



"Status Of Women Empowerment & Protection In India"

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Abstract

In this paper we attempt to analyse the status of Women Empowerment in India and highlights the Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment. On these days, the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns. But practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. The Indian Constitution grants equal rights to all genders as enshrined in the preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties and the Directive Principle. Women in India have the fundamental rights to not be discriminated on the grounds of gender and get equal protection under the law. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women to neutralise the cumulative socio-economic and political dis-advantages faced by them. It also imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Keywords – Indian Constitution, Equal Rights, Gender, Empowerment, Discrimination.

Introduction

Women's empowerment refers to the process of enabling women to have greater control over their lives and to be able to make their own decisions. This can include empowering women to participate fully in the economy and in the political process, as well as empowering them to make decisions about their own health and well-being. Empowerment of women is a process that leads women to claim their rights to

have access to equal opportunities in economic, cultural, social and political spheres of life and realise their full potential.

when we talk about women's empowerment in India what we refer that women must need to be aware of their rights like the right to vote, property rights, freedom of movement, their legal rights, and many more, which means, empowering women is making women realize their self-worth, their abilities to determine their own choice and shaping the society where women can enjoy their respect and rights just like other humans. Women's empowerment is an essential factor that works for the betterment and development of society, community, and country. If we pay more attention to how women's empowerment in India got momentum throughout the years, from the ancient to the modern period. Over time, Indian society has witnessed many uprises and downfalls when it came to empowering women.

In ancient Indian culture, women were treated as equal to men, and there was no discrimination on the bases of gender, instead of that women were honoured by society, and society at the time considered women as Janani which means mother, even in Hindu scripts women are considered as Devi. They used to enjoy their full basic rights where they were free to receive education, at that time the wives of the rishis could willing to take part in spiritual activities with their husbands, they were also known as the Ardhangini (better half) too. During that period, women got to live equal life just like men used to live. Women in Indian history have gone through two things in their life one is subjection and deliverance. With the passage of time, their positions might have changed but in the Vedic era, they were a complete symbol of protector and caretaker of mortality and ideals.

The accomplishment of Gargi, Maitreyi, Sita, and Draupadi turns out to be the most ideal role for women of this era. These women were competitive with men in many fields and also received and enjoyed their rights and equality, there were no restrictions on them, and they possessed great wealth and property. Along with that they even had a very strong say when it came to guiding their offspring.

In the ancient text of the Vedas, the concept of humans is a bedrock for society, in Taittiriya Samhita women and men were considered as the two-wheel of a cart. These lessons given by the Vedas to society were good examples of equality between men and women.

Legislative Framework for Women

The GOI (Government of India) has been active in ensuring the protection of law to the most vulnerable women since independence. Work is being carried out to ensure optimum implementation of laws for women such as :

- Legal Practitioners (Women) Act, 1923
- The Factories Act, 1948 (Amended in 1986)
- The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994 (PCPNDT)
- The Pre-Conception and Pre- Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of sex selection) Act,1994
- Offences mentioned under IPC Indian Penal Code, 1860
- The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
- The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
- The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987
- The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006
- The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013
- Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition & Redressal) Act,2013

Some major Constitutional Provisions for Women in India

Article 14 - Guarantees equality before law as well as equal protection of the law to all.

Article 15 – The State shall not discriminate against any citizen.

Article 15(1) – Prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex etc.

Article 15(3) – Special provision enabling the State to make affirmative discriminations in favour of women.

Article 16 - Guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment and that no citizen shall be discriminated against in matters of public employment on the grounds only of sex, religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, place of residence or any of them.

Article 39(a) – The State shall direct its policy towards securing all citizens men and women, equally, the right to means of livelihood.

Article 39(d) – Equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

Article 39(e) Enjoins the State to ensure that the health and strength of workers, men and women and the tender age of children are not abused and that the citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength.

Article 51 (A) (e) – To renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Article 243 (D) (4) – Guarantees reservation of not less than one-third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level for women.

Article 243 (T) (4) – Guarantees reservation of offices of Chairpersons in Municipalities for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the legislature of a State may by law provide.

Major challenges for women

There are several challenges that are plaguing the issues of women's right in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India-

Education: While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since independence where education is concerned. The gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India. The gender bias is in higher education, specialized professional trainings which hit women very hard in employment and attaining top leadership in any field.

Poverty: Poverty is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradication of poverty should be a national goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy. Due to this, women are exploited as domestic helps.

Health and Safety: The health and safety concern of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country and is an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned. Other major challenges are-

- Sexual Harassment at Workplace
- Child Marriage
- Domestic Violence
- Dowry Prohibition
- Indecent Representation of Women
- Immoral Traffic Prevention
- Trafficking of persons

Nature-Wise Details of Complaints Received-

SN	Category	1st Jan, 2022 To 31st March, 2022	1st April 2022 to 31st Dec. 2022	Total
1	Acid Attack	1	8	9
2	Cyber Crime against Women	237	690	927
3	Denial of Maternity Benefits to Women	17	66	83
4	Dowry Death	72	285	357
5	Gender Discrimination including Equal Right to Education & Work	12	15	27
6	Harassment of Married Women/Dowry Harassment	1011	3602	4613
7	Outraging Modesty of Women/Molestation	384	2143	2527
8	Rape/Attempt to Rape	326	1385	1711
9	Sexual Assault	30	129	159
10	Sexual Harassment	158	674	832
11	Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace	48	239	287
12	Stalking / Voyeurism	80	220	300
13	Traditional Practices Derogatory to Women Rights i.e. Sati-Pratha, Devdasi Pratha, Witch Hunting	7	5	12
14	Trafficking / Prostitution of Women	15	47	62
15	Police Apathy against Women	439	1186	1625

Source-Ministry of women & child development annual report 2022-23

Some important Schemes for Women

The Ministry has formulated 'Mission Shakti', an Integrated Women Empowerment Programme, as Umbrella Scheme for the Safety, Security and Empowerment of Women for implementation during the 15th Finance Commission period from 2021-22 to 2025- 26. It aims at strengthening interventions for safety, security and empowerment of women in a mission mode through institutional and convergence mechanism. Mission Shakti seeks to realise the Government's vision for 'women-led development' by addressing issues affecting women across the life-cycle continuum, while making them equal partners in nation-building through convergence across Ministries/ Departments and different levels of governance, greater participation and support of Panchayati Raj Institutions and other local self-governance bodies and Jan Sahabhagita, while also strengthening digital infrastructure for last mile tracking of service delivery.

- 1- **One Stop Centres (OSCs)**, provide integrated services like legal counselling and help, psycho-social counselling and support, providing information about help and facilities available for women etc., under one roof.
- 2- **Women Helpline (181-WHL)**, an emergency/non-emergency response system on a toll-free telephonic short code 181 that is being integrated with ERSS (112) and other existing helplines/institutions.
- 3- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)**, is the main initiative for behavioural and mindset change. It has been expanded to cover all districts of the nation.
- 4- **Nari Adalat**, a new sub-component for providing women with an alternate grievance redressal mechanism for resolving cases of petty nature such as harassment, subversion, curtailment of rights or entitlements etc.
- 5- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY)**, compensates for loss of wages due to pregnancy and childbirth and promotes health seeking behaviour. Earlier scheme used to cover only one child, now benefit will be given for second child also if the child is a girl child.
- 6- **Nirbhaya Fund**, The Government of India had set up a dedicated fund called Nirbhaya Fund for implementation of initiatives aimed at enhancing the safety and security for women in the country.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the status of women in India has improved significantly in recent years, but there is still a long way to go. It is essential to recognize the achievements made so far and continue to work towards a more equitable and just society for women. By addressing the challenges that women in India face and promoting gender equality, we can ensure that women can fully participate in all aspects of life and contribute to the development of the country. The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the mainstream of development. Women empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed income and property so that they may stand on their feet and build up their identity in the society. The government exercise various things to address the issue, such as Women Police

Station/Mahila Thana (Working, Efficiency and Effectiveness, Rights of Differently Abled Women (DAW), Role of Fast Track Special Courts in delivering Justice to Women, and Women in Paramilitary Forces. But only Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self-decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality

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