

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA AND ITS IMPORTANCE- A STUDY

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ABSTRACT;- Women empowerment refers to enabling women to have control over their lives, make choices and decisions, and have equal access to resources and opportunities. It involves creating an environment where women can participate in society and the economy on an equal footing with men, and where their voices are heard and their rights are protected. Women's empowerment can take many forms, including education, economic, political, and social. Ultimately, women's empowerment aims to create a world where women have the power and freedom to live their lives, without discrimination or limitations based on gender. Women empowerment through education refers to the process of providing girls and women with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to participate fully in society and make informed decisions about their lives. Education is one of the most powerful tools for empowering women, as it can help them to gain knowledge, skills, and confidence that can help them to improve their lives and the lives of their families and communities. Economic empowerment, Health and well-being, Political participation, and Social empowerment are some ways that education can help empower women. The focus of the government has shifted from women development to women led development. In order to achieve this goal, government is working around the clock to maximize women's access to education, skill training and institutional credit. **MUDRA Yojana (Micro Units Development and Refinance agency Ltd)** is one such scheme which was launched on 8 April 2015 in which loans upto Rs. 10 lakh are provided to women entrepreneurs, without any collateral. For instance: A woman namely Kamla daily wage labourer from Panipat has taken a loan of Rs. 45,000 from State Bank of India in order to start work of beauty parlour and she is engaged in gainful employment with dignity now.

KEYWORDS;- GENDER, EQUALITY, EMPOWERMENT, DISCRIMINATION, EXPLOITATION, EDUCATION, SKILLING, MUDRA,

INTRODUCTION

Equal rights for men and women are enshrined under **Articles 14 to 16** in the Indian constitution, which came into effect on **26 January 1950**. Discrimination based on gender is strictly prohibited. Indian women received universal suffrage during India's independence in 1947, long before several Western countries granted women the right to vote. India was the second country in modern history to have a female leader, **Indira Gandhi**, in 1966 after another South Asian state, Sri Lanka, elected **Sirimavo Bandaranaike** in 1960.

New Delhi has also taken a concerted effort to ratify key international conventions to end discrimination against women. It is a founding member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and has ratified 47 conventions and one protocol. It signed the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** in 1980 and ratified it in 1993 with some reservations. It has yet to ratify the Optional Protocol of the CEDAW and National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. Within the country, the **Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005** have been enacted to criminalise instances of dowry and domestic violence. The government also increased maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks under the Maternity Benefit Act in 2017 for the private sector.

The Women's Reservation Bill gives 33 per cent reservation for women seats in all levels of Indian politics. This is an attempt to increase female political participation. The bill was first introduced on 12 September 1996 by the Deve Gowda government. Successive governments tried to push for the bill but it took 14 years to get it passed in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Parliament). The bill has yet to be passed in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) and in all state legislative assemblies.

The introduction of the bill was a historic attempt to alter gender demographics in the Indian polity. Proponents of the quota system argue that it is a necessary step to increase women's effective and meaningful participation in the political system. It could help to expedite a process that usually takes generations by incorporating women's voices in governance. In contrast, sceptics think that the bill would only benefit elite women.

While a 33 per cent female reservation is a bold step, the Trinamool Congress, one of the ardent supporters of the bill, went a step further by reserving 40 per cent seats for women to contest in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Women empowerment refers to enabling women to have control over their lives, make choices and decisions, and have equal access to resources and opportunities. It involves creating an environment where women can participate in society and the economy on an equal footing with men, and where their voices are heard and their rights are protected. Women's empowerment can take many forms, including education, economic, political, and social. Ultimately, women's empowerment aims to create a world where women have the power and freedom to live their lives, without discrimination or limitations based on gender.

Naturally, when we talk about women's empowerment in India what we refer that women must need to be aware of their rights like the right to vote, property rights, freedom of movement, their legal rights, and many more, which means, empowering women is making 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 it is to specifying women's population in the world we get the result of around 50 %. But 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.

Comparatively the western part of the world is very liberal about women's empowerment but women's empowerment in India is the least concern of society because of gender biasness. It is believed that the problem with literacy, population, and health issues won't solve until there's any solution for the gender biasness so that women can take a free part in building a society and a community where everyone's rights and demands will be paid attention to.

If we pay more attention to how women's empowerment in India got momentum throughout the years, from the ancient to the modern period. Over time, Indian society has witnessed many uprisings and downfalls when it came to empowering women.

What is women's empowerment

Treatment for women has been a ritual for men, for centuries this unjustified treatment is going on, and women are not allowed to have property, they will have no share in their own parents' properties, and they never enjoyed their rights to vote and there was absolutely no freedom to choose their own way of lifestyle or job and so on.

Now women's empowerment means exercising their power and their own actions. Which means having control over your own material assets, intellectual resources, and your own ideologies.

In ancient Indian culture, women were treated as equal to men, and there was no discrimination on the bases of gender, instead of that women were honored by society, and society at the time considered women as Janani which means mother, even in Hindu scripts women are considered as Devi. They used to enjoy their full basic rights where they were free to receive education, at that time the wives of the rishis could willingly take part in spiritual activities with their husbands, they were also known as the Ardhangini (better half) too. During that period, women got to live equal life just like men used to live. Women in Indian history have gone through two things in their life one is subjection and deliverance. With the passage of time, their positions might have changed but in the Vedic era, they were a complete symbol of protector and caretaker of mortality and ideals.

The accomplishment of **Gargi, Maitreyi, Sita, Draupadi, and Alapa** turns out to be the most ideal role for women of this era. These women were competitive with men in many fields and also received and enjoyed their rights and equality, there were no restrictions on them, and they possessed great wealth and property. Along with that they even had a very strong say when it came to guiding their offspring.

In the ancient text of the Vedas, the concept of humans is a bedrock for society, in taittiriya Samhita women and men were considered as the two-wheel of a cart. These lessons given by the Vedas to society were good examples of equality between men and women.

Types of Women's Empowerment:

There are different ways to categorize women's empowerment, but here are five common types:

- **Economic Empowerment:** This refers to women's ability to participate in economic activities on an equal basis with men. It includes access to education, training, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities, as well as fair wages, equal pay, and access to credit and financial services.
- **Social Empowerment:** This type of empowerment refers to women's ability to participate fully in social and cultural life, free from discrimination and violence. It includes access to education, healthcare, and legal services, as well as the ability to exercise their rights and freedoms.

- **Political Empowerment:** This type of empowerment refers to women's ability to participate in political life and decision-making on an equal basis with men. It includes the ability to vote and run for office, as well as access to leadership positions and participation in policy-making processes.
- **Educational Empowerment:** This refers to women's ability to access education and develop skills and knowledge that enable them to make informed decisions, pursue their goals, and contribute to society. It includes access to quality education at all levels and opportunities for lifelong learning.
- **Health Empowerment:** This refers to women's ability to access healthcare and make decisions about their health and well-being. It includes access to information, services, and resources that promote reproductive health, maternal health, and overall well-being. Overall, these types of empowerment are interconnected and complementary, and empowering women in one area can have positive ripple effects in other areas.

Importance of Women's Empowerment:

- **Gender Equality:** Women's empowerment is essential for achieving gender equality, which is a fundamental human right. Gender equality means that women and men have equal rights, opportunities, and resources, and can participate equally in all aspects of life.
- **Economic Growth:** Women's empowerment is also important for economic growth and development. When women have equal access to education, employment, and other opportunities, they are better able to contribute to the economy and society as a whole.
- **Social Justice:** Women's empowerment is also essential for achieving social justice. Women and girls are often subject to discrimination, violence, and other forms of oppression simply because of their gender. Empowering women helps to create a more just and equitable society for everyone.
- **Health and Well-being:** Women's empowerment is also important for promoting health and well-being. When women have access to education and healthcare, they can better take care of themselves and their families.
- **Sustainable Development:** Women's empowerment is critical for achieving sustainable development. When women are empowered, they are better able to contribute to efforts to address environmental challenges, reduce poverty, and promote social justice. In short, women's empowerment is crucial for achieving a just, equitable, and sustainable world.

Factors That Encourage Women's Empowerment:

- **Education:** Education is a crucial factor in empowering women as it provides them with the knowledge, skills, and tools they need to make informed decisions, participate in society, and achieve their goals.
- **Job Opportunities:** Access to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities can also empower women economically, giving them the ability to make decisions about their lives and contribute to their communities.
- **Participation in Politics, Defence, Sports, and Games:** Women's participation in various fields, including politics, defense, sports, and games, can break down gender stereotypes and empower women to take on leadership roles, and challenge gender-based discrimination.
- **Equal Opportunities in Society:** Ensuring equal opportunities for women in all aspects of society, including education, employment, and leadership positions, can promote gender equality and empower women to participate fully in society.
- **Exposure to Media:** Access to media and information can provide women with the tools they need to stay informed about important issues, advocate for their rights, and participate in decision-making processes.
- **Freedom of Expression:** Women's ability to express themselves freely and without fear of discrimination or retribution is essential for their empowerment and participation in society.
- **Freedom of Movement:** Women's freedom of movement, including the ability to travel, work, and participate in community activities, is important for their empowerment and participation in society.
- **Proper Nutrition and Sanitation:** Access to proper nutrition and sanitation is crucial for women's health and well-being, enabling them to participate fully in society and pursue their goals.
- **Decision-Making Power:** Empowering women to make decisions about their own lives, including decisions about their health, education, and career, is essential for their empowerment and participation in society.
- **Introduction to Self-Help Groups:** The introduction of self-help groups can provide women with a supportive network and resources to pursue their goals and challenge gender-based discrimination.
- **Changes in Women's Labour Patterns:** Changes in women's labor patterns, including the recognition and support of women's unpaid care work, can help to promote gender equality and empower women economically.

Factors that prohibit Women's empowerment:

Unfortunately, there are several factors that inhibit women's empowerment in India, including

- **Patriarchal Attitudes:** Patriarchal attitudes that prioritize men over women are still deeply ingrained in many parts of Indian society. This can lead to discrimination against women in areas such as education, employment, and political participation.

- **Limited Access to Education:** Although education is a key factor in women's empowerment, many girls and women in India still face limited access to education due to poverty, cultural attitudes, and lack of infrastructure.
- **Economic Inequality:** Women in India are often economically disadvantaged, facing lower wages, limited job opportunities, and unequal access to financial services and resources.
- **Violence and Discrimination:** Violence and discrimination against women, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based discrimination, continue to be major obstacles to women's empowerment in India.
- **Traditional Gender Roles:** Traditional gender roles and expectations can limit women's opportunities and choices, including in areas such as marriage, family, and career.
- **Lack of Legal and Political Support:** Women in India also face limited legal and political support, including limited representation in government and limited access to legal protections and services.
- **Limited Mobility:** Limited mobility, including restrictions on women's freedom of movement and access to transportation, can also inhibit women's empowerment in India. Overall, addressing these factors will require a coordinated effort from the government, civil society, and individuals to promote gender equality, improve access to education and economic opportunities, and address violence and discrimination against women.

Women's Empowerment through education

Women empowerment through education refers to the process of providing girls and women with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to participate fully in society and make informed decisions about their lives. Education is one of the most powerful tools for empowering women, as it can help them to gain knowledge, skills, and confidence that can help them to improve their lives and the lives of their families and communities. Economic empowerment, Health and well-being, Political participation, and Social empowerment are some ways that education can help empower women.

Overall, women's education is essential for achieving gender equality and empowering women to realize their full potential. By investing in girls' education, we can create a more just and equitable world for all.

The census 2011, counts women population @ 48.5% of the total population in India, In the changing dynamics of the society women empowerment is much relevant and very important. **Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji** has also spoken for women empowerment on 82nd edition of Mann Ki Baat. Education plays an important role in building self-confidence among women it also enables to change she/her status in the society. Education enables and builds confidence to take decisions in a better way. Skilling and Micro Finance can get women financially stable and therefore she is no longer dependent upon on others in the society. Giving education to women means giving education to the whole family.

The **Constitution of India** has certain provisions that specifically focus on women empowerment and prevents discrimination against women in the society. **Article 14** talks about equality before law. Article 15 enables the state to make special provisions for women. As the progress of humanity is incomplete without women therefore successive governments have launched number of schemes for empowerment of women in male dominated society.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Andolan has been launched for creating awareness among the people to educate all girl children in the country. Government is successfully able to promote this scheme by forming District Task Force and Block Task Force. The scheme was launched in Panipat district of Haryana on 22 January 2015 with an initial funding of Rs. 100 crore. Before launching of this scheme, Child Sex Ratio of Panipat was 808 in 2001 and 837 in 2011. After launching of this scheme the Child Sex Ratio of Panipat is improving day by day. Massive publicity is made about the program in print and electronic medias, the logo of this scheme is very common in government buildings such as pillars of National Highway 44, Panipat District Court, bus stand and railway station of Panipat district etc.

Both earning and education are important factors for women empowerment. It might be possible that a woman is involved in unskilled work (for example: maids) but she is still not empowered. On the contrary, it might be possible that a woman is educated. But still she is not empowered because she is not earning. So, financial independence is important for women empowerment. Women, who are educated and earning, are in much better position in our society as compared to uneducated women worker.

Therefore, a scheme called **working women hostels** has been launched so that safe and convenient accommodation should be provided to working women. The benefit of this scheme is given to every working women without any distinction of caste, religion, marital status etc. In order to take benefit of this scheme, the gross total income of women should not exceed Rs. 50,000 per month in case of metropolitan cities whereas in case of small cities, the gross total income should not exceed Rs. 35,000 per month.

United Nation General Assembly adopted the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women' (CEDAW). CEDAW establishes an international bill of rights for women. Article 10 of CEDAW talks about providing right to education to women. India has ratified CEDAW for upliftment of women.

The focus of the government has shifted from women development to women led development. In order to achieve this goal, government is working around the clock to maximize women's access to education, skill training and institutional credit. **MUDRA Yojana (Micro Units Development and Refinance agency Ltd)** is one such scheme which was launched on 8 April 2015 in which loans upto Rs. 10 lakh are provided to women entrepreneurs, without any collateral. For instance: A woman namely Kamla daily wage labourer from Panipat has taken a loan of Rs. 45,000 from State Bank of India in order to start work of beauty parlour and she is engaged in gainful employment with dignity now.

Earlier a lot of women left out their job after giving birth to children, due to which lot of working women unemployed. The government has passed the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017 increasing the maximum period of maternity leaves from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. The landmark law has given a new life to the vision of women-led development as propagated by Hon'ble PM Shri Narendra Modi.

Increased knowledge, self-confidence and awareness of gender equity are indicators of the empowerment process. These components get develop through education. Educated woman aware about their rights and when women aware about their rights then she/her will not face discrimination.

Though the successive Governments have come up with various measures for the welfare and empowerment of women but still women are facing hurdles in our society. Therefore, there is a need to do much more, to protect women. Also, there is a need to uphold their dignity at par with the status of men in the society

CONCLUSION

Education-

- The education policy needs to be more inclusive to ensure girls right to education and their right to be free from discrimination within educational institutions. Also, education policy should target young men and boys to positively change their attitudes towards girls and women.
- In order to curb higher dropout rate among girls, there is a need for providing relatively higher financial incentives for girls education until Class XII.
- Post Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship should be extended from Single Girl Child Scheme to families with two girl child.
- Reward should be given to villages/districts that are able to attain equal child sex ratio through education, information and communication campaigns.
- There is a need for strict implementation of statutes that emphasise on women empowerment through education.
- Additional emphasis should be laid on e-governance so that there is a timely check on the expenditure released by the centre and various state governments for scholarships for girl students.
- For security purposes, gender-friendly facilities should be provided in hostels.

Skilling-

- In order to make women self-dependent, there is need to promote skill development among women in non-traditional works like electricians, plumbers etc.
- Women can be organised into different professional groups so that there is improvement in their bargaining power.
- Platforms like Digital India should be used for marketing and branding purposes and to establish linkages with corporate, markets and consumers.
- In addition to government efforts, NGOs and other institutions should provide employable skills & training to women to help them find alternative and dignified occupations to earn decently.

Micro-Finance

- NGOs working for the empowerment of women need to take interventions on livelihood development options related to the market and value chain.
- Policies and guidelines should be made in such a way that it is easy for women entrepreneurs to get credit facilities.
- Government should promote creation of Self Help group by women.
- There is need for industry-specific targets for women's employment and motivate their implementation by firm.
- Tax benefits should be given to companies that provide employment to 30 percent women workers
 - The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.
 - Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and

legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.

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