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## A brief discussion on empowerment of women in India

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### Abstract

The concept of women empowerment is a burning issue in the present situation in India. The government has already taken some measures for women empowerment by building up girls' schools, womens' colleges and universities etc. and also given special opportunities to the women by adopting reservation policy in employment and service. In spite of these, we find in the newspapers that women in the country are being deprived of the various scopes in the society and even some women are being disconnected from the main stream of living, sometimes causing nostalgic incidents. For this, women face a problem to lead an equal life with men. In this matter, the government has taken some steps for establishing the status of men and women equally in the society. We find that the women of our country normally take part in the domestic and social activities with the male members of the society. Education is essential for everyone but it is especially significant for the girls and women. This is also an entry point of other opportunities of higher status of living. Educational achievement of women can have ripple effects within the family and generation. A few numbers of women achieve the highest position in various fields in the country and in the nation by their own efforts and participation.

**Keywords:** concept of women empowerment, historical background, constitutional provision, scheme of women empowerment, empowerment of women in India

### 1. Introduction

The Empowerment of women has become one of the most important topics in the present context of India, as well as of the world. Government of India has been trying to ensure gender equality without discrimination of men and women. Sometimes, we see men are gainer and women are loser in the various fields of Indian society. The ancient famous book Vedas reminds us that 'JATRA NARI PUJJANTE RAMANTE TATRA DEVATA,' that means wherever woman is respected, God resides there. It further explains that no nation can prosper and develop without respecting women. India can respect women and can give equal right with men. The term Empowerment of women refers to the development of the spiritual, social, political, economic strength, decision making, rights and human dignity of all women. The women empowerment has been growing up day by day after the independence, as a result Indian women live in standard.

### Need and Importance of the Study:

Women play a vital role directly and indirectly in the various fields of development. Socially, economically and educationally if she is strengthened she will enhance development in all other fields. The present study emphasizes on past and present status of women, constitutional provisions for women and government policy or scheme for women empowerment. The status and position of women who have achieved success in the different sectors in India are described very shortly. At present empowerment of women has become an issue as well as challenge in our society. So, the researcher has taken the topic as a matter of discussion. Thus the researcher has tried to focus on the empowerment of women in our country to create a clear aspect on this in public.

### Scope of the Study:

The scope of the study of empowerment of women in India is very wide range basis. But it is a project work, so the discussion on the matter is very brief in different angles. Concept of women empowerment, historical background, constitutional provision and scheme of empowerment of women in India for specific and concise discussion are presented here.

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### **Limitation of the Study:**

- I. First of all, there is no statistical method and graphical presentation here.
- II. Secondly, the present study discusses on empowerment of women in different angles but in very brief.
- III. Finally, there is no mention of the solution of the problems as issues and challenges of empowerment of women in Indian society.

### **Review of Related Literature:**

**Pandya, Rameswari (2008):** Empowerment has become the key solution to many social problems. Empowerment of women is the empowerment of family / household and in turn development of a nation. The empowerment of women leads to benefit not only to the individual women or women groups, but also to the families and communities as a whole through collective action for development.

**Dr. Nagaraja, B. (2013):** Women empowerment in India is dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (rural / urban), educational status, social status with caste and class and age. Policies on women empowerment exist at national, state and local levels in different sectors including health, education, economic opportunities, and gender based violence and political participation. The scope and coverage of the schemes launched have been expanding by taking initiative for economic and social empowerment of women and securing gender equality.

### **Methodology of the Study:**

The research method of this paper is descriptive in nature. The various sources of data related to existing theories are collected and the researcher has been tried to explain and analysis the present study in descriptive manner.

### **Sources of Data Collection:**

The present study is based on secondary information collected from various sources like books, journal articles; report of national policy, articles published in national and local news papers and also different websites etc.

### **Concept of Women Empowerment:**

The origin of women Empowerment was raised up in the civil right of movement in the USA in 1960s. But India accepts this concept after 1980s. This concept is explained in various ways according to their own view by prominent experts in the different fields. The term 'empowerment of women' defined by prof. C.N. Sankar Rao is as follows:

1. The term "empowerment of women" refers to the process of providing power to women to become free from the control of others, that is, to assume power to control her own life and to determine her own conditions.
2. The term "empowerment of women" could also be understood as the process of providing equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and power positions to women so that they are able to play a role on par with men in society.

In the present context of Empowerment of women, Doshi and Jain said "Women are empowered through women

emancipation movement, education, communication, media, political parties and general awakening."

### **Historical Background of Women Empowerment in India:**

The status of women in India has been greatly changed over the past few decades. In early Vedic period women enjoyed equal status with men. Rigveda and Upanishada mention several notably sages and seers named Gargi and Maitrey. For another example women like Sita and Draupadi showcased various facets of women strength by overcoming the calamities with calmness or their endurance and their ability to punish and forgive. However, the status of women began to deteriorate approximately from 500 B.C. and later when Mughal Empire had been ruling in India the women status became worse. Even in some Muslim families the status of women is very low now. In the early twentieth century, the national movement rose up under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi who was in favour of removing all the disabilities of women. In that time, other social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Ray, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore laid stress on women's education. Most of Indian social reformers protected Child marriage, practice of Sutti, Dowry system, removal of polygamy, Devadasi system, and Purdah system etc. and almost abolished them from India. On the other hand, development in the field of science and technology, universalization of education, socio-political movements, and modernization have changed the approach of people towards women. These developments boosted the moral and self confidence of women.

After Independence, the government of India undertook a number of legislative measures to safeguard the interest of women. Some of them may be noted as the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, The Hindu Succession Act 1956, the Special Marriage Act 1954, the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, the Suppression of Immoral Traffic of Women and Girls Act-1956, The medical termination of Pregnancy Act-1971, The criminal Law Amendment Act-1983, the Family Court Act-1984, the Indecent Representation of women Act-1986, The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Acts-1993. These all are the Acts for women to equally entitle Individual freedom, fundamental rights including social, cultural, religious, educational, economic and political activity participation. The constitution makers and the national leaders realized the equal social status of men and women for the better development of the society. Hence, bringing about more and more legislations to ensure better opportunities to grant more right and concession is of no benefit unless there is a basic change in the people's attitude towards women and women's role in society.

The year 1975 was observed as "International year of Women" as per the call of the UNO. From 1975 onwards, the 8<sup>th</sup> day of March is being observed as "International women's Day." The year 1990 was observed as "SAARC year of The Girl Child." The Government of India declared the year 2001 as the "Year of women's empowerment." These declarations prescribed for all-round development of women in India as well as in the world.

### **Constitutional Provision for Women in India:**

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental

Duties and Directive Principles. The constitution of India has a great extent in favour of women for empowerment in India. Some of these are mentioned below:

- In the constitution of India, Article No. 14 has declared 'equality before law' that means man and woman are equal.
- Article no 15(1) states that there should be no discrimination against any citizen on grounds only of caste, class, creed, race, sex and place of birth or region.
- Article no 15 (3) declares that the state would make any special provision in favour of women and children.
- Article no 16 states the equality of opportunity for all citizens in subject relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state.
- Article no 39 (a) states to pursue a policy of providing the minimum necessities of life to the citizen without discriminating between men and women. And Article No. 39(d) also adds the equal pay for equal work for both men and women only in organized sectors.
- Article no 42 declares to provide human conditions for the citizens to fulfil their occupational obligations. The state shall take it as its responsibility to provide maternity benefits for its women employees.
- Article no 39 (e) states that the health and strength of the workers, men and women and the tender age of children are not abused and the citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter a vocation unsuited to their age or strength.
- Article no-51 (A) & (E) declares to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
- According to adoption Act "They should be equally shared between the sons, daughters and wife-except for the homesteaded land and it will be equally divided only when the sons want to divide it."
- Not less than 1/3 of the total number of seats shall be reserved for women in the panchayat and municipality (including the women belonging to the SCs and STs, Art. No-243 d (3), 243 D (4)).

#### **Government Policy for Women Empowerment:**

Government policy has been promoting women's self development and empowering women in the various field of the society. The schemes or programmes which have been implemented by the Indian Government are as follows:

- Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS)
- Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY)
- Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY)
- Rastriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)
- Mahila Samridha Yojana (MSY)
- Self help Group (SHG)
- National women's commission (NWC)
- State women's commission.
- Kanyashri Prokalpa (West Bengal)
- Employment cum Production Centers
- Women's Development Corporation
- Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)
- Jawarhar Rozgar Yojana (JRY)
- Training of Rural Youth and Self-Employment (TRYSEM)

- National Credit Fund for Women (NCFW)
- Food and Nutrition Board (FND)
- Information and Mass Education (IME)
- Institute for Providing Vocational Training for Women (IPVTW)
- Women National Training Institute (WNTI)
- Social Assistance Schemes etc.

#### **Empowerment of Women in India:**

The number of women in India is nearly 50% of its total population. Indian women are being empowered in the various field of the society effectively. Indian women working as teachers, professors, doctors, nurses, advocates, judges, managers, administrators, police officers, bank employees, clerks, typists, telephone operators, receptionists and personal assistants are found in almost all major cities in our country. And in some of the cities women do not hesitate to work as bus conductors and drivers, police constables, auto rikshwo drivers etc.

Indira Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Aruna Asaf Ali and Lata Mangeshkar had been awarded "Bharat Ratna", the national highest award, for the contribution in their fields. And some other women are acting as IAS, IFS and IPS officer in different departments of the central Government of India very successfully. In the present time, few number of women act as judges in the high court and in the supreme court of India. Mrs. Pratiba Devi Singh Patil, ex-president of India is a Legend of Indian woman.

The Literacy level of women has risen from 39.29% in 1991 to 54% in 2001. As per the latest information, 1.25 lakh women become graduates as doctors every year. This is 50% of the woman graduates. Further, 21% of India's software professional and 25% of science and engineering graduates are women. More than 50% of the students who pass out every year with a bachelor degree in humanities are girls (India Today, April 4, 2005). ICPD Programme of Action stresses "Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process."

The present prime minister of India, Narendra Modi said about the empowerment of women- "educating the girl child is the key to women's empowerment." He added that "most important factor for women's empowerment is the education of the girl child." The government of India has allocated Rs. 100 crore for "The Beti Bacho, Beti Padhao" scheme for the girl child in the budget. Women's empowerment has been one of the key objectives of the present government of India. So, along with women's education, the government also allocated in the yearly budget, Rs. 150 crore for the safety of women in cities and Rs. 50 crore for their safety on public transports.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitution amendment Act, 1993 to the constitution of India have provided some special powers to women for reservation of seats as 33% at all levels of the panchayat and municipality election system, whereas central government of India (2014) has given 30% reservation for women in election bodies. Now, in the present central ministry of cabinet 25% women have been selected as Ministers, Secretaries and other officials.

Many women are conducting different levels of activities like speaker of Lok Sabha, Chief Minister, central Minister, Leader of opposition, Suprimo of party in different political parties at

state and national level in India. And some other women are big businessman, writer, pleader, social thinker, social reformer and good administrator in their tolerance.

At present many women act as scientists from different parts of the country, with eleven active branches in cities like Delhi, Pune, Bhopal, Roorkee, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Kalpakkam etc. and many of them act as scientists outside India like Sunita William .

Women have had the right to vote and run for offices since India's first election after independence in 1951. On 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1998, when the Lok Sabha passed the constitution Amendment bill reducing the voting age to 18 years. Whereas many countries in the world women had had to fight for the right to vote.

Over thousand women professional from different walks of life came together at the 'Swami Vivekananda 150 women convention' on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014, in Chennai, Dr. Shanta, a veteran doctor and chairperson of the adyar cancer Institute, said about the empowerment of women - "Empowerment cannot be given to you on a golden platter, it should come from within you."

In Kolkata, 'Confederation of Indian industries 2014' conducted an assembly for women and gathered many women from different fields of well establish. After the discussion some important words have come into consideration. It has been discussed that actual empowerment of women would be possible when the innate power and possibility grow up properly and will be applied appropriately of herself. If the family supports her in the time of life building the work becomes very easy and may overcome any type of barrier.

Today's Indian woman is a symbol of strength and pride to the nation. Saina Newhal, Karnam Maleswari, Anju Bobby George, P.T. Usha, Sania Mirza, Mary kom are the pride of India for their contribution in the concerned field. The Womens' cricket team and Womens' Hockey team of India successfully lead in national and International level by their own efforts and practice.

#### **Conclusion Remark:**

The country of India has grown up by leaps and bounds after the independence, where education is concerned, the gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India in census 2011. According to the world economic forum's 2013, India ranks 101<sup>st</sup> out of 136 countries on global gender gap Index. India is the lowest among BRIC economics, which also include Brazil, Russia and China. I think, education is the main key of the empowerment of women to the nation. Education leads to the empowerment of women improving economic growth, low fertility rate, health and sanitation, Social awareness, equal rights, work participation rate, political participation and other participation may build up a better India. So, both the central and the state government should take steps for the development of women empowerment so that they may lead the life with safety, security, prosperity and standard keeping their heads high in the society, in the country and in the world.

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