

Women Empowerment in India

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***Abstract:** Women Empowerment' itself implies that women are not powerful enough - they need to be empowered. This painful truth has been in existence for a long long time. It is in recent years that noticeable work started beginning to lift women out of the abyss of insignificance and powerlessness. The patriarchal society suppressed women's freedom across the world. Women were not allowed to vote or even put forward any opinion. Women were confined to their homes. As time progressed, they realised that their life meant much more than just serving in the household. As more and more women started crossing the man-made barriers, the world began to witness the rise of women. Unlike men, women never try to stifle the voice of their opposite gender. They hold the hands of all the downtrodden people - men and women both - and they pull them out of misfortune as they try to improve their lives.*

Key words:women empowerment, policies of women empowerment, education, Skilling , financing, upliftment of women.

Methodology:

This paper is based on descriptive research and the secondary sources were used in the completion of this present paper.

Objectives:

- To boost women's status through literacy, education, training and awareness creation
- To create a world where women have the power and freedom to live their lives, without discrimination or limitations based on gender.
- To participate in political life and decision-making on an equal basis with men.

Introduction:

Women empowerment in India refers to the process of enabling women to gain power and control over their own lives and make their own decisions. This involves promoting women's rights, increasing their access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, and ensuring their participation in political and social processes.

HistoricalContext:

India has a great history of strong women leaders and figures, from ancient texts to modern times. However, despite this, Indian women have often faced difficult challenges, including discrimination, limited access to education, economic dependence, and gender-based violence. Over the past few decades, there has been a growing recognition of the need to address these issues and promote gender equality.

Women's Empowerment in India: Current Statistics and Demography

India with a current female population of 48.41% (with men at 51.59%) is on the way of growth and women have a great role to play when it comes to the economy. Indian women are still fighting patriarchy and gender inequality. The need for inclusivity of women is also of paramount importance when it comes to the job market in India.

If it is top positions and decision making power that the urban women is fighting for in the corporate world, the rural women still have to battle for their freedom, basic facilities and equal opportunities. The literacy rate of the adult male population in India is 80.95% whereas that of the female population is a disappointing low of 62.84%.

Women in rural India lack basic formal education and are mostly dependent on their husbands for financial support and lack financial independence for the majority of their lifetime. Apart from that women in rural India are prone to more domestic abuse and violence than their urban counterparts.¹.

History of Women's Empowerment in India

Women's empowerment in India has a long history. Great social reformers in the past like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Acharya VinobhaBhave and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagaretc abolished ghastly practices like sati and child marriage and worked relentlessly in the past for the up-liftment of women in India. The Indian National Congress, one of the first political parties of India, raised its voice to demand political rights for women in the year 1917.

The policy of women's empowerment is incorporated well into the constitution of India which became effective in the year 1950. Article 14 ensures the right to equality for women; Article 15(1) prohibits gender discrimination; Article 15(3) empowers the state to take affirmative steps in favour of women, to name a few.

The Equal Remuneration Act of 1976, The Maternity Benefit Act in 1961, The Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (prevention and protection act) in 2013 are some of the few specific laws which were sanctioned by the Indian Parliament with respect to

women's rights. And in the year 2001, the Government of India launched a national Policy for Women Empowerment with specific objectives like strengthening legal systems aimed at eliminating all forms of discrimination against women.

Nevertheless, India has a long way to go when it comes to women exercising their fundamental rights and enjoying their freedom equally as men. And although the constitution of India grants equal rights to both men and women, gender disparity still lurks around in both urban and rural areas of India.

Women's Empowerment in the 21st Century:

In modern India, activists like Sunitha Krishnan (a Padma Shri awardee) work relentlessly for rescuing and protecting girls and women who are trafficked or raped, and social entrepreneurs like Arunachalam Muruganantham, who invented the low cost sanitary-pad making machine so that even women from rural India could afford to buy them, travels around the country to generate awareness about traditional unhygienic practices prevailing around menstruation in rural India. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP India) also runs projects to provide vocational training and skill building to young women to enable them for their future.

Empowerment of Women through Education, Skilling & Micro-Financing.

The census 2011, counts women population 48.5% of the total population in India, In the changing dynamics of the society women empowerment is much relevant and very important. Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has also spoken for women empowerment on 82nd edition of Mann Ki Baat. Education plays an important role in building self-confidence among women it also enables to change her status in the society. Education enables and builds confidence to take decisions in a better way. Skilling and Micro Finance can get women financially stable and therefore she is no longer dependent upon on others in the society. Giving education to women means giving education to the whole family².

The Constitution of India has certain provisions that specifically focus on women empowerment and prevents discrimination against women in the society. Article 14 talks about equality before law. Article 15 enables the state to make special provisions for women. As the progress of humanity is incomplete without women therefore successive

governments have launched number of schemes for empowerment of women in male dominated society.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" (BBBP)"Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter" has been launched for creating awareness among the people to educate all girl children in the country and is a nationwide campaign launched by the Government of India in 2015. Government is successfully able to promote this scheme by forming District Task Force and Block Task Force.

Objectives:

1. Gender Imbalance Correction: The primary goal is to address the declining child sex ratio (CSR) and combat female foeticide and infanticide, which have contributed to a skewed gender ratio in many parts of India.
2. Promote Education: Encourage girls' education and literacy by ensuring their enrollment and retention in schools. The program aims to bridge the gender gap in education and empower girls through knowledge.
3. Empowerment and Protection: Enhance the status and value of girls in society, promoting their rights, safety, and overall development.

MUDRA Yojana or Micro Units Development and Refinance agency Ltd is an initiative by the Government of India to provide financial support to small and micro enterprises launched in April 2015 in which loans upto Rs. 10 lakh are provided to women entrepreneurs, without any collateral. Earlier a lot of women left out their job after giving birth to children, due to which lot of working women unemployed. The government has passed the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017 increasing the maximum period of maternity leaves from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. The landmark law has given a new life to the vision of women-led development as propagated by Modi. Increased knowledge, self-confidence and awareness of gender equity are indicators of the empowerment process. These components get develop through education. Educated woman aware about their rights and when women aware about their rights then she will not face discrimination.

Though the successive Governments have come up with various measures for the welfare and empowerment of women but still women are facing difficulties in society. Therefore,

there is a need to do much more, to protect women. Also, there is a need to uphold their dignity equal with the status of men in the society³.

WayOut:

Education

- The education policy needs to be more inclusive to ensure girls right to education and their right to be free from discrimination within educational institutions. Also, education policy should target young men and boys to positively change their attitudes towards girls and women.
- In order to check higher dropout rate among girls, there is a need for providing relatively higher financial incentives for girls education until Class XII.
- Post Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship should be extended from Single Girl Child Scheme to families with two girl child.
- Reward should be given to villages/districts that are able to attain equal child sex ratio through education, information and communication campaigns.
- There is a need for strict implementation of statutes that emphasise on women empowerment through education.
- Additional emphasis should be laid on e-governance so that there is a timely check on the expenditure released by the centre and various state governments for scholarships for girl students.
- For security purposes, gender-friendly facilities should be provided in hostels.

Skilling

- In order to make women self-dependent, there is need to promote skill development among women in non-traditional works like electricians, plumbers etc.
- Women can be organised into different professional groups so that there is improvement in their bargaining power.
- Platforms like Digital India should be used for marketing and branding purposes and to establish linkages with corporates, markets and consumers.

- In addition to government efforts, NGOs and other institutions should provide employable skills & training to women to help them find alternative and majestic occupations to earn decently.

Micro Finance

- Non- governmental organization working for the empowerment of women need to take interference on livelihood development options related to the market and value chain.
- Policies and guidelines should be made in such a way that it is easy for women entrepreneurs to get credit facilities.
- Government should promote creation of Self Help group by women.
- There is need for industry-specific targets for women's employment and motivate their implementation by firm.
- Tax benefits should be given to companies that provide employment to 30 % women workers⁴ .

Conclusion:

Women empowerment in India is an ongoing journey. While significant progress has been made, continuous efforts are needed to overcome deep-seated challenges and ensure that all women can fully participate in and benefit from economic, social, and political opportunities. Empowering women is not just a goal in itself but a fundamental step towards achieving broader societal and economic development.

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