do whatever possible jobs they want to do. Various different programs and schemes have been launched by Indian government to provide equality and protect the dignity of women.

Data at a glance-

- At the national level, as per the census of 2011 workforce participation rate for women was 25.51 per cent whereas the male's participation was 52.26 per cent. Workforce participation rate for female in urban sector was 15.44 per cent and it was 53.76 per cent for males. In rural areas women and men's workforce participation rate was 30.02 per cent and 53.03 per cent respectively.
- In 2011 census, 41 per cent women were agriculture laborers, 5.7 per cent engaged in household industry workers, 24 per cent were cultivators and 29 per cent were involved in another work.
- In 2011-12, as per the 68th round of national sample survey in rural areas, women and men workers were 24.8 per cent & 54.3 per cent. It was 14.7 per cent for women and 54.6 per cent for male in urban areas. 71th round of national sample survey 2014, literacy rate of rural women was 56.8 per cent and male's literacy rate was 72.3 per cent. In 2011 gap between gender in their literacy has shown declined rate. It was 21.6 per cent in 2001 it was decreased and reached up to 16.3 per cent in 2011.
- In 2014 in Indian economic service women's share was only 30.3 per cent. Out of the total 459 there were only 139 women in Indian forest service. In 2010 out of 74, there were only 21 women which is only 28.4 per cent of the total.
- In rural areas 59.3 per cent women were self-employed, 35.1 per cent were casual laborers and 5.6 per cent were salaried employee.
- In 2011, in organized sector, 20.05 per cent women were employed. In which 24.3 per cent were working in private and 18.01 per cent working in public sector.
- Under the Swarna Jayanti gram swaraj yojana women's ratio stood at 81.09 per cent.
- Literacy rate of women was 64.6 per cent and male's literacy rate was 80.09 per cent. In 2012-13, the ration of women was 51 per cent who were employed through MGNREGA.
- In any kind of decision making 46 per cent of women in the age group of 15-19 years are not involved. In any decision-making in the rural area 23.4 per cent females are not involved while, only 13.9 per cent of females are not involved in any choice making in the urban sector.
- In 2009, in the 15th General Elections there were 342.2 million women electors out of which 55.8 per cent cast their vote. There were 374.7 million male electors and 60.3 per cent exercised their voting rights. In 2009, in the 15th General Elections, 556 women candidates contested the elections and 59 women elected.^{iv}

Source: Census report of India, 2011

- In the 16th General Elections, in 2014, 62 women were selected in Lok Sabha, In the 17th General Elections, 2019, 78 women selected in Lok Sabha.
- In 2014 general election participation of women in election was 65.54 per cent whereas male's per cent was 67 per cent. In 2018, there were only 12.2 per cent women Ministers in central councils. There were only 66 women MPs in the 16th Lok Sabha election which was only 12 per cent of the total. The number of judges were only 2 out of 31 in 2013. There were only 52 judges out of 614 in

various high courts. At present there are only 3 women judges in supreme court named as Indira Banerjee, Indu Malhotra and R. Bhanu Mati. There are 73 judges out of 689 in various high courts at present.

Women have attained a reputed and respectable place but after looking the above discussed data it depicts another side. Undoubtedly women are top position holders but when we look on another side, which is dark side of women's status. One side woman is enjoying their rights and freedom fully without being tortured and facing discrimination. But Those women who belongs to poor or middle-class family are still leading a miserable life except few. But unfortunately, despite having various constitutional and legal provisions rights, freedom and equality but women are still facing various crimes. They are considered inferior. In villages the condition of women is not good. They are being raped, facing domestic violence, sexually exploited, gaining low education, burnt on the name of dowry etc. In villages even educated women are fully depend on men for their expenses. People should understand the value of women, they must think that women are also human being like them. Women have also right to get happiness. Men and other family members should not give tears and wound to women all the time. To provide a good status to women not only men but educated and reputed women must come forward to improve the condition of other women. Women should raise their voice themselves against wrong. They should collect courage of speaking against crimes, they should not just remain like a dumb. We all should come together to end this discrimination and crimes from society. So that women can lead their life with respect and freedom.

Why still need women empowerment?

Government has made various provisions to safeguard the interest of women. They are major shareholders and partners in decision making in various sectors. They have hold powerful positions weather it is politics or social economic fields. They are breaking their shackles but despite this on the other hand they are facing domestic violence, tortured on the name of dowry, sexually assaulted, raped etc. They are discriminated at every level and exploited in various ways. Society does not want girl child to be born. The example of fetus killing can be seen to verify the statement that preference is still given to boy child. A declining sex ratio is example of low status of women. The female sex ratio was 927 as per 1000 men according to the census of 2001 of the age group of 0-6 age, which was declined and reach to 914 as per 1000 men according to the census of 2011. In rural areas the health of pregnant women is not satisfactory. At the national level Female literacy rate is 65.46 percentage whereas male's literacy rate is 82 .14 per cent. The workforce participation rate for women was 25.51 percent as per the census of 2011.

Women need to gain same power and status in modern society. Now the time has come to forget that men are the only power holders. Women also have right to gain power. They have found a new path to empower themselves and that is only to raise their voice against crimes and violence. Women are the only person who can change their status by empowering themselves. Process of Empowerment is working as a medicine to cure the various disease present in society in the form of ill treatment with women and various types of torture and discrimination which imposed serious threat to the life of women's life. Without empowerment

women are unable to save their existence. That's why empowerment is needed so that they can free themselves from various types of discrimination, torture and exploitation. Only by the help of empowerment women's age-old bad status can be improved.

Conclusion

India is male dominated country where women are still facing discrimination even after independence. Constitution of India provides various provisions to empower them but despite this their condition is not much good. They are empowering slowly in various sectors such as work force, politics, cinema, sports, medicines, engineering, education, defense and even in space also. They are holding positions of CEOs in multi-national companies, which was not allowed earlier. Women are respectable person but despite this they are facing disrespects in society. Women is responsible to move the world forward but they are always pushed back. When women are equal to men than why such discrimination, disrespect and torture for them. To be a woman is not a crime but women always face crimes in society. Women have to open their lips to break this silence otherwise many decades have gone and many will pass, nobody will come forward to stand for their betterment and to raise voice against evils and crimes until they themselves come. Wake up women and do something, you have to act today, if you will not do today then this today will also become yesterday tomorrow. And history will always remember you by calling 'Abla Nari' forever. Stand up and break those shackles who made you slave, and slave the evils that shackles you and made you slave.

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ⁱ Merriam Webster New World College Dictionary, New Millennium Fourth Edition, michael Agnes, First edition - Sept. 2000, P. 466.

ⁱⁱ Batliwala Srilata, adopted from IGNOU, Status of Women, Block CWDL-01, New Delhi, July 2000, P. 35.

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^{iv} Census report of India, 2011.