

## Women Empowerment in India

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### ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is not a new concept and its need was sensed much earlier, even before independence. Not only in India but all over the world women have faced atrocities and thus since the beginning of its history they have been challenging gender inequalities. The struggles for women empowerment have also been supported by many men who have been outraged at injustice against women in society. Women empowerment has become a much raised and discussed topic around the globe. But why is it necessary and why are we trying to fill this gender gap? Why are women not given that equality level and trust in the society? Why even in the 21st-century women still have to run for their rights? In India, women have always been a victim of honour killings. They have been bereft of basic rights for proper education and freedom for years. In this male-dominated and patriarchal society, they face violence, abuse and other ill-treatment. Empowerment of women is essential to have the bright future in family, society and country. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru had said that to awaken the people, first awaken the women need to be awakened, because once a woman has been awakened then the whole nation and family gets awakened with her. I believe a woman is a most powerful creature in this living earth. Not only she compromises her family, but in the time of need, she tends to have such energy to make things go in a right way whether the cost to it is they themselves. The aim of women empowerment is providing strength to them. The condition and status of women is somehow improving in our society but it is still not up to the mark. They still face gender inequalities and many other atrocities whose scale differs for different class and region of people. Women empowerment helps women to look upon their lives as a confident being. It encourages women to stand and fight for their rights and live a worthy life. There is not a radical but a little bit of change in the mindset of people that are allowing women to walk on the pathway of development. Women are leaving no stones unturned to prove themselves to the world and despite many hurdles, they turn out to achieve respectable and notable positions. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process." Women empowerment can be defined in very simple words that it is making women powerful so that they can take their own decisions regarding their lives and well being in the family and society. It is empowering women to make them able to get their real rights in the society.

**KEYWORDS:** Women Empowerment, Education, Gender Gap, Honour Killings, Patriarchal Society

### INTRODUCTION

The subject of empowerment of women has becoming a burning issue all over the world including India since last few decades. Women empowerment refers to making women powerful to make them capable of deciding for themselves. In a male dominated society, women are the weakest links, so that they may be strengthened for strengthening the society as a whole and that is possible only by empowering them. Nehru said, "Women should be uplifted for the upliftment of the nation, if a women is uplifted, society and nation is uplifted." Women empowerment is critical to the process of development of the community. Empowerment of women is essential to harness the women labour in the mainstream of economic development. According to Swami Vivekananda, there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of the women is improved. It is not possible for a

bird to fly on one wing. Women have to play an important role in the building up of every economy. Empowerment can be defined in many ways, however, when talking about women's empowerment, empowerment means accepting and allowing women who are on the outside of the decision-making process into it. This puts a strong emphasis on participation in political structures and formal decision-making and in the economic sphere on the ability to obtain an income that enables participation in economic decision-making. Empowerment is the process that creates power in individuals over their own lives, society and in their communities. Women are empowered when they are able to access the opportunities available to them without limitations and restrictions such as in education, profession and lifestyle. Feeling entitled to make your own decisions

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creates a sense of empowerment. Empowerment includes the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment is all about equipping and allowing women to make life-determining decisions through the different problems in society.

India is a very famous country known for its cultural heritage, traditions, civilization, religion and geographical features from the ancient time. On the other hand, it is also popular as a male chauvinistic nation. Women are given first priority in India however on the other hand they were badly treated in the family and society. They were limited only for the household chores or understand the responsibility of home and family members. They were kept totally unaware of their rights and own development. People of India used to say this country as “**Bharat-Mata**” however never realized the true meaning of it. Bharat-Mata means a mother of every Indian whom we have to save and care always. Women constitute half power of the country so in order to make this country a fully powerful country, women empowerment is very necessary. It is empowering women to understand their rights to be independent in every area for their proper growth and development. Women give birth to the baby means future of the nation so only they can better involve in making the bright future of the nation through the proper growth and development of the children. Women need to be empowered instead of treating as a helpless victim of male chauvinism.

#### **Need for Women Empowerment:**

Need for empowerment arose due to centuries of domination and discrimination done by men over women; women are the suppressed lot. They are the target of varied types of violence and discriminatory practices done by men all over the world. India is no different. India is a complex country. We have through centuries developed various types of customs, traditions and practices. These customs and traditions good as well as bad have become a part of our society's collective consciousness. We worship female goddesses, we also give great importance to our mothers, daughters, sisters, wives and other female relatives or friends. But at the same time, Indians are also famous for treating their women badly both inside and outside their homes. Indian society consists of people belonging to almost all kinds of religious beliefs. In every religion women are given a special place and every religion teaches us to treat women with respect and dignity. But somehow the society has so developed that various types of ill practices, both physical and mental, against women have become a norm since ages. For instance, sati pratha, practice of dowry, parda pratha, female infanticide, wife burning, sexual violence, sexual harassment at work place, domestic violence and other varied kinds of discriminatory practices; all such acts consists of physical as well as mental element. The reasons for such behaviour against women are many but the most important one are the male superiority complex and patriarchal system of society. Though to eliminate these ill practices and discrimination against women various constitutional and legal rights are there but in reality there are a lot to be done. Several self-help groups (SHG) and NGOs are working in this direction, also women themselves are breaking the societal barriers and achieving great heights in all dimensions, political, social and economic. But society as a whole has still not accepted women as being equal to men

and crimes or abuses against women are still on the rise. For that to change the society's age-old deep-rooted mind set needs to be changed through social conditioning and sensitization programmes. Almost every country no matter how progressive has a history of ill-treating women. In other words women from all over the world have been rebellious to reach the status they have today. While the western countries are still making progress, third world countries like India still lack behind in Women Empowerment. In India women empowerment is needed more than ever. India is amongst the countries which are not safe for women. There are various reasons for this. Firstly, women in India are in danger of honor killings. Their family thinks its right to take their lives if they bring shame to the reputation of their legacy. Moreover, the education and freedom scenario is very regressive here. Women are not allowed to pursue higher education, they are married off early. The men are still dominating women in some regions like it's the woman's duty to work for him endlessly. They do not let them go out or have freedom of any kind. In addition, domestic violence is a major problem in India. The men beat up their wife and abuse them as they think women are their property. Because women are afraid to speak up. Thus, we see how women empowerment is the need of the hour. We need to empower these women to speak up for themselves and never be a victim of injustice.

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

1. To know the need of Women Empowerment.
2. To assess the Awareness of Women Empowerment in India.
3. To analyze the Factors influencing the Economic Empowerment of Women.
4. To study the Government Schemes For Women Empowerment.
5. To identify the hindrances in the path of Women Empowerment.
6. To offer useful Suggestions in the light of Findings.

**Methodology:** The present study is based on the secondary data published by various agencies and organizations. The present study makes use of data and information provided by, Govt. of India, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Newspapers, Magazines, Books, Various Journals, Research Papers and Internet etc.

**Review of Literature:** Review of the existing literature is the pillar of any research. At the beginning stage of a research, a researcher should go through the relevant literatures. Review of literature helps the researcher not only in understanding the problems involved but also in planning and execution of the experiences of various researchers in this field. The main objective of the study is to know the women empowerment in India. So, this study briefly review some of the past studies on women empowerment, which would help in current study and brief review of some studies, is given below.

M. Bhavani Sankara Rao, has highlighted that strength of Women individuals from SHG have surely taken a swing to better. It obviously demonstrates that health of women individuals examine among themselves about wellbeing related issues of different individuals and their kids and make them mindful of different Government arrangements exceptionally implied for them.

Doepke M. Tertilt M., does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development? This study is an exact examination recommending that cash in the hands of moms advantages youngsters. This study built up a progression of non-helpful family bartering models to comprehend what sort of grindings can offer ascent to the watched observational relationship.

Subrahmanyam, looks at Women instruction in India at present and Past. Creator highlighted that there has a decent advance in general enrolment of young lady understudies in schools. The term engage intends to give legitimate force or power to act. It is the way toward procuring a few exercises of Women.

Sethuraman K., The Role of Empowerment Women' sand Domestic Violence in tyke Growth and Under nourishment in a Tribal and Rural Community in South India. This exploration paper investigates the relationship between Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence, maternal nourishing status and the dietary status and development more than six months in kids matured 6 to 24 months in a provincial and tribal group. This longitudinal observational study attempted in provincial Karnataka. India included tribal and country subjects.

Venkata Ravi and Venkatraman, concentrated on the impacts of SHG on women support and practicing control over basic leadership both in family matters and in gathering exercises. Duflo E. , Women's Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge The study contends that the bury connections of the Empowerment and Development are likely too feeble to be in any way self-managing and that constant strategy responsibility to similarly for its own particular purpose might be expected to achieve fairness amongst men and women.

M. Doepke and M. Tertilt, has analysis does female empowerment promote economic development? This study is an empirical analysis suggesting that money in the hands of mothers benefits children. This study developed a series of non cooperative family bargaining models to understand what kind of frictions can give rise to the observed empirical relationship

Thus, from the above cited review of literature it is clear that large number of studies have already been undertaken on women empowerment and related problems. The current study in this field is an attempt to highlight the women empowerment in India.

**Benefits of Women Empowerment:** The term Women Empowerment refers to empowering women with education, employment, decision making, and better health in view of an equal and just society. Women Empowerment is a process to make the women financially independent, educated and progressive, enjoying a good social status. Women since ages have been struggling to be socially and professionally recognized as equivalent to men. There are many incidents in a woman's personal and professional life, where her abilities are undermined against that of a man's; having an adverse effect on her over all personality and hampering her growth. Benefits of Women Empowerment are as follows:

1. They are able to lead their lives with dignity and freedom
2. It adds to their self-esteem and self-confidence
3. It gives them a distinct identity of their own
4. They are able to gain respectable positions in society
5. As they are financially independent they are able to spend on all their needs and desires and they don't need to sacrifice or compromise with their needs for others.
6. They are able to make meaningful contributions to the well-being of society
7. They act as capable citizens to contribute to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of the country.
8. Country's resources are fairly and equally accessible to them.

**Barriers to Women Empowerment in India:** Indian society is a complex society with varied customs, rituals, beliefs and traditions. Sometimes these age old beliefs and customs constitute the most significant barriers to the empowerment of women in India. Few of the significant barriers to the women empowerment in India are explained below-

1. **Societal Norms:** Many societies in India restrict women from leaving the house, given to their orthodox belief and age old traditions. Women in such societies are not allowed to go outside either for education or for employment and are forced to live an isolated and dejected life. Women living under such conditions become accustomed to being inferior to men and are unable to change their present social and economical state.
2. **Workplace Sexual Harassment:** Workplace sexual harassment is the most significant barrier to women empowerment in India. Private sectors like hospitality industry, software industry, educational institutions, and hospitals are some of the worst affected. It is a manifestation of deep rooted male supremacy in the society. There had been a steep rise of about 170% in the workplace sexual harassment of women in India in the past couple of decades.
3. **Gender discrimination:** Majority of women in India still face gender discrimination at work place as well as in the society. Many societies don't allow the women to go out for employment or education. They are not allowed to take independent decisions either for work or for family, and are treated inferior to men. Such discrimination of the women leads to their socio economic decline and hugely contradicts Woman Empowerment.
4. **Pay disparity:** Women in India are paid less than their male counterparts. The situation is worst in unorganized sectors where women are employed as daily wage labors. Women working for the same number of hours and doing the same work are paid less than the men, which implies unequal powers between men and women. Even the women who are employed in organized sectors are paid less than their male counterparts having equivalent qualification and experience.
5. **Illiteracy:** Female illiteracy and their high dropout rate is one of the major obstacles to the empowerment of women in India. In urban India girls are at par with boys in terms of education but they significantly lag behind in rural areas. The effective literacy rate of women is 64.6%, while that of men is 80.9%. Lot of Indian girls



who join school, dropout in the initial years without having passed even 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

6. **Child Marriage:** Though, India has successfully reduced child marriages in the past few decades, through a number of laws and initiatives taken by the government; still a report in early 2018 by the UNICEF (United Nations Children Emergency Fund) states that nearly 1.5 Million girls in India get married before they turn 18. Early marriage reduces the growth prospects of girls who very soon be moving onto adulthood.
7. **Crimes against Women:** Indian women have been subjected to domestic violence and other crimes such as – dowry, honor killing, trafficking etc. It's strange that the women in urban areas are more prone to criminal assault than the women in rural areas. Even working women in big cities avoid using public transport in late hours, fearing their modesty and life. Woman empowerment can only be achieved in true sense if we ensure safety of our women, providing them the liberty to roam free and without fear as the men in the society do.
8. **Female Infanticide:** Female infanticide or sex selective abortion is also one of the major obstacles to woman empowerment in India. Female infanticide means identifying the gender of the fetus and aborting it when it is revealed to be a female; often without the mother's consent. Female infanticide has led to a high male female sex ratio in the states of Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir. Our claims on woman empowerment will not be substantiated unless we eradicate female infanticide or sex selective abortion.

#### Role of Government's in Woman Empowerment in India:

The government of India has implemented many programs for the empowerment of women. Many of these programs are for providing employment, education, health accessible to the masses. These programs have been especially incorporated keeping in mind the needs and conditions of Indian women, to ensure their participation. Some of these programs are – MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme), Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan, janani suraksh yojana (reduce maternal mortality) etc. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India has implemented various new schemes specifically aimed at the empowerment of Indian women. Some of those significant schemes are given below-

1. **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme:** The scheme focuses on eradicating female infanticide and also on the education of girl child. It aims for changing the mindset of people towards a girl, by providing financial support and also by strict enforcement of laws and acts.
2. **Women Helpline Scheme:** This scheme aims for providing 24 hours emergency support help line for women who are subjected to any kind of violence or crime. The scheme provides a universal emergency number -181 across the country for women in distress. The number also provides information on women related schemes in the country.
3. **Ujjawala Scheme:** A scheme aiming at the rescue of women affected by trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation and their rehabilitation and welfare.
4. **Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP):** The STEP scheme aims at imparting skills to women, making them employable as well as to become self employed. Various sectors like

agriculture, horticulture, handloom, tailoring and fisheries etc are covered under the scheme.

5. **Mahila Shakti Kendras:** The scheme focuses on empowering rural women through community participation. Community volunteers like students, professional etc will teach the rural women about their rights and welfare schemes.
6. **Reservation for Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions:** In 2009 the Union Cabinet of the Government of India instituted 50% reservation for the women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. It is aimed mainly at improving the social status of women in rural India. The states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and Andhra Pradesh among various others have majority of women as elected head of gram panchayats.

**Slogans on Women Empowerment:** Various slogans can be found on women empowerment to make the society even more aware for a safer environment for girls. We'll update an article specifically on Women Empowerment slogans. For now, here are some of the best slogans for women empowerment are:

1. Teach a girl child, the whole nation will be taught.
2. Respect women, help develop the nation.
3. Empower women, advance the nation
4. women are equal to men, don't judge on gender basis.
5. Forget gender difference, see the real difference that a woman can bring to the society.

It is time for us to really forget gender inequality and think about a growing advanced nation and a safer environment for all of us. It is we that can remove the myth and differences between boys and girls. In no ways, a girl is less competent to boys. Let us swear to empower women in our society by respecting them and understanding their dreams. Let us help them achieve their dreams. Women empowerment is a serious concern which if handled wisely is an advantage for the society.

#### Suggestions:

However, we are still far behind in achieving the equality and justice which the Preamble of our Constitution talks about. The real problem lies in the patriarchal and male-dominated system of our society which considers women as subordinate to men and creates different types of methods to subjugate them. The need of us is to educate and sensitize male members of the society regarding women issues and try to inculcate a feeling of togetherness and equality among them so that they would stop their discriminatory practices towards the fairer sex. For this to happen apart from Government, the efforts are needed from various NGOs and from enlightened citizens of the country. And first of all efforts should begin from our homes where we must empower female members of our family by providing them equal opportunities of education, health, nutrition and decision making without any discrimination. Because India can become a powerful nation only if it truly empowers its women.

#### Conclusion:

In order to really bring women empowerment in the Indian society, it needs to understand and eliminate the main cause of the ill practices against women which are patriarchal and male dominated system of the society. It needs to be open-minded and change the old mind set against women together

with the constitutional and other legal provisions. As India is progressive to become world's fastest growing economy in near future, it must also focus on Women Empowerment. We must understand that women empowerment is a process which hopes to bring gender equality and a balanced economy. Indian women had been President, Prime ministers, ministers, civil servants, doctors, lawyers, sportswomen, teachers, astronaut etc, but still a good majority of them needs help and support. Support to be educated, to do what they want to do, to travel safe, to work safe and to be independent; making their own decisions. The way to the socio-economic development of India goes through the socio-economic development of her women folk. In spite of many problems, drawbacks and hurdles that still prevail, Indian women (especially educated) are no longer hesitant or apologetic about claiming a share and visibility within the family, at work, in public places, and in the public discourse. There is no denying the fact that women in India have made a considerable progress in almost seven decades of Independence, but they still have to struggle against many handicaps and social evils in the male-dominated society. Many evil and masculine forces still prevail in the modern Indian society that resists the forward march of its women folk. We can make our society and nation develop more faster by accepting the contribution from girls towards the nation. History has set motivating examples on how girls have achieved their dreams. We can bring the change in our society, as change comes from within us.

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