



INDIA'S WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment is fundamentally the process of improving the status of traditionally underprivileged women in society on the economic, social, and political fronts. It entails protecting kids from all sorts of assault. Building a societal and political climate where women can live free from oppression, exploitation, trepidation, discrimination, and the general sense of persecution that comes with being a woman in a historically male-dominated institution is a key component of women empowerment. Nearly half of the world's population is made up of women, however India has a disproportionately low female population compared to its male population. There are some regions where they are not regarded equally to males in terms of their social position. Women in Western nations enjoy the same rights and status as men in all spheres of life. However, discrimination and limitations based on gender continue to exist in India. As a result, the position of women in Indian society will be the main topic of this essay.

KEYWORDS: *Women Empowerment, Education, Discrimination, Socio-Economic Status.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Indian social structure, women played the most important role. Certainly, the Rig Vedic In India, women had a high social rank and an excellent standard of living. Even women were given the chance to reach a high level of intellectual and spiritual achievement. However, women began to face discrimination in schooling and other rights and amenities starting in the Later-Vedic period, after enjoying free and prestigious roles in the Rig-Vedic society (Saravanakumar, 2016). Indian culture does not believe that we are currently seeing a significant revolution for women. Women's voices are becoming more prominent in the legislature, courts, and public spaces. While women in the West had to fight for more than a century to obtain some of their fundamental rights, such as the ability to vote (Altekar,1983), women in India have had equal rights with males since the commencement

of the Constitution (Devandra,Kiran,1985). In terms of equality, education, marriage and family life, race and gender, religion, and culture, women in modern Indian society preserve or decline from their ancient and medieval standing.

The woman held a high position throughout the Vedic era. She was viewed as the other half of the man, his confidante, comrade in solitude, guide through life's desert, and the rest. The women were given the chance to reach a high level of intellectual and spiritual development. Throughout this time, there were a lot of female Rishis. Although monogamy was typically the norm, polygamy was practiced by the wealthier members of society. Early marriage and the sati system did not exist. However, women began to face discrimination in education and other rights and facilities starting in the Later-Vedic period after enjoying free and respected roles in the Rig-Vedic society. The purdah, polygamy, widow burning or sati, child marriage, and these practices further harmed the position of women. The Vedas are the foundational texts of Indian culture. The Vedic period is usually accepted to have lasted from 2000 BC to 500 BC. Vedic women had financial independence. There were some women working as teachers. The place of production was the home. Clothes were made by spinning and weaving at home. Women supported their husbands' agricultural endeavors as well. The Medieval period (during the time between 500 and 1500 A.D.), which saw a further decline in Indian women's standing, proved to be a very discouraging time for them. The 'dark age' for women in medieval India is generally considered to have been this time period.

In terms of equality, education, marriage and family life, race and gender, religion, and culture, women in modern Indian society preserve or decline from their ancient and medieval standing. In the RigVedic In India, women had a high social rank. The women were given the chance to reach a high level of intellectual and spiritual development. Women did not have a lower status in Vedic India; rather, they held an esteemed position. They enjoyed extensive rights in the social and religious spheres but few in the political and economic ones. They were regarded equally with men rather than as inferiors or subordinates. Our nationalism grew out of the mantra "Vande Mataram," and we have revered our homeland as our Motherland, or "Bharat Mata."

Objectives of the Study:

- 1.To study the historical profile of Indian Women.
- 2.To know the need of Women Empowerment.
- 3.To study the Government Schemes for WomenEmpowerment.
- 4.To offer useful suggestions in the light of Findings.

2. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Change, power, and choice are all aspects of empowerment. It is a process of change that gives people and groups who have little or no authority the ability to make decisions that will impact their lives. Women's empowerment is the process of giving women the authority they need to recognize their rights and carry out their obligations to others and to themselves in the most efficient way possible. Women empowerment, according to K. Sayulu, G. Sardar, and B. Sridevi in 2005, is any procedure that gives women more autonomy by sharing pertinent information and giving them control over aspects that affect their performance.

2.1.Characteristics of Women Empowerment

Women empowerment possesses certain characteristics.They are the following:

1. Women empowerment enables a greater degree of self-confidence and a sense of independence among women.
2. Women empowerment is a process of acquiring power for women in order to understand her rights and to perform her responsibilities towards oneself and others in a most effective way.
3. Women empowerment enables women to organise themselves to increase their self- reliance.
4. Women empowerment provides greater autonomy to women.
5. Women empowerment means women's control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology.
6. Women empowerment abolishes all gender-based discriminations in all institutions and structures of society.
7. Women empowerment means participation of women in policy and decision making process at domestic and public levels.
8. Empowerment of women enables women to realise their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.
9. Empowerment also means equal status to women.
 10. Women empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological, political, cultural, familial and economic spheres and at various levels such as individual, group and community.
 11. Women empowerment is a process of creating awareness and capacity building.

2.2.Importance of Women Empowerment

Women's empowerment is a constant and dynamic process that enhances women's capacities to alter the structure and environment that prevent them from changing the financial, political, and social procedures that affect the general public. The 73rd Amendment's passage signaled a state-supported effort for women's emancipation, with 33% of seats in Panchayats and jobs set aside for women. During the period when India was working to empower women, reservation in the Panchayats was seen as a significant accomplishment.

When women make up 50% of the population, empowering women is crucial to preserving the country's economic growth. Women's empowerment, according to former president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, is crucial to building a civilized nation and ensures social stability. The improvement of a decent family, fantastic community, and ultimately a good country depends on the considerations and value system of women. It is widely understood that women's empowerment is essential to a nation's growth. The scenario in India, where women's empowerment is a top priority on the country's advancement agenda, is comparable to that in other countries due to the global initiatives for women's empowerment. Despite earlier intentions focusing solely on the welfare of women, 2001 was declared to be the "Year of Women's Empowerment." In India, the National Policy for Women's Empowerment was unveiled in 2001. In order to properly actualize it, a National Plan for Action for Women's Empowerment was implemented between 2003–2004. The Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07) had a coordinated technique for women's empowerment with clear objectives, targets, and a time frame. The Government of India has introduced a fourth, three-dimensional strategy of social empowerment, economic empowerment, and provision for gender equality because women's empowerment depends on both economic and social determinants. The government has undertaken a number of initiatives, including programs and strategies, to ensure the success of the current system. The Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Amendment Act of 2003, the Sati Prevention Act, the Hindu Succession Act, and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act are a few examples of laws that protect women against domestic violence. The Ministry of Women and Child Development has implemented a number of plans like Swayamsiddha, Support for Training and Employment Program (STEP), and others. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (which offers small-scale credit), Kishori Shakti Yojana, and the Nutrition Program for Pre-Adolescent Girls are just a few of the many ways the government has tried to improve financial status and gender equality. To aid working women in gaining financial security and improving their social standing, working women's lodgings and creches have also been established. The 11th Five Year Plan's primary goals are to strengthen the legal system to end discrimination against women and integrate a gender perspective into the development process. By tackling structural and institutional barriers and bolstering gender mainstreaming, the aim for the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017) is to guarantee improving the status and condition of women.

3. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

Empowering women entails giving them the tools they need to be economically independent, self-sufficient, and confident enough to deal with any challenging circumstances. It also means enabling them to take part in development efforts. The National Credit Fund for Women (1993), the Food and Nutrition Board (FNB), the

Information and Mass Education (IME), and other initiatives have been adopted by the government for the benefit of women.

The growth of women's involvement in Panchayati Raj institutions during the past few years has been the most encouraging development. At the village council level, there are a large number of elected female representatives. Women are also involved in issues of gender parity, education, health, and child raising that pertain to human development. Many of them have gotten involved in the production and distribution of a variety of homegrown goods, such as pickles, clothing, embroidery, etc. The problem of economic empowerment of women is of utmost importance to political thinkers, social thinkers, and reformers because it is currently thought of as a sine qua non of progress for a nation.

3.1. Women Rights in India

The guideline of equivalence status of women is cherished in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The constitution provides equity to women, yet in addition enables the State to make provisions of positive discrimination in favour of women. Some of the significant articles are as per the following

- Equality before law[Article 14]
- No Discrimination by state on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them[Article15(i)]
- Special provision by state in favour of Women and Children[Article 15(3)]
- Equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment [Article 16]
- Securing adequate means of livelihood for men and women equally [Article 39(a)]
- Equal pay for equal work[Article 39(d)]
- Promoting justice on basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid[Article 39(A)] Renounce practices derogatory to women[Article 51(A)(e)]
- 1/3 reservation for women in panchayats[Article 243(D)] and in municipalities[Article 243(T)]
- Right to Property to Women[Article 300(a)]

3.2. Legislations

- Abolition of Sati Act,1829
- Special Marriage Act,1954
- Hindu Succession Act,1956
- Dowry Prohibition Act,1961

- Maternity Benefits Act, 1961
- Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
- Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- Sexual Harassment Bill, 2010 (Ram, 2004)

3.3. Government Schemes for Women Empowerment The Government programmes for women development began as early as 1954 in India but the actual participation began only in 1974. At present, the Government of India has over 34 schemes for women operated by different department and ministries. Some of these are as follows;

1. Rastria Mahila Kosh (RMK) 1992-1993
2. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) October, 1993.
3. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) 1995.
4. Women Entrepreneur Development programme given top priority in 1997-98.
5. Mahila Samakhya being implemented in about 9000 villages.
6. Swayasjdha.
7. Swa Shakti Group.
8. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP).
9. Swalamban.
10. Crèches/ Day care centre for the children of working and ailing mother.
11. Hostels for working women.
12. Swadhar.
13. National Mission for Empowerment of Women.
14. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (1975),
15. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls (RGSEAG) (2010).
16. The Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers.
17. Integrated Child Protection scheme (ICPS) (2009-2010).
18. Dhanalakahmi (2008).
19. Short Stay Homes.
20. Ujjawala (2007).

3.4. Suggestions

1. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging

to weaker sections about their rights.

2. The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grassroots problem. Hence, education for women has to be paid special attention.

3. Strict implementation of Programmes and Acts should be there to curb the mal-practices prevalent in the society.

4. Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in the society.

4. CONCLUSION

Increased spiritual, political, social, educational, gender, or economic strength of individuals or groups of women is referred to as "women empowerment." The degree to which women are empowered in India is strongly influenced by a wide range of factors, such as age, caste, educational attainment, and geographic location (urban vs. rural). At the national, state, and local (Panchayat) levels, policies on women's empowerment exist in numerous fields, including as politics, health, education, and economic opportunities. At both the national and international levels, the empowerment of women has grown to be one of the most pressing issues of the twenty-first century. Governmental efforts alone wouldn't be adequate to accomplish this. In order to eliminate gender discrimination and provide women full autonomy over their lives and equal opportunity to participate in society's social, political, and economic affairs, society must take the initiative.

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