



STATUS OF INDIAN WOMEN AN OVERVIEW OF HISTORY, CULTURE, AND TRENDS¹

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Abstract: Vedic India respected women. In 200 B.C., the ancient Indian lawgiver Manu stated, "Where women are revered, the gods are delighted; but where they are disrespected, no holy ritual is beneficial." Before the ceremony, the groom may make a vow to the bride. As a mother, wife, and sister, she was held in high regard. She symbolizes bravery, love, sacrifice, and suffering. Women, who make up almost half of the country's population, have been denied development prospects on purpose in the guise of religion and socio cultural customs. As a result of many repulsive practices, conventional rigidities, and depravities, the condition of women in society was dismal. The widespread illiteracy, forced child marriage, complete denial of individuality, economic dependence, heavy domestic work-load that remained unpaid and unrecognized, absence of career and mobility, non-recognition of their economic contribution, poor working conditions and wages, and monotonous jobs, etc., were to blame for their pitiful conditions. Due to social, economic, and political issues, women have lost respect. The practices of Sati, Purdah, child marriage, and dowry humiliated women both within and beyond the house. Sexual harassment in the workplace, kidnapping, and female foeticide have resulted in horrific social behavior, and the majority of dependent women have lost their identities.

Keyword: Ancient, Medieval, Manu, Women, Opportunities, Growth.

Introduction:

Almost half of the country's population is female, yet they have been specifically excluded from development opportunities under the pretense of religion and social norms. Women's status in society was dismal due to several depraved behaviors, traditional rigidities, and depravities. The widespread illiteracy, forced child marriage, complete denial of individuality, economic dependence, heavy domestic work-load that remained unpaid and unrecognized, absence of career and mobility, non-recognition of their economic contribution, poor working conditions and wages, monotonous jobs, etc. were all to blame for their pathetic situations. On the sociopolitical front, women endured several afflictions, including the restriction of freedom even inside their own families, repression and artificial indoctrination, rigid caste system, and untouchability. Protest movements within the Hindu religion helped to a little improvement in the position of women, especially in relation to religious activities. However, they saw women as inferior to males in society and mainly as mothers and spouses. The emergence of Islam precipitated a further decline in the position of women. Reform groups like Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, etc. supported women beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, but little meaningful was accomplished. It is vital to highlight that the empowerment of women was a fundamental part of Mahatma Gandhi's goal.

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Exploitation of Women

The humiliation, the misery, and the abuse that Indian women endure is widespread. The economic decisions that are made in Indian society are influenced by male dominance, which may be detrimental to women's access to and usage of earnings. In the lowest economic groups, women are more likely to engage in dangerous forms of physical labor than males. Nearly half of all agricultural labor in India is performed by women. There is still the expectation that men would provide for their families. The inferiority mindset is maintained by psychological indoctrination passed down from generation to generation. The majority of forms of sexism and violence against women are psychological, and they begin to erode the feminine mind as soon as they are born. They are used to having a low social standing. When women are young, they begin a vicious and unending cycle of being harsh to themselves or denying themselves pleasure. Additionally, children learn to internalize these ideals as contributing members of society. Women are regarded more for what they can do for men rather than for who they are in and of themselves.

Vulnerability of Women Living in Rural Areas

In rural areas of India, the lives of women are made more challenging by a variety of socioeconomic reasons. Those considerations are outlined further down..:

1. Poverty

About half of the people who reside in rural areas of India are living below the poverty line. The majority of people's earnings come from doing routine activities. It should come as no surprise that moms and female children do worse. These ladies do not have access to credit or skill training of any kind. Children who live in such families have no expectation of receiving better medical care or a higher education, and the gender of the kid does not matter. The vulnerable subculture in question has not been given any therapy.

2. Violence

Since prehistoric times, the Indian civilization has been held together by its traditions and culture. Boys are favored by society's preconceived notions of gender roles and sexism. As a result of their inferiority, women are subjected to degradation and exploitation. She was subjected to practices like as child marriage, sati, polygamy, purdah, the killing of female infants, forced pregnancy, and rape, among other atrocities.

The unequal treatment of women and the violence perpetrated against them have hurt India's gender ratio. Inequalities in power, discrimination based on gender, patriarchy, economic dependency on women, the dowry system, poor morality, a lack of decision-making, negative attitudes, and gender stereotypes all contribute to the escalation of violent behavior.

Economic Exploitation

Women and girls do two-thirds of the world's labor yet earn just 10% of what males do. Less than one percent of the world's property is owned by women, despite the fact that women make up half the population. Although they make up more than half of the world's population, women are only paid one-tenth of the average wage, work two-thirds as many hours, and own less than one-hundredth of the world's property. The lives of Indian women are more difficult in every aspect. Women make up about half of India's agricultural workforce. The majority of women labor anywhere from 15 to 16 hours each day, including at home, in factories, and offices, for very little money. Women get the least amount of social aid for the many roles they play in society. The rights, obligations, and levels of economic engagement of women are directly related to their economic standing. The economic standing of women is a barometer of society's overall growth. These developments do not lead to an increase in the level of economic engagement among women.

Educational Deprivation

Indian women are far less literate than men. A lack of education promotes poverty. UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy says, "No country has ever overcome poverty without devoting focus to education." But women's education is improving. National Commission on Women was created in 1992 to oversee women's affairs. Education, health, and employment initiatives for rural and urban women are many. Literacy is growing, fertility falling. Universal education, dropout elimination, creches, female hostels, technical schools for women, health, nutrition, and family welfare programs are examples globally, women's empowerment is gaining prominence. Concerns exist at government, non-governmental, and scientific levels. Development aims to empower women. Empowerment is giving women more influence over money, ideas, and themselves. Women's rights and choices increase. Women get life control by setting and attaining goals. Personal, household, communal, and social. Media, mobility, and reducing barriers like limited resources and skills help it. The process of obtaining the capacity to make strategic life decisions after being denied it.

Empowerment of Women

Recently, many UN bodies have pushed for the advancement of women's rights. Inspiring others requires boldly prevailing over the challenges and discrimination of life. Increasing women's access to knowledge and resources, autonomy in decision-making, life management, and independence from customs, beliefs, and habits may help women realize their full potential and live up to their full potential.

Women were given more agency at the IWC in Nairobi in 1985. Participants on the panel defined empowerment as the allocation of women's power and resources. Self-assertion that challenges existing power structures, community dissent, protest, and mobilization are all components of empowerment. Women and other marginalized groups have the potential to transform systems. The many international conferences held in India helped to socially improve rural women who were previously disadvantaged. Policy for the National Empowerment of Women (2000) The women's movement and grassroots nongovernmental organizations have been sources of inspiration for empowering initiatives. According to the Empowerment and Poverty Reduction guideline published by the World Bank, empowerment may be defined as "extension of freedom of choice and action." Opportunities provide women the ability to take charge of their own lives. It may be easier for developing nations like India to establish institutions with the support of microcredit, savings, and self-help organizations. Credit for women's self-help groups is backed by the NPEW. It enables freedom, choice, and the prospect of new experiences. Control over one's own resources, autonomy, self-reliance, and independence are necessary components of women's empowerment.

Definition of Empowerment

Because individual empowerment is so context dependent, it may be difficult to convey. Some academics use the terms self-reliance and self-respect to describe the concept of empowerment. According to UNIFEM Sen and Baltiwala (2000), empowerment is "gaining the capacity to make choices and wield bargaining power." This definition was developed as the best explanation of what empowerment is. "Giving authority to those who are powerless gives them more control. It requires having extrinsic control over resources and ideology, as well as having internal competence, self-confidence, and the ability to modify one's awareness in order to transcend external limitations." The ability to accomplish one's objectives is not synonymous with empowerment. Second, the term "empowerment" should be understood to refer to all powerful people, irrespective of gender, group, social class, or caste. The concept of empowerment is unique in that it may be applied to people of all social groups and castes, not only women.

Women Empowerment

Empowerment is acquiring social, economic, political, or spiritual authority via decision-making power, knowledge and resources, assertiveness in collective decision making, skill development, ability to influence others, and good self-image. Effective management and development of women's talents, potentials, and skills are essential to economic progress. Empowerment is knowledge, skills, and awareness against domination and exploitation. People and organizations need power and change to make life-changing decisions. Origins and usage of power influence women. Credit, property, money, education, and business insider knowledge are prohibited for women. For strategic life choices, empowerment involves financial, human, and social resources.

Empowerment and equality need resource autonomy. Women's empowerment is a "western" idea that encourages cultural and social transformation, which non-Western cultures dislike. Independent, indigenous women's groups have led lengthy, successful campaigns for women's empowerment, helping their nations grow. India's, SEWA and WWF have recruited thousands of women to fight for their rights and empowerment without "outside" help. A few emerging nations have surpassed wealthier nations in women's representation, machinery, and instrument and convention ratification all show government support for women's empowerment.

Economic Empowerment

Since India's development activities are geared at elevating the standard of living of its population, the country's primary challenge is alleviating poverty. A significant portion of our population, particularly women, children, and members of other marginalized groups, suffers from malnutrition, unemployment, and poor health and hygiene. Because of their low economic position and high rates of illiteracy, women in rural India need activities that may generate revenue. The vast majority of developing countries place an emphasis on the expansion of rural women and their active engagement in the main stream of development, particularly in the economic sphere by providing more possibilities for labor. SHGs provide people who were previously thought to have no savings the ability to save money by educating them how to be thrifty. Additionally, SHGs lend money when necessary to create income. When women have more power as a result of enhanced access to economic resources, they have achieved economic independence. This is beneficial for both gender equality and the well-being of families. Gaining economic independence requires not just an increase in income but also access to credit and the capacity to make decisions. The ability to make money, to engage in collective bargaining for economic benefits, to have ownership over material or human resources, to participate in economic decision-making, and to acquire management skills are all components of economic empowerment. Through the redistribution of power, economics helps communities gain confidence, self-assurance, and fearlessness, which in turn empowers individuals.

i) Poverty Eradication

Economic empowerment comes from SHGs teaching frugality to the poor, who were previously expected to have no savings. Lending money when needed helps them generate revenue. Thus, gender equality, economic independence, and family well-being arise from women gaining authority and access to economic resources. Rising income, credit, and decision-making authority are ways to achieve economic empowerment. Economic empowerment include earning power, collective bargaining for economic advantages, ownership over material or human resources, economic decision-making, and managerial skill development. Economic empowerment builds confidence, self-assurance, and bravery through redistributing power.

ii) Women in the Primary Sector

We make it a priority to ensure that women working in agriculture and related fields have access to training, extension, and other types of programs. The expansion of training programs in areas such as soil conservation, social forestry, dairy development, horticulture, cattle, animal husbandry, poultry, and fisheries would be beneficial to women working in agriculture.

iii) Micro Finance

The availability of loans and other forms of microfinance is made easier for women through the creation of new microfinance organizations and the improvement of existing ones. Current financial institutions and banks may lend to all women below the poverty line with extra help.

iv) Women in the secondary sector

Women's contributions have been an important factor in the growth of a number of different businesses, including agriculture, the food processing industry, the information technology industry, and the textile industry. They would get support in areas such labor law, social security, and other areas so that they could find job in a variety of businesses.

v) **Support Services**

Child care facilities, including creches at work and schools, homes for the elderly and disabled will be expanded and improved in order to facilitate the full participation of women in all aspects of social, political, and economic life. This will contribute to the creation of a more hospitable environment. In order to encourage female participation in the development process, the staff rules will be gender-neutral.

Social Empowerment

The social responsibility of SHGs includes contributing to the growth of the surrounding community as well as hosting cultural activities. Protests against alcoholism, domestic violence, and mistreatment of women get their backing from these individuals. People gain power by their engagement with others, social position, access to organizations and cultural activities, and so on..

i) Education

Equal educational opportunities for girls and women should be provided. The issues of discrimination, universal education, illiteracy, a gender-sensitive educational system, and education quality will all be tackled in an effort to help women advance in their careers and acquire technical skills. It is of the utmost importance to narrow the gender gap in secondary and higher education. It is anticipated that current sectoral time objectives would be met, with a special emphasis on girls and women, particularly members of SCs, STs, and minority groups.

ii) Health

A comprehensive women's health plan includes nutrition and health services for all ages. Healthcare for women should be inexpensive, comprehensive, and high-quality. Correct microdata on deaths, births, and manages is needed to reduce neonatal and mother mortality and early marriage. Marriage, death, and birth registration will be severely enforced. The National Population Policy recommends safe, effective, and inexpensive family planning for early marriages and child spacing Indian and alternative medicine will be promoted in health infrastructure, honoring women's traditional health and nutrition skills.

iii) Nutrition

We will focus on nutrition since females are more likely to suffer from malnutrition and illness during all stages of their lives, including infancy, childhood, adolescence, and reproduction. There will be a focus on addressing nutrient deficiencies, which are the root cause of a wide variety of illnesses and impairments, particularly in pregnant and nursing women.

iv) Environment

Policies pertaining to the environment, conservation, and restoration will take into consideration the perspectives of women. Women will play an important role in preserving the environment and halting its destruction. The majority of rural women get their energy from animal feces, waste from agricultural practices, and fuel wood. The Policy encourages the development of alternative energy resource programs with the goal of ensuring that these resources are used in an environmentally responsible manner. Women will work to increase awareness of renewable energy sources such as solar, biogas, and others..

Political Empowerment

Men have traditionally had more power in political positions. According to Joseph "Women should have the same rights to political and economic autonomy as males. It's possible that equal rights and involvement will change them." Participation in politics by women confers a sense of empowerment. Participation of the general populace in the selection of representatives and of those representatives in government is essential to democratic systems. Citizens are engaged in the process of policymaking via the use of voluntary politics. Active engagement consists of things like joining a party, campaigning, making public speeches, canvassing, registering voters, running for public office and party office, and registering voters. SHG members get the courage to speak out during Grama sabha meetings when they occur on a regular basis. Some members of SHGs decide to run for seats on the Panchayat. Members of the SHG are given the opportunity to voice concerns and build the self-

assurance necessary to act in a public capacity at regularly scheduled group sessions. The social mobilization of SHG is necessary for political empowerment. Women who hold influential political positions may advocate for the rights of women in their communities. Politics are strengthened by factors such as political literacy, participation in political campaigns, party membership, and elections.

Personally Empowered

Empowerment requires awareness, assessment, and decision-making. After subjugation, women gain self-confidence and equality. Women's health, reproductive rights, social, economic, and political knowledge advances greatly. Abandoning superstitions helps them avoid early marriage, dowry, domestic abuse, and other social issues. Controlling health, family size, and child education empowers women. Women's equality as participants, decision-makers, and beneficiaries in Self-Help Groups gives rural women confidence to succeed in daily life. Women who were barred from leaving the kitchen are now involved in home decisions including child education, marriage, and property ownership. A woman is individually empowered when she can boost her self-reliance and self-confidence, improving family welfare. Personal empowerment is achieved by economic independence, decision-making, self-esteem, health and knowledge support from the spouse, family relationships, basic facilities and amenities, etc.

Approaches to Women Empowerment

The emancipation of women has the ability to bring about a transformation in the power relations on a range of dimensions, including the individual, the family, the group, the community, and society as a whole. There are three distinct ways to advance the status of women. The integrated development approach places an emphasis on women's ability to survive and make a living; the economic development approach places an emphasis on women's economic status; and finally, the consciousness approach organizes women into groups that discuss the factors that contribute to oppression in society. The emancipation of women has the ability to bring about a transformation in the power relations on a range of dimensions, including the individual, the family, the group, the community, and society as a whole. There are three distinct ways to advance the status of women. The integrated development approach places an emphasis on women's ability to survive and make a living; the economic development approach places an emphasis on women's economic status; and finally, the consciousness approach organizes women into groups that discuss the factors that contribute to oppression in society.

Features of Women Empowerment

The empowerment of women may take various forms, and each one has the potential to be beneficial in its own way. As women gain more political and economic power, it is feasible for them to achieve greater levels of self-assurance, independence, and autonomy in their lives. and When women are able to recognize their rights and responsibilities to themselves and to society as a whole, as well as when they have the courage to fight against gender inequity, they become more self-reliant and empowered. Empowerment can be defined as the state of having control over one's own life. Women who have been granted more autonomy have a larger degree of influence on both the resources and the ideas that are developed. The validity of patriarchal standards is called into doubt as a direct result of this.

The elimination or reduction of gender inequities and the encouraging of women's participation in the process of establishing domestic and social policies are two of the many good outcomes that may result from empowering women. Empowering women also has a number of other positive benefits. By giving women more control over their own lives, we provide them the ability to triumph against the discrimination and adversity they face on a daily basis. In addition to this, it assists women in realizing their full potential in all aspects of life, which is a very helpful advantage. Increasing a woman's access to knowledge and resources, giving her a higher degree of autonomy in decision-making, and freeing her from the constraints of tradition and beliefs are all parts of empowerment that contribute to her achievement of an equal standing with males. As a direct result of the continuing empowerment of women, they are now in a position to change the ideas that keep them in subordinate positions. This is a direct consequence of the ongoing empowerment of women. A large amount of effort has to be invested into both raising awareness and enhancing capacities in order to make appreciable headway toward the goal of boosting the agency of women.

Components of Women Empowerment

The components of empowerment are as follows:

- i) Self- confidence to face the challenges of life
- ii) The right to make choices
- iii) The power to control their own *lives*
- iv) Cognitive awareness takes into account not only the immediate and immediate causes, but also the global and subordinate causes as well. acting in a manner that is contrary to the accepted rules of social interaction.
- v) Women are expected to be able to manage productive resources and to maintain a certain level of financial independence in order to meet the needs of the economic component.
- vi) Because of the political aspect, women now have the ability to evaluate, organize, and mobilize for social change.
- vii) For women to attain the psychological component, which is the gateway to the other components, they need to improve their personal and social abilities.

Empowerment is based on the following five principles:

- viii) Self-reliance,
- ix) Self-awareness,
- x) Common Mobilization,
- xi) Capacity building and
- xii) Interaction with others.

During the first phase of the procedure, the women are educated on the power dynamics that result in their ongoing subordination and given training to develop a novel viewpoint on the circumstances in which they find themselves. Women join together to share their thoughts and collaborate on developing a goal and a vision for the organization that they can all get behind. This takes place at a gathering where the women are. In the second stage, women make alterations to the manner in which they think about gender roles and the interactions they have with other persons. This may take place anywhere from a few months to many years. During the third and final stage of the course, students are given reminders and instructions on the significance of collaborating with their classmates. There is a possibility that the patriarchy, in addition to other archaic customs and ways of thinking, is directly responsible for the development of problems that are of a social or gender-related character.. If they are successful in conquering the obstacles, other members of the family will profit from their empowerment in the event that they are successful. If they are successful in overcoming the problems.

Measures of Women Empowerment

A restructuring of power relations is the end outcome of the process of purposefully empowering individuals. During the course of the evolutionary process, a pattern of dependency gave way to another pattern of independence, which was then followed by another pattern of interdependence. This is the absolute definition of allowing people greater control over their own lives. Simply appraising a person's degree of empowerment is a far less difficult process than really determining that person's level of empowerment, which is a much more difficult undertaking. The Gender Empowerment Measure, more often referred to as GEM, is a measurement that evaluates the level of social and economic empowerment of women in a country based on qualities such as participation, decision-making, and resource control. The GEM was developed by the World Bank in 2005. There are occasions when people will refer to the GEM by its abbreviation, which is GEM. It is essential for every program to have the involvement of the people in order for it to be successful, and empowerment in the context of changing relationships is something that needs to be acknowledged on both sides of problems such as reserves and social services. This is something that is essential for every program to have in order for it to be successful. Choices are at the heart of women's empowerment; nevertheless,

until they are given a larger role in the formulation of public policy, their capacity to make choices will be constrained. Unless they are given a larger role in the formation of public policy. Giving women more of a platform to express themselves is essential to empowering them. The government has also established a national resource unit for women, which serves as the apex body for promoting and incorporating gender perspectives in the politics and programs of the government. This unit was created as a result of the government's decision to establish the national resource unit for women.

Because the government decided to establish a national resource unit for women, this unit came into being as a direct consequence of that decision. The foundation of this unit was partially motivated by the objective of the government's initiative to construct a society that is more welcoming to people of many backgrounds. A variety of preventive measures, including the enactment of laws, have been taken in an attempt to reduce the number of cases of female feticide. One of these measures is the use of poisonous chemicals. Place restrictions on sexual identity testing It wasn't until 1993 that the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, and also promoted to ensure the dignity of life which includes human dignity and values ensured women would hold one-third of elected positions in local authorities.

Conclusion

In order for a nation to experience development and progress, its human resources must be used to the fullest extent that is practically possible. This must be done notwithstanding any differences that may be based on factors such as religion, faith, caste, gender, and other characteristics. According to popular legend, Abraham Lincoln once said the following: "No nation can advance forward if it is half free and half slave." This observation is often attributed to former U.S. President Abraham Lincoln. In spite of this, women in more than half of the world's nations continue to face discrimination in social, emotional, economic, and political spheres. If at least half of a country's population continues to regress in all aspects of development, then it is difficult for that nation to credibly claim that it has achieved progress in any of its areas of development, regardless of which areas it may be referring to. People who reside in rural areas are more likely to be exposed to greater rates of poverty, inequality, and discrimination; yet, these issues may be reduced to some degree through the use of planned development. The laws, programs, and initiatives that have been put into place by the government with the aim of expanding the rights of women and providing them with more freedom are the purposes of those laws, programs, and initiatives. Additionally, there are a number of groups that are working toward the same goal of empowering rural women by improving their socioeconomic status. This ambition is shared by all of these organizations. All of the organizations who are currently working toward this goal have it in common. The purpose of the government's efforts to enhance the economic, political, and cultural standing of women is to help facilitate the development of a welfare state as well as the general prosperity of society as a whole. This is the end aim of the government's activities. The formation of self-help groups (SHGs) and the provision of microfinance are two of the most important tactics that we use in our mission to foster the economic and political advancement of women. This is an ongoing project that we have been working on for quite some time.

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