



## WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: CONTINUING CHALLENGES

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**ABSTRACT** The aim of this paper is to analyze the Women's empowerment issue ie introduction of this concept in post independent India, efficacy of its implementation over a period of time and the challenges it continues to face. There is an old saying "Peace has been the dream of the wise BUT war is the history of mankind" ie to say that we have every honest intention of empowering the women or rather restore the glory they had in ancient India but sadly the truth is "It's a long way to go". Very ironically so, especially from the Indian perspective where women were revered and given a lot of importance in both society as well as the family. There is no abatement in crimes against the women, be it dowry harassment, eve teasing, work place harassment, molestation, acid attacks, or domestic violence etc etc. The Women's Empowerment process actually refers to the process of uplifting women and enabling them to achieve economic independence, better social status, and proportionate political representation in addition to a dignified life without any gender bias of any kind. The important enablers to achieve these goals without doubt happen to be access to education (especially the middle and higher level), change in the social structure in tune with the times, employment generation for women. The study unravels that though there has been some movement in the process of empowerment it is alarmingly inadequate. The acceptance of unequal treatment by women is one of the major reasons for the state of affairs and effective legislations for bringing a rapid growth in women's empowerment should definitely help the cause. Also, exemplary punishment for crime against women should help as an active deterrent.

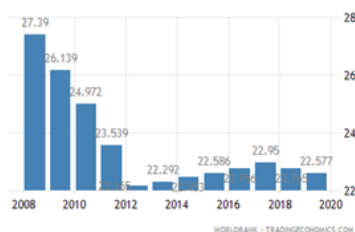
**KEYWORDS :** Women empowerment, gender bias, equal opportunity, legislation

## INTRODUCTION

Does women's empowerment got something to do with the resources allotted to men? Is there a conflict for resource utilization? And how can equality be achieved and supposing steps are initiated in that direction then, is there fair allotment of resources in the development and welfare programmes?

An evolved society's sign is that it affords equal opportunities and that certainly is without gender bias. Here, one has to bear in mind that even if equality is really to translate into reality, then starting points or take off levels can be relaxed based on gender keeping in view the natural differences of physical capabilities between men and women. Also there are issues specific to women involving their specific hygiene and privacy requirements whether in work places or in public places and there are issues related to maternity and child care issues as well. This means that the capacities, capabilities, resources, social conditioning and the moorings certainly have a bearing on deciding the appropriate yard sticks to decide a starting point and this becomes a guiding principle for resource allocation for empowering the women. For example If Sub Inspector of Police trainees are there in a Police Academy, definitely the parameters for training and evaluation have to be as per the gender and not uniform. Having said that, those parameters in no way should be detrimental for equal assessment, evaluation and in a fair and equal opportunity without gender bias. The target population has a lot of subsets viz: Rural/Urban, educational background, religion, caste, age, marital status, health etc as data for the metrics..

Needless to say that a lot of significance has been given to the subject of Women's empowerment which can be illustrated with an example. To fly .... a bird requires two wings. It cannot fly with a single wing however strong it is. Similarly for mankind to develop and flourish its mandatory that both the genders contribute or participate in equal measure. The biases which are prevalent will challenge the very existence of mankind.



Source: <https://www.worldbanktradingeconomics.com>

Now we see the chart above to gauge what's the women's share in contribution to the workforce in percentage terms. It is in fact on a south ward direction which in a way is quite startling!! We are not

walking the talk, not to outrightly condemn anyone but the results are still not encouraging and something is amiss. Women's empowerment as a programme has different policies at various levels of political as well as administrative strata and they have health, economic opportunities, educational standards political participation etc as parameters. Suffices it to say that the women empowerment programmes which work towards achieving gender equality basically have to work towards achieving them and have to focus on the following:

- Access to education, employment, recasting the social structure.
- Uplifting the status of women in terms of their social, economic and political affairs.
- Laws to deter, contain, and if committed exemplary punishment to be meted out for crimes against women.

Some of the schemes which have been initiated and put into force by the Govt of India are

- Support to training and employment programme for women (STEP)
- National mission for empowerment of women
- Swadhar scheme
- Rajiv Gandhi scheme for empowerment of adolescent girls.
- Rashtriya Mahila Kosh
- Priyadarshini

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Duflo, E. (2011) Women's empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge.

For bringing about equality between men and women a continuous policy commitment is certainly necessary and the study finds the inter relationships between development and women empowerment to be rather weak and not likely to be self-sustainable.

<https://www.scribd.com/document/298662417/b-017411319>

## Devi Rama T, Dr, Gender Equality : Women Empowerment

Always been a non-negotiable thing in the history of humankind and that's irrespective of the gender and every one is entitled to a certain freedom and socially acceptable level of dignity. Once equality prevails only then can we think of development in a society and which can result in reduction of poverty. Empowered women make invaluable contribution to the improvement of health conditions and educational status and productivity of whole families and communities, which in turn can improve prospects for next generation. The millennium development goals also puts the emphasis on gender equality and empowerment of women. The world over, development could result only in cases where women have been empowered and are given an equal status. They have known to have brought about a catalytic effect on society. Keeping the status of women empowerment

and its determinants in view, an attempt too is made to present key determinants highlighting the extent of womens empowerment.

**Shettar, Rajeshwari M Dr,**

The involvement of women folk itself as well as important policy initiatives taken by the state and the society go a long way in establishing a society of equals. Lets pledge that it should be a society of equals irrespective of the gender.

The fact about Women's empowerment is not being only a concept limited to the Northern Hemisphere only but equally prevalent in southern countries as well. The fight against inequalities have a kind of universal flavour all over the world and this has been the case from time immemorial. These struggles have also been supported by many men who have been outraged at the injustice meted out to the women.

**AgnihotriRashmi Rani Dr**

Women empowerment is empowering the women to take their own decisions for their personal dependence. Empowering women to make them independent in all aspects. It is to bring equality to both men and women in the society. Women need a more conducive environment so that they can take the right decisions in every area whether for themselves, family, society or the country.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To understand Gender Equality
2. To understand the Womens Empowerment
3. Why it is a continuing Challenge

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Secondary sources happen to be the source for this study. Whereas the data has been collected from publications, websites and various documents of the Ministry of Human Resources and the census of India .

**DISCUSSION**

**EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN : HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE(myindiaglory.com)**

The status of women in the ancient Indian culture was that of equality and they didn't lag behind in the major areas of education and also were competing neck to neck with the men in the art of warfare as well. There is mention of a warrior queen called Vishpala whose valour finds a mention even in the Rig Veda. The women had their choice in matrimonial alliances as well, instead of just being given away in marriage or that they were married off against their wishes. Infact, in the vedic studies too there is mention of Katyayani, Maitreyi, Gargietcalongwith the mention of sage Yajnavalkya which is a tribute to the women of that era.

In the medieval period there is a also a mention of Rani Rudrama Devi of Warangal, Chennamma of Keladi, Rani of Jhansi etc etc. These are but an acknowledgement of the broadmindedness of the then prevailing society not just in terms of encouraging the women but also ensuring that they pursue activities of their interest and choice and that too without strictures and without a hint of male chauvinism in the air. After the medieval era especially with the invasion of India by the Invaders from West Asia and the subsequent takeover by the imperial forces from the Europe the whole narrative about the Indian woman completely changed. Some of the practices which seem very retrograde and thoughtless could have inadvertently been introduced maybe, to protect the honour and dignity of women from the ravaging and marauding invaders. Some such practices being Jauhar and Sati.

However, certain social reformers like swami Dayanand Saraswati, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwarchand Vidyasagar etc made yeoman efforts to eradicate these decadent practices. These were the problems arising out of the British apathy and lack of concern. The impersonal views/behavior of the Britishers spiraled downwards and hit the nadir. The immediate problems confronting or staring in the face were

- a) Illiteracy
- b) Poverty
- c) Social Restrictions
- d) Stigmas associated to the gender

Last but not the least was the increasing number of crimes against women. The problems cited definitely need deft handling and therefore good planning followed by sincere implementation could be the only way forward.

The table below is to illustrate the point discussed earlier ie crime against women. This is a black mark for any civilized society and conveys a sad story. The acts of crime are despicable and highly condemnable and should be dealt with very firmly. Also, in addition it conveys a very poor impression about the country in the eyes of the foreign nations/nationals as well. This kind of an image about the country can have commercial ramifications as well

Crime Against Women: 1995 to 2016

Crime Heads	1995	2000	2016	Growth 1995 to 2016 (%)
Rape (No.)	13,754	16,490	38,367	5.4%
Drury Death (No.)	4,848	6,995	7,821	1.9%
Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty (No.)	31,545	43,364	84,747	4.9%
Cruelty by husbands and relatives (No.)	28,579	45,778	1,10,378	6.8%
Total Cases of Crime against women (No.)	78,826	113,627	3,38,959	7.4%
Total Cognizable Crime (No.)	16,95,895	17,71,094	28,78,711	3.0%
% of crime against women to total cognizable crime	4.6%	6.5%	11.4%	

Source: NCRB

**EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN : ON ATTAINING INDEPENDENCE**

The leadership was firm on bringing about changes in three thrust areas viz; which are in the fields of reforms in the constitution, in the field of legal areas and a pattern of development based on economy which is mixed and complete support to social welfare activities. This three pronged strategy is most likely to create a democratic, Just(judicious) and prosperous society and certainly impact the women favourably.

The chart below covers one of the very important aspects ie the average annual drop out rate of children in various stages of education covering both boys as well as girls. The important observation being that the dropout rate of girls is particularly higher in the upper primary which means the girls have discontinued schooling after their primary education and that is an irreversible process.

Table-25 : Average Annual Drop-Out Rate in School Education  
A : All Categories of Students

Classes/Year	Primary			Upper Primary			Secondary			Senior Secondary		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2013-12*	5.89	5.34	5.62	2.33	3.28	2.65	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2012-13*	4.68	4.66	4.67	2.30	4.01	3.13	14.54	14.54	14.54	NA	NA	NA
2013-14*	4.52	4.34	4.34	3.09	4.49	3.77	17.93	17.79	17.86	1.48	1.61	1.54

Data Source: For School Education : National University of Educational Planning & Administration, New Delhi (website: <http://inep.in/>)  
\* Figures related to School Education are provisional.

The following are some of the steps initiated in the planning process itself and have been instrumental in providing the role of a sheet anchor in the movement to empower women in India.

- The first Five year plan established the CSWB( The central social welfare Board)
- Second FYP – Maternity plan and fair and equal wages.
- Third FYP- Thrust to womens education also continued through to fourth and fifth FYP's
- Fifth FYP- Need for training women in income generating activities & functional literacy
- National Plan of action 1976- Initiated by the United Nations The UN plan of action . The National action plan identifies the areas of health, family planning, nutrition, education, employment and planned interventions to improve the conditions of women.
- Sixth FYP – Stressed on the need of economic independence , educational advancement and access to healthcare.
- Seventh FYP \_Awareness about rights and privileges.
- Eighth FYP- Benefits made available to women. The plan stood out for its shifting of priority from development of women to empowerment of women.
- Ninth FYP- Here the emphasis was on involving the women from the outset laying emphasis on supportive environment which meant better tackling feminization of poverty, inadequate investment in social sector.
- 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments- National policy for empowerment of women, raising the sex ratio.

National perspective plan for women 1988-2000- special attention to rural women and giving a new thrust and responsiveness to developmental programmes at all levels.

**THE WAY FORWARD:**

The Indian Govt as a proactive measure introduced a policy at National level and also declared 2001 as womens' empowerment year. The goals

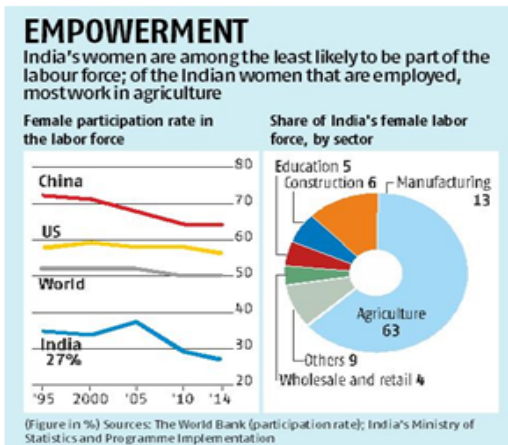
of the Govt are very clear and to the point. Some of the specific objects of the cited policy are

- Creating an environment conducive to development of women with focus on encouraging policies in social and economic spheres and to enable them to realize their full potential.
- The women have been mandated to enjoy on equal basis with men in all vix Political, economic, social, cultural and civil spheres. And that is not only on ground but supported adequately by legal provisions as well.
- Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social- political and economic life of the nation.
- Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, care and vocational guidance, employment,, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social safety and public life.
- Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all discrimination against women

**THE CONCRETE STEPS**

- Need for interministerial coordination duly coordinated by the Dept of women and child welfare.
- The emphasis on effective contribution by women towards the socio-economic development of the country.
- Need to have a woman's cell in all the ministries and govt departments including the NITI Ayog
- Conscious change in attitude toward women and girls
- The equality and justice should be achieved for women at all levels and in all fields. This will only be possible with enacting laws which will empower the police, judiciary, and other law enforcement agencies.
- What is badly lacking is womens participation for their empowerment and upliftment. Their involvement will certainly go a long way in expediting the action and will certainly put a lot of pressure on the civic society and the Govt agencies as well..

The following table depicts the sector wise employment details of the women work force in India.



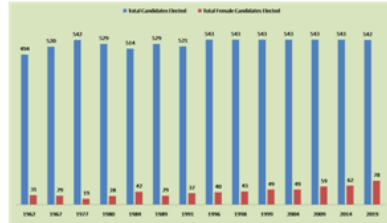
As one can notice the participation of women is maximum in the sector of Agriculture with very minor percentage taking part in other areas of work.

**THE CHALLENGE**

This paper wants to establish that the Challenges tend to continue in the women empowerment movement.

The Parliament of India the heartbeat of the nation should lead the way and ensure that the womens' reservation bill is passed as a law reserving seats for women in the Parliament and the State legislatures. When it flows top down and when the highest body enacts the law, rest should all fall into place. This move by the Parliament will show that the Government means business and with women being at the decision making level as lawmakers it is expected that they definitely pitch in for womens rights, empowerment, correcting the historical wrongs and setting a pace for further development for the women. Also, once Parliament leads the way the corporates and other businesses too will toe the line.

Laws to curb violence against women should also be given enough teeth and not just remain on paper.



<https://www.feminisminindia.com>

**CONCLUSION:**

India is a Country with timeless history Great civilizations, thriving and mature urban centres much ahead of their times. It was also a trend setter in Science, Technology, Astronomy, Medicine, and Architecture. Town planning and International Universities were already in place and were attracting foreign students even in those days. Also, it was an egalitarian society with equal status and respect for women.

But with the invaders from west asia( Aghans and others) and the subsequent British rule the things went a bit awry .Either due to the compulsions or the then prevailing socio-economic conditions certain practices crept into the Indian way of life which were detrimental to the interest of the Indian Women.

In fact, the British were indifferent to this very vital aspect which only worsened things. As swami Vivekananda rightly said that a bird cannot fly with one wing so also a society cannot progress with one gender shackled.

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