

Women Empowerment: A Challenge of the 21st century.

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Abstract: In the 21st century Women Empowerment has become a well known subject on many occasions. Empowerment of Women involves many things such as economic opportunities, social equality and personal rights. Women Empowerment itself elaborates that social rights, political rights, economic stability, judicial strength and all other rights should also equal to women. This paper attempts to analyse the status of Women Empowerment in India. Today the empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concern of 21st century. But practically Women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. We observe in our day to day life how Women become victimized by various social evils. (A study on issues and challenges of Women Empowerment in India by Dr. Rajeshwari M. Shettar)

It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. The study is based on purely from secondary sources. The study reveals that Women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by Government. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by Women are still concludes by an observation that access to education, employment and change in social structure are only the enabling factors to Women Empowerment. In this paper, an attempt has been made to through some light upon the several issues and challenges faced by the Indian Women.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Schemes of Government, Women rights in India.

Introduction: Women Empowerment is very essential for the development of society. Empowerment means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercises choice and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society

As per UNLFEM (United National Development Fund for Women) the term Women Empowerment means :

- a) acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed.
- b) developing a sense of self worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.
- c) gaining the ability to generate choices, exercises bargaining power.
- d) developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on – Swami Vivekananda

Manu says, "Where women are respected, there the gods delight; and where they are not, there all works and efforts come to naught."

Historical Background of Women Empowerment:

The origins of the concept of empowerment go back to the civil rights in USA in 1960. Since the mid -1980, the term 'empowerment' has become popular in the field of development, especially with reference to women. In grassroots, programmes and policy debates alike, empowerment has virtually replaced terms such as welfare, upliftment, community participation, and poverty alleviation to describe the goal of development and intervention. Women constitute almost 50 percent of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio where by 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. Even today gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India. The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millenniums. In early Vedic period, women enjoyed equal status with men. Rigved and Upanishads mention several names of women sages and

seers notably Gargi and Maitrey. Later, the status of women began to deteriorate approximately from 500B.C, the situation worsened with the invasion of Mughals and later on by European invaders. The real change came after Independence constitution of India guarantees equality to women (Article 14). There are other articles too which ensure rights of women eg. No discrimination by the state [Article 15(1)] equality of opportunity (Article 16) etc. Feminist activism picked up momentum in India during late 1970s. Later on many groups and (NGOs) have been working for the empowerment of women. We are proud that in India women got voting right much before United States of America and some other European countries (Ghosh, Aritra & Sarkar, Rimi).

Review of Literature: The Review of literature provides us some insights about the process and dimensions of women empowerment and the gaps which exist in between. Various studies on women empowerment throw some light on the issues and challenges that come in the way of women empowerment and also show the impact of policies and programmes in the different dimensions of women empowerment. Sethuraman K. (2008) highlighted the role of women Empowerment and Domestic violence in child growth and under Nutrition in a Tribal and Rural community in South India. This study tries to explore the relationship between women's empowerment and domestic violence, maternal Nutritional status, the growth and nutritional status of children aged 6 months to 24 months in a rural and tribal community. It also reveals positive relationship between women empowerment and higher Nutrition status for mother and child. M. Bhavani Sankara Rao (2011) has highlighted that health of women members of Self Help Groups (SHGs) have certainly taken a turn to achieve better health status. It clearly shows that women members use to discuss among themselves about the health related problems of their own, their children and of other family members make them aware of various government provisions for children as well as for them. Doepitee M. Tertilt M. (2011) "Does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development?". This study is based on an empirical analysis suggesting that money in the hands of mother 's benefits children. It further, reveals that access to decent work and regular income in the hands of women, contribute not only to poverty reduction but also support better education, health and nutrition outcomes for women and those who are depend on them.

Women Empowerment Objectives

1. To know the concepts of women empowerment.
2. To study the violence against women in India.
3. To analyze the factors that affect women's empowerment.
4. To identify the challenges in the path of women empowerment.
5. To make useful suggestions in the light of the findings.

Research Methodology: Aims of this study to analyze the different types of Women Empowerment. The study is descriptive and analytical in nature. The data used in this has been taken from purely secondary sources as per the requirement of this study. Secondary data which is collected from various reports of national and international agencies, various authentic websites, books, journal research articles, internet source and e-content related to Women Empowerment.

Violence Against Women

Violence against women in India is physical or sexual violence against women, especially by men. Common forms of violence against women in India include domestic violence, sexual assault and murder. This act must be done purely to consider violence against women because the victim is a woman. Men with gender disparity roles often commit these acts. According to India's National Crime Records Bureau, incidents of crime against women have increased, and a crime is committed against a woman every three minutes.

Murders:- Dowry killing is the killing or suicide of a married woman due to a dowry dispute. In some cases, the husband and father-in-law constantly try to collect more dowries by harassing and harassing, sometimes the wife has committed suicide or there will be an exchange of gifts, money or property at the daughter's wedding in the family. Most of these suicides have been committed by hanging, poisoning or self-immolation. If the dowry is killed the woman is set on fire, it is called burning the bride. The murder of the bride is often referred to as suicide or accident, sometimes the woman is set on fire in such a way that it looks like she set fire to the kerosene stove while cooking.

Dowry is illegal in India, but it is still common to give expensive gifts to the bride and her relatives at weddings organized by the bride's family. Honor killing is the murder of a family member, which is a matter of disgrace and shame for the family. Honor killings include refusing to enter into a planned marriage, committing adultery, choosing a rejected partner from the family, and being a victim of rape. In some villages in India, caste councils regularly execute people who do not follow the rules on their caste or tribe. The killing of women accused of witchcraft in India continues to this day. Poor women, widows and lower caste women are most at risk of this type of murder.

Sexual feticide is the selective killing of a newborn child or the termination of a female fetus by a sex-selective abortion. Protecting the family in old age in India and being able to perform rituals for deceased parents and ancestors inspired them to have children. Girls, on the other hand, are considered a social and economic burden. Dowry ban is an example of this. Fear of not giving dowry and social exclusion can lead to female feticide in poor families. Modern medical technology has determined the sex of the baby given that the baby is still pregnant. Once this modern prenatal diagnostic technology determines the sex of the fetus, families are able to determine whether they want to have an abortion based on gender. One study found that 7,997 out of 8,000 abortions were performed on female fetuses. Fetal sex determination and prenatal abortion by medical professionals is now a Rs 1000 crore industry.

Sexual crimes:- India is considered to be the most dangerous country in the world in terms of sexual violence against women. Rape is one of the most common crimes in India. In the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, rape is defined as the intrusion of a man into a woman's physical beauty without the consent of a man or a woman and not being punished. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, one woman is raped every 20 minutes in India. Marital rape is not a criminal offense in India. India is one of fifty countries that have not yet banned marital rape. 20% of Indian men admit to forcing their wives or partners to have sex. Human trafficking in India, although illegal under Indian law, is a major problem. People are often smuggled through India for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation and forced / enslaved labor.

Domestic violence:- Domestic violence is when one partner abuses another in an intimate relationship such as dating, marriage, intimacy or family ties. Domestic violence is also known as domestic violence, marital abuse, assault, domestic violence, dating abuse, and intimate partner violence. Domestic violence can be physical, emotional, verbal, financial and sexual abuse. Domestic violence can be subtle, coercive or violent. According to politician Renuka Chaudhary, 70% of women in India are victims of domestic violence.

Forced and child marriage:- Girls at risk of being forced into marriage.

Because of such marriages, girls are burdened by their parents and are afraid of losing their sanctity before marriage.

Acid throwing:- Acid throwing, also known as acid attack, vitriol attack or vitriolage, is a form of violent attack on women in India. Throwing acid means throwing "acid seeds or alternative corrosive substances" on a person's body for the purpose of deforming, maiming, torturing or killing. Acid attacks are usually directed at the victim's face causing skin damage and often exposing or breaking the bone. Acid attacks can cause permanent scarring, blindness as well as social, psychological and economic problems. The Indian legislature has controlled the sale of acid seeds. Women in India have a higher risk of acid attacks than women around the world. At least 72% of reported acid attacks in India involve women. Acid attacks have been on the rise in India for the past decade.

Need of Women Empowerment:

This is very important for the self-esteem of women and also for the society. To empower women is to empower women. Women can have equal rights to participate in education, society, economy and politics. Women can join the society as they are happy by choosing their religious, language, work and other activities. Women empowerment is the most effective means of development in India these days; Women all over the world are actively working as a leader and surpassing others in all walks of life. As the whole world is holding its breath and praying every single day for an unbelievable escape from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is the women governors and the nation who are driven by these amazing personalities who are taking the responsibility and fighting alone. Women empowerment in India is largely dependent on many different variables including geographical setting, social status, and educational status and age factors. Action on women empowerment exists at the state, local and national level. However, women face discrimination in most areas such as education, economic opportunity, health and medical aid, and political participation, indicating that there is a substantial gap between strategy progress and actual practice at the community level.

Challenges of Women Empowerment: There are many challenges facing women's rights issues in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit women's empowerment in India. Education:- The country has taken a leap since independence and is concerned about education. The gap between women and men is wide. 82.14% of adult males are well educated, while in India only 65.46% of adult females are considered literate. Gender bias is in higher education; specialized vocational training that strongly influences women in employment and achieves top leadership in any field.

Poverty:- Poverty is considered to be the biggest threat to world peace and eradication of poverty should be as important a national goal as eradication of illiteracy. This leads to the exploitation of women as domestic helpers.

Health and Safety:- Women's health and safety issues are paramount in the interest of the country and are important factors in the assessment of women's empowerment in the country. However, there are worrying concerns where mothers are concerned.

Professional Inequality:- This inequality is prevalent in employment and promotion. In government offices and private industries, women face a myriad of barriers in a male-dominated and dominated environment.

Household Inequality:- Family relationships around the world, especially in India, are showing gender differences in very small but important ways. Sharing homework, childcare, and trivial workloads from the so-called division of labor.

Unemployment:- It is becoming more and more difficult for women to find the right job for themselves. They become more vulnerable to exploitation and harassment in the workplace. **Unbearable Conditions:-** Uneducated women are more likely to divorce and leave their husbands at any stage of life. They will have to live their whole lives for fear of divorce. In some cases they have to end their lives due to unbearable circumstances.

Schemes Launched in favour of Women by the Indian Government.

Following are the main schemes of central government are as under

1)Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme: This Initiative was launched in Haryana on 22nd January 2015 by P.M of India to guarantee the survival, safety and education of girls. The Initiative Intends to tackle the issue of the unequal sex ratio in recent years,raise social awareness and improve the effectiveness of welfare benefits for girls.

2) Working women Hostel Scheme:

This scheme was initially launched

by the government of India in 1972-

1973 with the primary purpose of providing secure housing and environments for working women as well as giving day care amenities for their children,if any the government offers grant-in-aid through this women's empowerment project to construct new hostel buildings and enlarge an existing structure in rented space.

3) One-stop Centre Scheme:

The one- stop center scheme is one of the schemes for women that provides essential medical assistance introduced in 2015,it is a government sponsored scheme for women that receives funding from the Nirbhaya fund.Under this Initiative, state governments get complete federal funding to protect women who are victims of gender -based violence in both public and private settings,such as acid assaults,rape and sexual harrasment.This program provides medical assistance,legal help and counselling services under one roof to address all types of violence against women

4) Women Helpline Scheme:

Launched in April 2015,the women

Helpline Scheme aims to provide women who have experienced abuse in either public or private settings with24*7emergency assistance.The government introduced a toll - free number(181) for providing quick and emergency assistance. Women can use this helpline number in every state and union territory across the country.This initiative also raises awareness about women empowerment and safety.

5) Mahila Police Volunteers Scheme: The mahila police volunteers scheme

was introduced in 2016 by the Ministries of women and child development and Home affairs in all states and UTs. In order to ensure police outreach on crime cases this central government - sponsored program strives to establish a connection between police authority and local community. As part of this strategy an MPV (Mahila Police Volunteers Scheme) will act as a public-police liaison to combat crimes against women such as dowry, harrasment, chil marriage, domestic abuse and domestic violence. This plan also encourage women to join the police force by fostering a secure atmosphere.

6)SWADHAR Greh:

It is one of the Indian government schemes for women's empowerment introduced in 2018. This project's primary goals are to ensure social, economic and health security as well as to offer housing, food and clothes. This program gives women legal support and empowers them to take the initiative to reintegrate into society.

7)STEP(Support to Training and Employment program for women)

From 1986-1987, the Ministry of Women and Child development operated the step scheme as a "central sector scheme". In December 2014, it underwent revision. It was designed to give women work security and training in skill development. This government - sponsored initiative provides Institutions and Organisations with funding so they may run training programs for women.

8)Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK): Mahila Shakti Kendras, an initiative for women's empowerment started in 2017 is one of the well known schemes for women. It intends to offer women convergent support services at one location so they can grow their talents, find work and improve their digital literacy. This program aims to give women access to resources, including quality healthcare, education, work opportunities and counselling.

9)Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):

(Erstwhile Maternity Benefit Programme) has been contributing towards better enabling environment by providing cash incentives for improved health and nutrition to pregnant and nursing mother.

10) Scheme for Adolescent Girls:

Aims at girls in the age group 11-18, to empower and improve their social status through nutrition, life skills, home skills and vocational training.

11) National creche scheme:

To provide day care facilities to children of age group of 6 months to 6 years of working women who are employed.

12)Rastriya Mahila Kosh(RMK):

To provide micro- credit to poor woman for various livelihood support and income generating activities at concessional terms in a client - friendly procedure to bring about their socio- economic development.

13) Ujjawal: A comprehensive scheme for prevention of trafficking and for rescue, rehabilitation, re-integration and repatriation of victims of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation.

14) Gender Budgeting Scheme:

Is being implemented as a tool for mainstreaming gender perspective at various stages of planning, budgeting, implementation, impact assessment and revisiting of policy/ programme , objectives and allocations. The scheme helps in strengthening of institutional mechanism and training of various stakeholders so as to mainstream gender concerns in central and state governments.

15) Integrated Development Services Scheme .

It being implemented through state / UT with the aim of holistic development of children upto 6 years of age and to meet nutritional needs of pregnant women and lactating women.

Apart from the central government the state governments also actively offers several schemes that benefit girl children some of these includes :

1. Rajshri yojana- Rajasthan.
2. Girl child protection scheme- Andhra Pradesh
3. Sivagami Ammaiyar Memorial girl child protection scheme- Tami Nadu.
4. Ladli Laxmi Yojana- Madhya Pradesh.
5. Mukhyamantri Ladli Yojana - UP.
6. Mukhyamantri Kanya Suraksha yojana- Bihar.
7. Kishori Shakti Yojana- Odisha.
8. Mamta scheme for girl child- Goa.
9. Saraswati Bicycle scheme - Chattisgarh.
10. West Bengal kanyashree prakalpa- West Bengal.
11. Ladli scheme- Haryana.
12. Bhagyalaxmi scheme- Karnataka.

Women Rights in India: Constitutional Rights and Legal Rights.

The rights available to women in India can be classified into two categories, namely as Constitutional rights and Legal rights.

The constitutional rights are those which are provided in the various provisions of the constitution. The legal rights, on the other hand, are those which are provided in the various laws (acts) of the parliament and the state legislature.

A) Constitutional Rights To Women:

The rights and safeguards in the Constitution for women in India are listed below.

- . The state shall not discriminate against any citizen of India on the ground of sex [Article 15 (1)].
- . The state is empowered to make any special provision for women. In other words, this provision enables the state to make affirmative discrimination in favor of women [Article 15(3)].
- . No citizen shall be discriminated against or be ineligible for any employment or office under the state on the ground of sex [Article 16(2)].
- . Traffic in human beings and forced labour are prohibited [Article 23(1)].
- . The state to secure for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood [Article 39(a)].
- . The state to secure equal pay for equal work for both Indian men and women [Article 39(d)].
- . The state is required to ensure that the health and strength of women workers are not abused and that they are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their strength [Article 39(e)].
- . The state shall make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and Maternity relief [Article 42].
- . It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women [Article-51-A(e)].
- . One - third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women [Article 243-D(3)].
- . One -third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in panchayat shall be reserved for women [Article 243-D(4)].

. One - third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality shall be reserved for women [Article 243-T(3)].

.The offices of chairpersons in the municipalities shall be reserved for women in such manner as the state legislature may provide [Article243-T(4)].

B)Legal Rights To Women: The following various legislation's contained several rights and safeguards for women:

. Protection of women from Domestic violence Act (2005)is a comprehensive legislature to protect women in India from all forms of domestic violence.It also covers women who have been/are in a relationship with the abuser and are subjected to violence of any kind physical, sexual,mental, verbal or emotional.

. Immoral Traffic (Prevention)Act (1956) is the premier legislature for prevention of trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation.In other words,it prevents trafficking in women and girls for the purpose of prostitution as an organised means of living.

.Indecent Representative of women (Prohibition)Act(1986)prohibits indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publications, writing, paintings, figures or in any other manner.

.Commission of sati (prevention) Act (1987) for the more effective prevention of the commission of sati and it's glorification on women.

.Dowry Prohibition Act (1961) prohibits the giving or taking of dowry at or before or any time after the marriage from women.

. Maternity Benefits Act (1961)regulates the employment of women in certain establishments for certain period before and after child -birth and provides for maternity benefit and certain other benefits.

. Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (1971) provides for the termination of certain pregnancies on humanitarian and medical grounds.

. Pre- Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection before and after Conception and prevents the misuse of pre- natal diagnostic techniques for sex tdetermination leading to female feticides.

. Equal Remuneration Act (1976) provides for payment of equal remuneration to both men and women workers for same work or work of a similar nature. It also prevents discrimination on the ground of sex against women in recruitment vand service conditions.

. Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act (1939)grants a muslim wife the right to seek the dissolution of her marriage

.Muslim women (Protection of Rights on Divorce)Act (1986) protect the rights of Muslim women who have been divorced by or have obtained divorce from their husbands.

.Family courts Act (1984) provides for the establishment of family courts for speedy settlement of family disputes.

. Indian Penal Code (1860) contains provisions to protect Indian women from dowry death,rape, kidnapping, cruelty and other offences.

.Code of criminal procedure (1973) has certain safeguards for women like obligation of a person to maintain his wife,arrest of women by female police and so on.

.Indian Christian Marriage Act(1872) contain provisions relating to marriage and divorce among the Christian community.

. Legal Services Authority Act(1987) provides for free legal services to Indian women.

.Hindu Marriage Act (1955) Introduced monogamy and allowed divorce on certain specified grounds. It provided equal rights to Indian man and woman in respect of marriage and divorce.

. Hindu Succession Act(1956) recognizes the right of women to inherit parental property equally with men.

. Minimum wages Act (1948) does not allow discrimination between male and female workers or different minimum wages for them.

.Mines Act(1952) and Factories Act(1948) prohibits the employment of women between 7P.M to 6A.M in mines and factories and provides for thier safety and welfare.

.The following other legislation's also contain certain rights and safeguards for women.

.Employees 's state Insurance Act(1948).

.Plantation Labour Act (1951).

.Bonded Labour System Abolition Act (1976).

.Legal Practitioners women Act (1923).

.Indian Succession Act (1925).

.Indian Divorce Act (1869).

.Parsi Marriage and Divorce Act (1936).

. Special Marriage Act (1954).

.Foreign Marriage Act (1969).

.Indian Evidence Act (1872).

.Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (1956).

. National commission for women Act (1990) provided for the establishment of a National commission for women to study and monitor all matters relating to the constt and legal rights and safeguards of women..Sexual Harrasment of women at workplace (prevention, prohibition and redressal act (2013) provides protection to women from sexual harrasment at all workplaces both in public and private sector, organised or unorganised.

Findings of the study :

1. Many laws have been made in India but crimes against women have not reduced. 2. There are many barriers to women empowerment in India.

3. Poverty and lack of education are major obstacles to women empowerment.

4. Empowerment is possible only when the economic and social status of women improves. This is possible only by relying on certain social and economic policies for the holistic development of women and realizing that they have the potential to become capable men.

5. Empowerment requires building confidence in the minds of women.

6. We must start by empowering women to create a sustainable world.

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 . The 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:

"When women move forward the family moves,the village moves and the nation moves ".It is essential as their thought and their value systems lead the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation. The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the mainstream of development. Women empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed income property so that they may stand on their feet and build up their identity in the society. The empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st 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, economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

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