

Women Empowerment in India

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Abstract - Women's empowerment is a contentious issue. Women enjoyed equal status and power to men throughout the earlier Stone Age period. However, during the post-Vedic and epic times, they began to have certain challenges. History demonstrates that women were frequently treated like slaves. The standing of women has been progressively shifting from the early 20th century (national movement), and the British people are to thank for this. It is only after the Independence of India, under the able leadership of Dr. Ambedkhar, the constitutional makers and national leaders started strongly demanding and also reiterating the equal social position of women with men. It is good to learn that a few number of women have been able to establish their potentialities. Therefore, this paper suggests that each and every human being should be careful in taking steps to promote the statuses of women and respect their dignity

Keywords - Empowerment, Leadership, movement

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INTRODUCTION

India exhibits a disproportionate sex ratio, thus this is not true there. Even though India is moving closer to being a developed country, the fact that women's numbers have lagged behind men's is alarming. It is encouraging to learn that women's social standing in Indian culture is concerned about the fact that they are not consistently treated equally to males. We can still clearly see chauvinism, gender inequalities, and prejudice in India today. Women were sometimes treated as Goddesses and other times as ordinary slaves, which is a contradictory scenario.

India's empowerment of women

Naturally, when we discuss women's empowerment in India, we mean that women must be informed of their rights, such as the right to vote, the right to their property, the freedom to travel about, their legal rights, and many more, so empowering women involves making sure that these rights are upheld. 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.

When we focus on the people of India, it happens to be a disproportionate sex ratio which means the female population is comparatively lower than the male. Women's empowerment is comparatively highly liberal in the western world, however due to gender bias, it is the least important issue in Indian society. It is thought that until there is a solution to gender bias so that women can participate freely in creating a

society and a community where everyone's rights and demands will be given attention to, the problems with literacy, population, and health issues won't be resolved.

If we focus more on how India's women's empowerment movement developed over time, from the ancient to the modern era. When it came to empowering women, Indian culture has experienced numerous ups and downs over the years.

1. The ancient Indian era and the empowerment of women

Women were respected by society at the time and were referred to as Janani, which is Hindi for mother, and Devi in Hindu scriptures. In ancient Indian culture, women and men were treated equally and there was no discrimination based on gender. They used to have access to all of their fundamental rights, including the freedom to pursue an education. The wives of rishis were also known as the Ardhgini (better half), as they were eager to engage in spiritual pursuits alongside their husbands. Women were able to have equal lives, just like men did, throughout that time. In Indian history, women have experienced two different things: submission and deliverance. Although their roles may have evolved over time, in the Vedic era they were a comprehensive emblem of guardian and keeper of life and principles.

It comes out that the achievements of Gargi, Maitreyi, Sita, Draupadi, and Alapa represent the most desirable role for women in this time period. These women competed with men in many fields, received and enjoyed their rights and equality, were

unrestricted, and acquired significant wealth and property. They also competed with men in numerous fields. Additionally, they had a significant influence over how their progeny were raised.

The concept of humanity is a pillar of society according to the ancient Vedic scripture Taittiriya Samhita, where women and men were viewed as the two wheels of a cart. These principles, which the Vedas imparted to humanity, served as magnificent illustrations of gender equality.

2. The medieval empowerment of women in India

While there was leeway for gender equality and integrity in the early Vedic period, there was a reduction in both of those things in the later Vedic period. This was particularly true of women's positions, which had been equal in the earlier Vedic period but had a negative tendency in the later Vedic period. The fundamental explanation for the deterioration in women's position in ancient times is thought to be foreign conquest. The Rig-Vedic principles of justice and harmony have been eroded, depriving women of their right to study the Vedas, recite Vedic mantras, and perform Vedic rituals. Women were compelled to get married, participate in domestic duties, and show unwavering love to their husbands. Parents at the time were embarrassed by the birth of a girl child.

There was a period when women were required to wear the "pardah," a body-covering veil that restricted their independence. Because of this, it gave rise to a number of other social ills that made life harder for women. Many restrictions existed, including Sati, Jauhar, the ban on girls' education, widow remarriage, child marriage, and with a ton more.

a) What exactly is sati :

The idea behind sati is that after a woman's husband passes away, she must sit next to him on a blazing fire and burn herself to death. It's said that she did it as a matter of obligation to her spouse. According to ancient Hindu texts, a woman's straight entry into paradise is ensured when she dies as a sati.

b) Describe Jauhar :

When we try to understand Jauhar in the modern world, we learn that it is just a mass suicide, but throughout the medieval era, this was a Rajput tradition in which Rajput ladies gave their lives in order to save their husbands when they were about to lose a war.

c) What constitutes child marriage :

There are several reasons why medieval India is widely remembered, but child marriage is one of them. Women were treated like material back then because men believed that women were only good for marriage. Due to the very poor health of women, which also contributed to the rise in the mortality rate for both

pregnant women and infants, there was an increase in the birth rate.

d) Widows are not permitted to remarry :

In the medieval era, treating women as the object was customary. In the Middle Ages, widows were viewed as cursed; it was thought that when a woman became a widow, she inflicted depredation and brought bad luck, and that after becoming a widow, she had to give up every comfort her husband had promised her during their marriage. Widows were also not allowed to participate in any holy or sacred rituals or places. Remarrying was not permitted for them. She will not be allowed the option to live a quiet life; instead, she will be forced to consume only certain foods and wear only tattered white clothing.

e) Women cannot attend school :

There is evidence that women had access to education in the past, but in the later Vedic time, the nature of their education changed and they were taught all the domestic duties, but in the Muslim religion, they received instruction in fine art. However, over this time, women's suffering has not improved.

3. The modern-era struggle in India for women's emancipation.

Then, as time went on, society underwent changes, and somehow, women were given the opportunity to use their rights and authority, though not every woman in society had access to this. There are a lot of names that show up at the very beginning of this contemporary era of women's emancipation in India under the East India Company. They were incredibly courageous women at the time, including Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi and Begum Hazrat Mahal, Uda Devi, and Azizun Bai.

The movement for women's emancipation in India gained strength throughout time. Social changes have taken place, and numerous men, like Raja Rammohan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, and Swami Dayananda Saraswat, have participated in them. They had all worked to restore women to their former social prominence.

The civil rights demonstrations in the USA in 1960 were when this empowerment notion first emerged. To be more precise, the concept of empowerment is a broad individual process that involves taking charge of one's life and circumstances while also securing one's human rights and social justice.

The following are only a few of the numerous characteristics of women's empowerment:

I. Community Empowerment

The ability of women and girls to take individual and group action to alter social structures and institutions

is referred to as social empowerment. It implies that gender norms are not a barrier to the development of healthy relationships, social engagement, or decision-making skills in women and girls. Women's accessibility is increased through social empowerment by giving them equitable access to all the fundamental services so they can reach their full potential.

II. Economic empowerment :

Economic empowerment is a process that gives women more access to financial resources and the authority to take actions that will benefit their families, communities, and themselves. Women who are economically empowered are more likely to construct better means of support, make more money, and start enterprises that employ women. This guarantees the availability of training, employment, and income-generating opportunities with both forward and backward links with the ultimate goal of achieving economic independence and self-reliance for all women. Therefore, it is crucial to make sure that women have economic empowerment. Women's economic empowerment, according to CARE3, is the process by which they acquire more economic rights and influence over decisions that affect their lives, those of their families, and those of their communities.

III. Political empowerment:

In order to achieve comprehensive, impartial, and sustainable development, political empowerment is required. To keep democracy strong, women must actively participate in politics and government decisions. Due to cultural and social traditions that restrict women's engagement in the political process, statistics from throughout the world clearly demonstrate that they are underrepresented in positions of leadership, in elected office, and among voters.

Problems and concerns women encounter:

Even while more women than ever before are in positions of leadership in industry, government, and non-governmental organizations, most of the world's poor, hungry, and uneducated people are still women. Low income and low assets reinforce one another. Low income and low education all lead to bad health and less prospects for higher education. The following are issues specific to women:-

- I. Health issues
- II. Issues with literacy and education
- III. Violence against women
- IV .Discrimination against women

Government's role in empowering women:

A) Acts passed before independence :

The Female Infanticide Act of 1870, the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, the Indian Evidence Act of 1872, the Married Women Property Act of 1874, the Age of Consent Act of 1891, the Practitioners (Women) Act of 1923, the Indian Succession Act of 1925, and the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 are just a few of the significant laws passed during the British rule, The 1937 Hindu Women's Right to Property Act.

B) Acts passed after independence:

From the time of immediate post-independence to the present, a number of laws have been passed to protect the rights and particular provisions of women from various castes.

The following laws prohibit indecent representation of women: a) The Special Marriage Act of 1954; b) The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955; c) The Hindu Adaptation and Maintenance Act of 1956; d) The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act of 1956; e) The Hindu Succession Act of 1956; f) The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956; g) The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961; h) The Maternity Benefit Act of 1961; i) The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1971, the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976, the National Commission for Women Act of 1990, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006, and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act of 2013 are just a few examples.

All of these measures were effective in improving the social and economic conditions of the nation as well as the status and position of women. This was the episode that roused the whole nation from its nighttime slumber.

Various government initiatives to encourage women's empowerment:

The government has introduced a variety of initiatives and strategies to protect society from the raging strife that accelerates the development of any unexpected social catastrophe. The government has taken note of the problem facing women and has launched a number of initiatives to end violence against women and improve their spirits.

Women's helpline program Beti bachao Beti padhao, namely the NAND Ghar Yojna, Rajiv Gandhi Nation's Childcare Program, The Working Women's Hostel, The One Stop Center Scheme, Mantri Pradhan Mantri Vandana Yojna, Swadhar Greh's Plan

The Mahila e-haat, Mahila Police Volunteers, The Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, The National Mission for Equality Program, PDhanmantri Ujjwala Yojna.

Present scenario of women:

The status of women in contemporary India has significantly improved over the past few decades, yet despite the existence of numerous laws and awareness-raising mechanisms, women continue to face gender-based discrimination. Typically, women are underrepresented in positions of authority and decision-making. While there has been significant improvement in some regions of the world, much more needs to be done to address the issues of gender inequality.

In terms of educated and uneducated women, employed and unemployed women, rural and urban women, youthful and middle-aged women, regional differences, affluent or poor women, the current situation of women's empowerment is quite unbalanced. We see that although a working educated woman who is able to make a living is conscious of her rights, a working illiterate woman who is performing physical labor and making a living is not.

Although modern women have undergone a complete transformation, urban women in particular have evolved from being merely homemakers to modern-day women. Now that she can handle various tasks without anxiety, she is a multitasking woman who balances her professional and personal lives. The majority of metropolitan families today look like this. In contrast to their metropolitan counterparts, rural women still have a lot to accomplish. Not that women in rural areas are less advanced than women in urban areas, but change and transformation in rural areas are unquestionably more gradual.

Therefore, it is crucial to raise awareness, come up with solutions to all of these issues, and motivate people to pursue possibilities for empowerment.

Women's rights advocacy, empowerment, improving livelihood skills, boosting their involvement and leadership in the public realm, and upholding gender justice all depend on literacy. Adult education and training, capacity development, and enhancing social, economic, and financial skills can empower rural women in a sustainable way.

Women's position has risen over the past few decades, yet despite the existence of numerous laws and awareness-raising mechanisms, women continue to face gender-based discrimination. Empowering women may contribute to a decrease in domestic abuse, sexual assault, emotional and physical abuse.

CONCLUSION

The demand for women empowerment makes clear that every human being must need to be treated in a way where their dignity and rights are not getting violated. For a long millennium of time women are suffering from this harassment where their very existence is just nothing more than material, but as the world has evolved and women can now fight for their own rights, there are few sections of women to whom the light has not been yet ventured. To live in a

civilized world it is our duty as a human to help people to enlighten and take them out of any dogmatic state of mentality where it harms society in moving forward. We must educate our women and children so that they can carry on the legacy to the upcoming generations and take a part in building a nation.

In conclusion, without the full collaboration and support of their family members, women's empowerment is not feasible at all. In order to support and value women in all facets of development and empowerment, the society in which they reside must acknowledge and encourage their efforts to succeed in obtaining an education, participating in society outside of the home, and providing financial assistance. Most importantly, women must empower themselves before they can contribute to the empowerment of others.

Therefore, policies aimed at reducing feminized poverty, advancing women's education, granting them the freedom to work outside the home as they see fit, empowering them to make decisions about both the financial and familial aspects of running the household, supporting their efforts to establish themselves as they see fit, and, lastly, preventing and ending violence against women in the home and workplace are desperately needed.

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