# Women's Empowerment in India

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**Abstract:** *Empowerment includes control our resource such as physical, human intellectual and financial; and ideology like belief, values ad attitude (Baltiwala, 1994). In 1960, in civil right movement the concept of empowerment is origin. It has since then interpreted differently in different sectors as business, social work, development, discourse, different political agendas, a largely individual process of taking control and responsibility towards one's life and situation and defining it as a political process of granting human rights and social justice to disadvantage group of people. The concept women's empowerment come after Feminism movement started in China, 1911. Women's empowerment means given equal status to women with men. Empowering women towards socio-economically, politically, physically and psychologically develop through increase awareness of their right and duties, higher level of education for them, better health care for them, equal worship of productive resource and increase participations in economic, commercial and political sections, improve standards of living and acquiring self-reliance, self-esteem and self-confidence.*

**Key Words:** *Women Empowerment, Empowerment, Education.*

**Introduction:**

Today's women are not behind men in every aspect but the status of women in India is not uniform. They have excelled in every field; they proved their worth, but still their condition on social, political, economical, physical as well as cognitive and psychological fronts has not been up to the mark and they are forced to lead a miserable life. In such condition, it calls for immediate attention to empower them and create conductive environment for their social, political, economic, physical and others upliftment.

The overall development of any society depends upon the maximum utilization of human power, both men and women. The greatest son of India, **Swami Vivekananda quoted that "There is no change for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved; it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing"**. In India the status of women changes with time. If we see the ancient Indian society women were adored and worshiped as goddess 'Laxmi Maa' the goddess of wealth, future and prosperity; 'Saraswati Maa' the goddess of knowledge, music, arts and wisdom and learning; 'Durga Maa' goddess of power. However in the middle age, the status of women got down to a great extent. Women are considered in the society only to fulfill their duties like bring up children, caring family members and other households activities. The women in India contributed half of the total population, but they earn one third of remuneration and own 10% of the property or wealth of the country. In such scenario, it is essential to take immediate steps to empower women of India. After independence the government of India takes so many

initiatives for women's empowerment. This study focused on the status of women in India and the problem, initiatives for women empowerment in India.

### Empowerment:

The process of authorizing to think, take action and controlling work in a autonomous way by an individual is called empowerment. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstance of individual lives. In simple word empowerment is giving the power, and it is the keyword of the concept empowerment. According to the international encyclopedia (1999), 'power means having the capacity to direct one's life toward desired social, political, cultural and economic goals.

Empowerment includes control our resource such as physical, human intellectual and financial; and ideology like belief, values ad attitude (Baltiwala, 1994). In 1960, in civil right movement the concept of empowerment is origin. It has since then interpreted differently in different sectors as business, social work, development, discourse, different political agendas, a largely individual process of taking control and responsibility towards one's life and situation and defining it as a political process of granting human rights and social justice to disadvantage group of people.

### Women's Empowerment:

Given equal status to women is called women's empowerment. Here equal status means balance of power between men and women is equal; neither one party dominance over other. Empowering women towards socio-economically, politically, physically and psychologically, this develop through increase awareness of their right and duties, and higher level of education for them, better health care for them, equal worship of productive resource and increase participations in economic, commercial and political sections, improve standards of living and acquiring self-reliance, self-esteem and self-confidence.

At the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1993 and the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994 Government committed themselves to the empowerment of women. This Commitment was operationalised and formulated into a clear action plan at the Fourth World Conference on women in Beijing 1995 where Governments committed themselves to the "empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs of women and men, individually or in community with others and thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations".

Duflo E. (2011) carried out a study on Women's Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge The study argues that the inter relationships of the Empowerment and Development are probably too weak to be self sustaining and that continuous policy commitment to equally for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women.

### Objectives:

Objectives of the presents study are under as:

1. To understand the concept empowerment and women's empowerment.

2. To know about the dimensions of women's empowerment.

3. To find out the scenario of women's empowerment in India since ancient India to the present.

### Significance of the study:

As we all know that India is called a men dominated country where males are dominated in almost every area and women are forced to be responsible for fulfil their duties like bring up children, caring family members and other household activities and others many restrictions. Almost half of the total population of India is women. Full development of our country depends on half of population because the rest 50% population covered by women and they are not empowered still. Because of gender discrimination and male domination in the Indian society, women empowerment becomes immediate necessity. Since ancient time, we push them (women) back in many ways like *Satidaha Pratha, Nagar Vadhu system, Dowry system, Sexual violence, Domestics violence, Female infanticides, Parda Pratha, Wife burning, Sexual harassment at work place, Early marriage, Child labour, including other discrimination* practises. For the prosperity of our country we have to give the women freedom to take right decision.

Government of India, in recent years, various constitutional and legal rights have been implemented to eliminate these types of ill practice and gender discriminations against women. In order to reduce crime and provide Benefit Act-1961, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act-2006, Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention and Protection) Act-2013, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act-2005, Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill-2015 etc have been introduced. From the above discussion it state the importance of the present study.

**Methodology:**

This study is basically descriptive in natures. It is based on review of information collected from the secondary source of information i.e., published book, journal, internet browsing.

**Findings and analysis of the study:**

According to the objectives of the study, the findings of the study discuss below-

*Objective 1. To understand the concept of empowerment and women's empowerment:*

*Empowerment:* The term empowerment is a multi-dimensional, multi-faced and multi-layered concept includes social, political, cultural, economic, physical, cognitive and psychological aspect. In Webster's English Dictionary, the verb empowers means to give the means ability and authority.

*Women's Empowerment:* The concept women's empowerment come after Feminism movement started in China, 1911. Women's empowerment means given equal status to women with men. Empowering women towards socio-economically, politically, physically and psychologically develop through increase awareness of their right and duties, higher level of education for them, better health care for them, equal worship of productive resource and increase participations in economic, commercial and political sections, improve standards of living and acquiring self-reliance, self-esteem and self-confidence.

*Objective 2. To know about the dimensions of women's empowerment:*

The concept women's empowerment has seven dimensions viz. social, political, economic, cultural, physical, cognitive and psychological.

a. **Social Empowerment:** Social empowerment means a more equal social status for women in society. Social empowerment facilitating through training on awareness for health, education, child education, self-esteem, self-confidence and their right and duties.

b. **Political Empowerment:** Political equality and right to access the institutionalized centres of power are the keyword of political empowerment. Political empowerment is a process that enables women to increase their mobility and break their isolation, to develop their self-confidence and self-image and to establish their public presence whereby they participate in decision making in an expanding

frame work of awareness and critical analysis to control and influence the direction of development. Participation of women in Panchayati Raj has been recognized as a step towards equality.

c. **Economic Empowerment:** Economic empowerment is a process as well as a stage which is to be reached by designing strategies focusing on building credit worthiness and financial independence among women by removing all the gender-specific barriers which prevent women from gaining access to their rightful share in every spheres of life. Government of India having realized the power and potential of Self-Help Groups approach has started mobilizing the poor women into Self-Help Groups. The rural women performed in commercial activities to earn money for their better level living.

d. **Cultural Empowerment:** Cultural empowerment deals with the activities which develop the intellectual capacity, self-esteem, self-confidence of women on their society. They right to participate on cultural activities without any religious barrier.

e. **Physical Empowerment:** Physical empowerment is to gaining of control over one's body and sexuality and the ability to protect oneself against sexual violence to the empowerment process.

f. **Cognitive Empowerment:** The cognitive empowerment deals with women having understanding of the causes of their condition at different level and it involves making choices that may go against cultural expectations and norms.

g. **Psychological Empowerment:** It includes the beliefs that women can act at personal, social and cultural levels to improve their individual realities and the society in which they lives.

*Objective 3. To find out the scenario of women's empowerment in India since ancient India to the present:*

The scenario of women's empowerment in India discuss through different age of time-

**Ancient India:**

Women enjoyed equal status with men in all aspects of life during Vedic period. They educated in early Vedic period. Rig veda verses suggested that women were select their own husband by practice called Swayamvar at mature age. In Vedic era polygamy was matched with polyandry with the example of the story of Drauadi's marriage to 5 men is a case of point in Mahabharata. In the Puranas every God was show in consort of their wife (Brahma with Saraswati, Vishnu with Laxmi, Shiva with Parvati and Krishna with Radharani). Idols of God and Goddesses were delineating equal importance to both genders. Separate temples were setup for goddess.

In the 5th or 6th century BCE, queen Mrgavati of the Vatsa Mahajanapada ruled as regent while her son Udayana was either a minor or hold captive by a rival king and she earned the admiration of eve experienced ministers. In the 2nd century BCE, queen Nayanika (aganika) was ruler and military commander of the Satavahana Empire of the Deccan region.

**Medieval And British India:**

In medieval period the position of Indian women in the society further deteriorated when Satidaha among some communities, child marriage and a ban on widow remarriage, polygamy become part of social life among people of India. The Muslim conquest brought the Purdah practice in the Indian society in some part of the India. The Devadasis and the temple women were sexuality exploited.

In spite of these conditions, some women excelled in the field of politics, literature, education and religion. Razia Sultana (1205–1240) became the only woman monarch to have ever ruled Delhi. Rudrama Devi was a

monarch of the Kakatiya dynasty in the Deccan Plateau with capital at Warangal of present-day Telangana from 1263 until her death. She was one of the few women to rule as monarch in the Indian subcontinent and promoted a male image in order to do so. Akka Mahadevi was a prominent figure of the Veerashaiva Bhakti movement of the 12th century Karnataka. Her Vachanas in Kannada, a form of didactic poetry, are considered her most notable contribution to Kannada Bhakti literature. During the conquest of Sindh by Muhammad bin Qasim, Rani Bai and other Rajput women had performed the jauhar. It was committed thrice, in Chittor Fort alone, by many of the wives and children of the Rajput soldiers who died in battles at Chittorgarh Fort. The first time was led by Rani Padmini, wife of Ratnasimha, who was killed in the battle in 1303, and later, by Rani Karnavati in 1537.

The Gond queen Durgavati (1524–1564) ruled for fifteen years before losing her life in a battle with Mughal emperor Akbar's general Asaf Khan in 1564. Chand Bibi defended Ahmednagar against the powerful Mughal forces of Akbar in the 1590s. Jehangir's wife Nur Jehan effectively wielded imperial power, and was recognised as the real power behind the Mughal throne. Abbakka Chowta was the first Tuluva Queen of Ullal who fought the Portuguese in the latter half of the 16th century. Shivaji's mother, Jijabai, was queen regent because of her ability as a warrior and an administrator. Kittur Chennamma, queen of the princely state Kittur in Karnataka, led an armed rebellion against the British in response to the Doctrine of lapse. Rani Lakshmi Bai, the Queen of Jhansi, led the Indian Rebellion of 1857 against the British. She is now widely considered as a national hero.

In 1917, the first women's delegation met the Secretary of State to demand women's political rights, supported by the Indian National Congress. The All India Women's Education Conference was held in Pune in 1927, it became a major organisation in the movement for social change. In 1929, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed, stipulating fourteen as the minimum age of marriage for a girl.

**Independence India:**

After independence women of India started participate in all activities such as education, service, politics, media, social and cultural activities, industry and agricultural sector because of Indian constitution has provided the bulwarks for gender equality in the country in the following articles-

**Article 14-** It guarantees equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws with in the territory of India prohibition on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

**Article 15(3)-** State can make special provisions for benefit women and children.

**Article 16-** No citizen can denied employment on grounds of religion, race, sex, caste, decent, place of birth, residence or any of them. It provide equal of opportunity to all citizen in matter of employment.

**Article 23-** Prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour.

**Article 39(a)-** Provide for an adequate means of livelihood for all citizens. **39(b)-** has provisions for equal pay for equal work.

**Article 40 (after the 73rd Amendment)-** $1/3^{rd}$ of seats in panchayats shall be reserved for women.

**Article 42-** The states shall make provisions for just and humane working conditions and maternity relief.

**Article 325 and 326-** Provide political equality, equal right to participate in political activity and right to vote, respectively.

Some of the acts passed by the Parliament of India are Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act-1956, Dowry Prohibition Act-1961, Maternity Benefit Act-1961, Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971, Equal Remuneration Act-1976, Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of

misuse) Act-1994, Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act-2000(2015), Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act-2005, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act-2006, Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention and protection) Act-2013, Indecent Representation of Women, etc in order to empower women with legal rights and provide safety to women and reduce crime.

The Government of India take some empowerment schemes for the women for their better standard of living and empowering them in every sector. This are-

1. Rastriya Mahila Kosh (RMK), 1993

2. SWADHAR Greh Scheme, 2001

3. Pradhan Mantri Mantru Vandana Yojana, 2017, 2010(Indira Gandhi Matriva Sahyog Yojana), 2014(Matriva Sahyog Yojana)

4. National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW), 2011

5. Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme, 2012,2016

6. Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao Scheme, 2015

7. Skanya Samriddhi Yojana, 2015

8. Women Helpline Scheme, 2015

9. NAND-GHAR Yojana,2015

10. Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, 2016

11. Maternity Benefit Program, 2017

12. Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme, 2017

13. eSamvad Portal,2018

14. Nari Web Portal,2018

15. She-Box Portal,2018

16. New Draft National Policy, 2019

17. One Stop Centre Scheme

18. Working Women's Hostel (WWH)

19. Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP)

20. Mahila E-Haat

21. Mahila Police Volunteers

**Challenges of Women in Indian Society:**

Numerous Acts, provisions (articles) are provided by Government of India in order to empower women with legal rights and provide safety to women and reduce crime. But still now Indian women face various kinds of challenges. The challenges faced by Indian women are as follows in the table 5.

**Table 1: Crime head-wise incidents of crime against women, 2010-16 (2 yrs interval)**

| Sl. No. | Crime head | 2010 | 2013 | 2016 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Rape | 22,172 | 33,707 | 38947 |
| 2 | Kidnapping and Abduction | 29,759 | 51,881 | 64,519 |
| 3 | Dowry Death | 8,391 | 8,083 | 7621 |
| 4 | Cruelty by husband or others relatives | 90,041 | 1,18,866 | 1,10,378 |
| 5 | Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty | 40,613 | 70,739 | 84,746 |
| 6 | Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act-1956 | 2,499 | 2,589 | 9,683 |
| 7 | Dowry Prohibition Act-1961 | 5,182 | 10,709 | 9,683 |

Source: Crime of India

**Conclusion:**

In order to really bring women empowerment in Indian society, its needs to understand and eliminate the main causes of ill practice, male dominated system, animal mind of man against women. Their need to be open minded and lives with women with the constitutional and other legal provisions. Various indicators of women empowerment are analysed while discussing women's present status of India, it needs to give priority to education of women, awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights, should be provided enough safety at work place and strict implementation of Programmes and Acts should be there to curb the mal-practices prevalent in the society. If we want to bring about women empowerment in the true sense, there is a crying need for elimination of the man superiority and patriarchal mindset, they make the society and world a better place to live. It means increase happiness for the family and the organizations where women make a difference.

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