



## Women Empowerment in India: Some Issues

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### ABSTRACT

*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. It is ironical that a country, which has recently acclaimed the status of the first Asian country to accomplish its Mars mission in the maiden attempt, is positioned at the 29th rank among 146 countries across the globe on the basis of Gender Inequality Index. There has been amelioration in the position of women, but their true empowerment is still awaited. Swami Vivekananda, one of the greatest sons of India, quoted that, "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." Therefore, the inclusion of "Women Empowerment" as one of the prime goals in the eight Millennium Development Goals underscores the relevance of this fact. Thus, in order to achieve the status of a developed country, India needs to transform its colossal women force into an effective human resource and this is possible only through the empowerment of women.*

**KEYWORDS :** Women, Empwerment, development, society, traditionally

### Introduction

Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave.

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban / rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender based violence and political participation. However there are significant gap between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence.

Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today.

### What is women empowerment?

Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender-based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices. Women empowerment does not mean 'deifying women' rather it means replacing patriarchy with parity. In this regard, there are various facets of women empowerment, such as given hereunder:—

**Human Rights or Individual Rights:** A woman is a being with senses, imagination and thoughts; she should be able to express them freely. Individual empowerment means to have the self-confidence to articulate and assert the power to negotiate and decide.

**Social Women Empowerment** A critical aspect of social empowerment of women is the promotion of gender equality. Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life.

**Educational Women Empowerment** It means empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. It means making women aware of their rights and developing a confidence to claim them.

**Economical and occupational empowerment** It implies a better quality of material life through sustainable livelihoods owned and managed by women. It means reducing their financial dependence on their male counterparts by making them a significant part of the human resource.

**Legal Women Empowerment** It suggests the provision of an effective legal structure which is supportive of women empowerment. It means addressing the gaps between what the law prescribes and what actually occurs.

**Political Women Empowerment** It means the existence of a political system favouring the participation in and control by the women of the political decision-making process and in governance.

### Challenges of Women Empowerment

**Perspective:** The most widespread and dehumanising discriminations against women are on the basis of the biased perspective. The discrimination against the girl child begins from the birth itself. Boys are preferred over girls; hence, female infanticide is a common practice in India. The ordeal that an Indian girl faces at birth is only the beginning of a lifelong struggle to be seen and heard.

**Patriarchate Bottlenecks** The traditional Indian society is a patriarchal society ruled by the diktats of self-proclaimed caste lords who are the guardians of archaic and unjust traditions. They put the burden of traditions, culture and honour on the shoulders of women and mar their growth. The incidences of "honour killing" reveal the distorted social fibre in the male-dominated society.

**Economic Backwardness:** Women constitute only 29% of the workforce but forms majority of the destitute in the country. There has been a failure in transforming the available women base into human resource. This, in turn, has hampered not only the economic development of women but also of the country as a whole.

**Implementation Gaps** Through all these years, the attention is only on developing and devising new schemes, policies and programmes and have paid less attention to the proper monitoring system and implementation short-sightedness, for e.g. despite the presence of

The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technologies Act and various health programmes like Janani Suraksha Yojana and National Rural Health Mission (NHRM), our country has a skewed sex ratio and a high maternal mortality . rate (MMR).

**Loopholes in the legal structure** Although there are a number of laws to protect women against all sorts of violence yet there has been the significant increase in the episodes of rapes, extortions, acid, attacks etc. This is due to delay in legal procedures and the presence of several loopholes in the functioning of a judicial system.

**Lack of Political Will:** The still- pending Women's Reservation Bill underscores the lack of political will to empower women politically. The male dominance prevails in the politics of India and women are forced to remain mute spectators.

**Way ahead** starts with bridging the deep-rooted biases through sustained reconditioning. It is only possible by promoting the idea of gender equality and uprooting social ideology of male child preferability. This concept of equality should be first developed in each and every household and from there, it should be taken to the society. This can be achieved by running sustained awareness programmes with the help of Nukkad natak or dramas, radio, television, Internet, etc. across the country.

**Replacing 'Patriarchy' with Parity:** A strong patriarchate society with deep- rooted socio-cultural values continues to affect women's empowerment. The need of the hour is an egalitarian society, where there is no place for superiority. The Government should identify and eliminate such forces that work to keep alive the tradition of male dominance over its female counterpart by issuing inhumane and unlawful diktats.

Education is the most important and indispensable tool for women empowerment. It makes women aware of their rights and responsibilities. Educational achievements of a woman can have ripple effects for the family and across generations. Most of the girls drop out of schools due to the unavailability of separate toilets for them. The recently launched 'Swachh Bharat Mission' focusing on improving sanitation facilities in schools and every rural household by 2019, can prove to be very significant in bringing down the rate of girls dropping out of school.

**Political Will:** Women should have access to resources, rights and entitlements. They should be given decision-making powers and due position in governance. Thus, the Women Reservation Bill should be passed as soon as possible to increase the effective participation of women in the politics of India.

### Suggestions

1. The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grassroots problem Hence, education for women has to be paid special attention.
2. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights.
3. Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in the society.
4. Strict implementation of Programmes and Acts should be there to curb the mal practices prevalent in the society.

### Conclusion:

The Empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concerns of 21<sup>st</sup> century not only at national level but also at the international level. 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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