

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The status of women in society specifies its level of civilisation and development. Status of women is not a continual phenomenon; it has undergone many changes during various historical stages. During the Vedic era, woman enjoyed high status in the beginning but gradually the status declined in the medieval period. The contradictory situation was such that sometimes she was considered as 'Goddess' and other time a 'slave'. After the fall of Mughal empire, the British people establish their supremacy over the Indian people. But Indian women have forged a good way to attain the present position. Woman at present have stepped out of their domain of four walls and are now in the battlefields struggling each day against social restrictions, emotional ties, religious boundaries and culture clutches. There are no field which are left unconquered by women of India starting from politics, culture, defence to sports. Today Indian women are enjoying a considerable good position in our country because of the Indian constitutional and legal provision. Women have fought for their rights and have achieved a lot as compared to the women in past but in reality, there are lot more to accomplish.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Gender, Inequality, India.

Introduction

Women empowerment means creating opportunities for women and girls to experience their life, their vision and their authentic selves in an environment that is free of fear and self-doubt and racism. It would mean boosting confidence of women to be self-reliant and independent and become capable to tackle her personal as well as social matters and participate actively in social and political development.

Women empowerment a method to elevate women by giving them their correct rights. Women have been deprived of the rights since beginning of time. Women's empowerment is the process of getting women out of the tragedy situation and giving them the rights and a better place in the society.

According to Swami Vivekananda "It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing". From the above statement we can clearly conclude that to build up a better and stronger society men and women need to be treated equally and which would be only possible if women in India will be protected from any kind of violence and discrimination.

Empowering women is a necessity if the country wants to prosper in future. If women are given the same opportunity and equal treatment as men in every sphere of life our country will make twice as much progress. This will also bring down problem of unemployment and poverty in India. Brigham Young says "You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; You educate a generation". Women empowerment is crucial for success of a family, a society, and a country as a whole. An empowered woman will shape the future of the family by imparting the right kind of education to their kids which will eventually contribute to good responsible citizens in the country.

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Issues and Problems Faced by Women in India

- **Rape** is the fourth most common crime against women in India.^{[1][2]} According to the 2021 annual report of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 31,677 rape cases were registered across the country, or an average of 86 cases daily, a rise from 2020 with 28,046 cases, while in 2019, 32,033 cases were registered.^[3] Of the total 31,677 rape cases, 28,147 (nearly 89%) of the rapes were committed by persons known to the victim.^[4] The share of victims who were minors or below 18 - the legal age of consent - stood at 10%.^[4] -Courtesy Wikipedia.
- **Dowry Deaths:** Although dowry is illegal in India, but still giving of expensive gifts and huge amount of money to groom and groom's family is common practice continuing in India society. According to National crime Record Bureau data Twenty women are killed for dowry every day in India. Between 2017 and 2021 a total of 35 493 dowry deaths took place in India.
- **Gender based Violence:** As per the National Crime Record Bureau, afflictions of offence against women there were more than 2,28,650 reports whereas in the year 2021 the cases rose to 4,28,248 by 87 percent increase.
- **Low Wages:** According to the report women and men in India 2022 released by the national statistical wage disparity between men and women has widened over the past decade with the gap opening up further at higher wage levels. According to the world inequality report 2022, Indian men earn 82% of labour income whereas women in India earn just 18%.
- **Poverty:** Despite all the development in the present period India is still one of the poorest countries in the world which is amongst the major reason for gender inequality in India.
- **Unequal opportunities:** India gender norms create disadvantage for women. Often girls are not sent to school when they become women, they have limited ability to earn money or realise their potential. Rural women of India instigate a crucial role in agricultural development however in India despite constitutional laws women cannot formally earn own land, without land they cannot get loans to invest in their farms or businesses. this also means that they have no control over the use of land or the benefits that comes from land it. Men generally control the household decision like how to use the families land assets. These disadvantages are often reinforced by practices that limit women's access to services like training.

As per the most recent census overall literacy of India is 77% out of which literacy rate for men is 84.40% and 71.50% for women. Although, the literacy percentage for women has gradually increased since independence but still, women have to travel a long way to bridge the huge gap in literacy with men.

Challenges faced by Women in India

- **Gender Discrimination**

Women are treated as weaker section of the society than men and are given less importance always. Because of the patriarchal system in India male and female are always discriminated of power and work. It is an idea or opinion that women are incapable and are not equal to men. Gender discrimination refers to unequal treatment or attitude of individuals because of their gender. Gender is a socio-cultural term indicating defined roles and behaviour allocated to 'males' and 'females' in a society.

Women often feel discriminated in every aspect of life like nutrition, education, healthcare, decline of female population, job, public life etc. Day-by-day women are becoming the real victim of the discrimination.

- **Lack of Education**

Educating a girl child is regarded as a bad investment as one day or the other she has to leave the parental home and start her new life with her husband. Low socio-economic families tend to favour boys in a matter of investing in education as they will support the families when parents get older. Practice of teaching are not gender-responsive resulting in gender gaps in learning and skills.

Thus, without proper education girls and women's lack behind in meeting the present days demand of job skill. Although gradually girls are been educated but not to the expectation. Study shows that parents often do not spend on girls after 10, +2 standards, huge drops are determined after completion of 10 and+ 2 standards.

- **Female Infanticide**

Female infanticide is killing a new-born female child, giving birth to a son in India is an incentive as they provide security to parents in old ages and can perform rights and rituals for expired parents and antecedents. Dissimilarly their daughters are regarded as social and economic strain for the fear of being incapable to pay agreeable amount of dowry and an opinion about girl child that they are valueless to parents can give rise to female infanticide.

- **Female Foeticide**

Female foeticide is the termination of female foetus through sex discrimination abortion. It occurs when the family has a longing and fondness for son over daughter. This is a common culture practiced in India. Families make a decision to determine the foetus as soon as they determine the gender of foetus. However, now-a-days sex discrimination is totally banded in medical science and therefore, these cases of female foeticide are decreasing.

- **Financial Constraints**

Financial challenges are faced equally by men and women, but it depends on one's individual potential to get over them. Challenges on part of a man is to be the bread winner for the family and support the family financially, while on the other hand for women's, roles which are categorised by the society from centuries are cooking, reproduction, taking care of the family. The daughters are taught to be a good wife, daughter-in-law, and a good mother. While the more crucial part of to sustain a life that is financial education is the least lesson, she grows up learning.

In a survey conducted by AARP founded that woman of 40-79 age group faced financial turbulence such as divorce, widowhood, losing jobs, retirement. Women experience many hurdles in her life for not being financially literate as before marriage she financially depends on her father and then husband after marriage. Sometimes women often sacrifice their blooming career for home and children.

- **Low Mobility**

"To achieve gender equality, we need to mobilise not just parliament but populations, not only civil society but all the society"-World Economic Forum

Reasons for lack of accessibility are:

- low rate of women's labour participation
- unavailability of transport routes at times when women need for social or economic network.
- Inflation of metro and bus fare.
- women do not feel safe on roads and public transportation.
- social norms -women are restricted from stepping out of the house to work and earn despite being capable due to patriarchal rules.

- **Low Ability to Bear Risks**

Women's comparatively have a low ability to bear economic risk because since birth they have been led a protective life.

- **Low Ability for Achievement**

Need for achievement, interdependence, and self-determination are precondition to flourish in a business, but women often are found in taking pride in the achievements of their father, husbands, and sons. Poor literacy, inadequate infrastructural facilities, high production, social attitude, economic constraints, prevents women to bear any risk or to enter businesses.

- **Lack of Awareness**

Prevailing culture and social norms restrict opportunities for women in India as a result women cannot reach its potential perpetuating poverty and hunger in the country. Women in India are not aware of their rights so that they can demand equality.

According to the report by World Economic Forum's Gender Gap, India ranks 135th amongst 146 countries in gender parity in 2022.

Government Schemes to Empower Women

- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**- this campaign was initiated by Government of India which targets mainly the girls in up Haryana, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Bihar and Delhi, with an objective to prevent gender bias sex selective elimination, to ensure survival and protection of girl child, to ensure education and participation to girl child.
- **One Stop Centre Scheme**-the scheme was launched on 1st April 2015 by Government of India, which provides comprehensive integrated services under one umbrella, comprising of facilities like legal aids, medical aids, police facilitation, counselling, psychosocial counselling and refuge to women in distress and victims of violence.
- **Women Helpline scheme**-a 24hour response scheme was launched to provide response to women afflicted by any kind of violence or threat via a referral. The scheme also provides an update regarding scheme programmes nationwide via 24hour toll-free number.
- **Ujjwala**- A comprehensive scheme was launched in 2007 to prevent trafficking and rescue, rehabilitation, re- integration and re-patriation of victims trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation.
- **SakhiNivas**
- **SwadharGreh**(a scheme for women in difficult circumstances) -the scheme was inaugurated by department of women and child development in 2001-2002, the scheme serves to the primary needs of women encountered with unfortunate circumstances and protects them from further exploitation and desolation.
- **Nari shakti puraskar** -the scheme was inaugurated by Ministry of women and child development Government of India in 1999 to recognize the work of individual women or an institution contributing to women empowerment.
- Stree Shakti Puruskar 2014
- Women Helpline scheme
- **Mahila police Vounteers** -The scheme was launched by MWCD on December 2016 collaboration with Home Ministry, envisaged the engagement of mahila police volunteers in states the UTS who will act as a link between police and community and help for women in distress.
- **Mahila shakti Kendras (MSK)**-the scheme was approved on November 2017, providing a platform for rural women to avail their entitlements and focus on their empowerment through capacity building.
- **Nirbhaya**-The scheme was launched post 2012 Nirbhaya gang rape case. A dedicated fund known as 'Nirbhaya fund' has been setup by the Government of India to enhance the safety and security of women across the country.

Conclusion

Society plays a major role in women empowerment. Problem lies in the social structure that socializes men in the same way. Changes should be made in the social norms that set boundaries for women opportunities. Men and women must be involved on many levels for changes to take place. By adopting gender transformative approaches, we can overcome the restraining gender norms, gender inequality, and bridge the gap in the access to resources, including shared control over resources and decision making. Research and development organisations need to invest in programs that promote gender equality alongside improving productivity and income, policies need to be implemented that increases women's access to services and resources.

Most women in India lack behind because of the fear of what other people will think of her, such mentalities keep lot of women in abusive relationship. Communities should take a step and support women and celebrate their success in every field. Women's need to be respected as farmers as well as a leader. Woman should have access to education so that they know their rights and have confidence to raise their voice and claim them. Women should be educated along with maths and science the lesson of equality, they must learn that they are as equal person, deserve respect and have rights to do what they want. These small steps will lead to big changes in future.

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