

## Women still need Empowerment in India

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### Abstract

**“There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved, it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.”**

**Swami Vivekananda**

Women empowerment is a matter of concern of 21<sup>st</sup> Century which includes women awareness of their rights, self-confidence, to have a control over their lives both at home & outside and their ability to change in the society

Women empowerment means women have been respected, given total independence of their own life, making own decision by own choice, have equal rights in society and Judicial works and are not discriminated in providing education, Job employment, wages earning and other facilities which are available to men.

Women empowerment also means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender-based discrimination which means granting women the freedom to make life choices. Women empowerment does not mean ‘deifying women’ rather it means replacing patriarchy with parity.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Women, Discrimination, Emancipation, Marginalized, Constitutional Provisions, Legislative, Participation

### 1. Introduction

Women are the wealth of each and every nation of the Globe. India is not exception to it. In India, Vedas have glorified women as the mother, the creator and one who gives life and worshipped her as “Devi” or “Goddess”.

In India, Women are contributing in almost every field and made country feel proud at every occasion. They are in front, leading the country, making mile stones and source of inspiration for many. However, another reality of Indian society is that there is systematic discrimination and neglect of women in India, which could be in terms of inadequate nutrition, denial or limited access to education, health and property rights, child labour and domestic violence etc. The fear of sexual violence has been a powerful factor in restricting women behavior and sense of freedom. The struggle against violence is actually the struggle against the unequal distribution of power both physical and economic between the sexes<sup>[1]</sup>.

In India, Women are facing problems in every sphere of life whether employment, access to health care or property rights and the other segments of life. The required attention is still not being paid to the women and women empowerment in India is still a distant dream. There still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programs and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other hand. India is fast developing but women in India continue to be discriminated. They are victims of crime specifically, rape, kidnapping and abduction, dowry-related crimes, molestation, sexual harassment, eve-teasing, etc. Around 40 per cent of married women in India are victims of domestic violence. The increasing violence against women shown in television and films and their vulgar portrayal as objects of sex is also an important contributing factor in the

escalating violence against women in India. The crimes against women in India are growing at a rampant speed. Women, irrespective of their class, caste and educational status, are not safe. The lack of any serious effort to rectify the weaknesses in dealing with the crimes against women further compound the situation and result is that the conviction rate remains abysmally low. The dignity of the women can be maintained only by empowerment of women<sup>[2]</sup>.

### 2. Contribution of Indian Women in various segments in India

Women are the wealth of India and they have contributed in almost every field and made country feel proud at every occasion. They are in front, leading the country, making mile stones and source of inspiration for many. In politics, Former President Smt. Pratibha Patil, Lok Sabha Speaker Smt. Sumitra Mahajan, UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Former Chief Minister of UP Mayawati and Delhi Smt. Sheila Dixit, in Bureaucracy- Nirupama Menon Rao, in Socio-Cultural field- Medha Patekar, Arundhati Roy, Shobna Narayanan, Lata Mangeskar, Anjolie Ela Menon, Rekha, Meera Nayar and many others, in sports, Sania Mirza, Saina Nehwal are some of the names at the top. Women are also playing important role in national growth and economic development through corporate houses. They are not only working at grass root level but participating in decision making. **Jyoti Naik** - President of Lijjat Papad, **Kiran Mazumdar** - Chairman & Managing Director of Biocon, **Naina LalKidwai** - Ex-Deputy CEO of HSBC, **Ranjana Kumar** - Ex-Chairman of NABARD, **Ritu Nanda** - CEO of Escolife, **Priya Paul** - Chairman of Apeejay Park Hotels, **Indira K. Nooyi** - Chairperson & CEO of Pepsico, **Roshani Nadar** - Ex-CEO of HCL are some of the pioneers in their respective field. At present women are

contributing and participating in every sphere, politics, business, education, science and technology, media, sports, art and culture etc.

However this is the one face of coin and on the other side of coin is the hard truth of the Indian society. There is systematic discrimination and neglect from early childhood of women in India, which could be in terms of inadequate nutrition, denial or limited access to education, health and property rights, child labour and domestic violence. The fear of sexual violence has been a powerful factor in restricting women behavior and sense of freedom. The struggle against violence is actually the struggle against the unequal distribution of power both physical and economic between the sexes. It is important to address the root cause for the subordinate status of women in the Indian society. Hillary Clinton, US secretary of State, addressing the Delhi University students on 20 July 2009 said that “women roles and rights are as important as any issue we can list. Women are the key of economic growth. It has been established through research”. Men should perceive women not as subservient being but as empowered individuals who are equal partners. Women are not only entitled for survival but also to a life with dignity, grace and equal opportunities so that they can grow to their full potential. There is an urgent need to pay attention to the issues that concern this section of population. The focus should be on poverty reduction, gender justice, health, nutrition, sustained awareness of rights and redressal, eradication of social evils etc<sup>[2]</sup>.

### **3. Need for the Empowerment of Women**

In spite of various measures taken up by the Government after Independence, In India women are still discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare<sup>[3]</sup>. Women are found to be economically very poor all over India and they need economic power to stand on their own legs with men. Other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. According to 2011 census, rate of literacy among men in India is found to be 74.04% whereas it is only 65% among women. Thus, increasing education among women is of very important in empowering 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 folk who are to be weaker are to be made stronger. Another problem is that workplace harassment of women. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment, and so on. For these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds and in area to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. Dr. Dashrath Bhuyan in his article titled “Empowerment of Indian Women: A challenge of 21st century” writes “Women are being brutalized, Commodified, materialized and subjected to inhuman exploitation and discrimination” In spite of reservation being granted to women in Panchayat elections after 73rd and 74th Constitution amendment, in many Panchayats the male Chavinism does not allow them to function independently.

We may conclude that women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

Sir Roseanne Barr rightly said – “**The thing women have yet to learn is nobody gives you power. You just take it**”.

### **4. Ways for the Empowerment of Women in India**

Women can be empowered through Constitutional Provisions & Legislative Measures and with the sincere efforts of NGO, Society and Community which are highlighted here as:-

#### **4.1. Constitutional Provisions**

The Indian constitution grants equality to women and also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women to neutralize the cumulative socio-economic, educational and political disadvantages faced by them. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles of the Indian constitution. Article 15 of the Indian constitution forbids discrimination on grounds of caste, religion, sex, race and place of birth, whereas Article 16 ensures equal opportunities of employment. Some of the provisions of Indian constitution safeguard the women rights which include: Equality before law for women (Article 14); State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (I)); State to make special provision in favor of women and children (Article 15 (3)); Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Article 16); State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally, the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); Equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)); To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Article 39 A); State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42); State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46); State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health (Article 47); To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)); 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 to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat (Article 243 D(3)); and 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 Municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality (Article 243 T 3) etc.

#### **4.2. Legislative Provisions**

The government of India has enacted several women-specific legislations to uphold the constitutional mandate and to protect women against social discrimination, violence and atrocities

and also to prevent social evils like child marriages, dowry, rape, practice of sati etc. The 'crime against women' under various legislations of government of India could be broadly classified within two categories:

- First, the crimes identified under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) which includes Rape (Sec. 376 IPC); Kidnapping & Abduction for different purposes (Sec. 363-373); Homicide for dowry, dowry deaths or their attempts (Sec.302/304-B IPC); Torture, both mental and physical (Sec. 498-A IPC); Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC); Sexual harassment (Sec. 509 IPC) and importation of girls (up to 21 years of age).
- Secondly, the crimes identified under the Special Laws (SLL) which are though not gender specific, but have special provisions to safeguard women and their interests. It includes The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948; The Plantation Labor Act, 1951; The Family Courts Act, 1954; The Special Marriage Act, 1954; The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955; The Hindu Succession Act, 1956; Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956; The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995); Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971; The Contract Labor (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1976; The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976; The Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 1979; The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983; The Factories (Amendment) Act, 1986; Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986; Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987; and The Marriage (Amendment) Act, 2001 etc.

The constitutional and legislative provisions in India not only grants equality and protection to women, but also empower the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. In India, within the framework of a democratic policy, laws and development policies, programs have been aimed at women advancement in different spheres of life. From Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards, there has been a marked shift in the approach to women issues in India, from welfare to development of women. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committed to secure equal rights of women. Important among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 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 the outcome document adopted by the UNGA session on Gender Equality and Development<sup>[4]</sup>.

### 4.3. Political Process for Women Empowerment

Women equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making, including decision making in political process at all levels will ensure the achievement of the goal of women empowerment. Government of India through 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts reserved the one-third of seats in all local elected bodies for women as a sign of political empowerment. The percentage of women in various levels of political activities in India have risen considerably, however women are still under-represented in governance and decision-making process. Their power is restricted, as it the men who wield all the authority. Their decisions are often over-ruled by

the government machinery. In recent years there have been explicit moves to increase women political participation at top level. However, the Women reservation bill is a sad story as it is repeatedly being scuttled in the parliament. All this shows that the process of gender equality and women empowerment still has a long way to go.

### 4.4. Government Policies for Complete Development of Women

The Government of India had ushered in the new millennium by declaring the year 2001 as 'Women Empowerment Year' to focus on a vision 'where women are equal partners like men'. The objective of government policy in India has been to bring about development, advancement and empowerment of women in the country through active participation of all stakeholders. The government has attempted to create an environment through positive political, economic and social policies for complete development of women. Government policy has been to promote women participation in political, social and economic life of the nation and identical access to health care, quality education, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc. The objective has been also to strengthen legal system aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and changing the societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women<sup>[2]</sup>.

### 4.5. Indian government special initiatives for women

Special initiatives are taken by government of India for building confidence and self-dependency across Indian women. Some of them include:

- a) National Commission for Women was set-up as a statutory body in January 1992 with specific mandate to study and monitor all matters related to constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc.
- b) The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000) to ensure survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future for the girl child.
- c) National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) to bring advancement, development and empowerment of women in all spheres of life through creation of a more responsive judicial and legal system sensitive to women and mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process. The strengthening and formation of relevant institutional mechanisms and implementation of international obligations/commitments and co-operation at the international, regional and sub-regional level was another commitment.
- d) The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005: It provides for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected herewith or incidental thereto. It provides for immediate and emergent relief to women in situations of violence of any kind in the home.
- e) Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) was created in January 2006 and is the nodal Ministry of the

government of India for the advancement of women and children<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### 4.6. Role of NGO's for Women Empowerment

Governmental Organizations are formal agencies working for the empowerment of women. But this work requires multidimensional approach and hence a large number of voluntary organizations / NGO's have gained increased attention in the field from grass – root level to national & international level. Their role is so impressive because they work with missionary zeal and commitment. The working style of NGO's is open, transparent and personal. So, they are more effective in this direction. They organize seminars, conferences and workshops for the awakening of the masses. Their mass appeal – style contributes to a better understanding of women rights and of the means to ensure the enjoyment of those rights and the elimination of discrimination. They prepare urban and rural uneducated women for self – employment, which is vital for the economic empowerment of the women. In short, all these programs and functions of NGO's contribute towards the realization of sustainable community development and hence women empowerment<sup>[6]</sup>.

#### 5. Conclusion

In spite of various constitutional & legislative provisions along with many development schemes for the empowerment of women in India, the scenario of women empowerment is far behind from the satisfactory which is evident from the fact that there is increase in various types of crime against women, whether it is Rape, Kidnapping, Dowry Death or other form of crime or violation against women which is a big obstacle in empowering of women.

In India, during the last two decade, women have been empowered by adopting various measures/schemes for improving their fortune. Such measures have started giving positive results relating to women. But desired result is yet to be achieved. Top priority should be given in our development plan for improving female literacy and creating skills among women by giving them proper/adequate education which will enable them to stand on their own feet **“Mahatma Gandhi very aptly said”**.

**Education is foremost important tool for the empowerment of women because in the absence of proper education there is invisible barrier where women are deprived of opportunities at all level of employment and are discriminated only because they are women.**

No doubt women have all qualities & potentiality to achieve an equal footing with the man. But male attitudes are making invisible barrier preventing women from rising above certain level.

Empowerment of women can be achieved by adopting spiritual, political, social and economic policies with a view to total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human being as country can develop or progress until/unless women are empowered because women are the wealth of each & every nation and are contributing in almost every filed and make country feel proud at every occasion.

**“Swami Vivekananda had said *“There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved, it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.”***

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