

## WOMEN OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN EMPOWERMENT- PRESENT SCENARIO

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### Abstract

*The constitution of India also guarantees the equality of rights of men and women. However, in the sphere of women's legal rights in India, there exists a wide gulf between theory and practice. Indian society is a male dominated society where men are always assumed to be superior to society. The women in India very often have to face discrimination, injustice and dishonour. Though women in India have been given more rights as compared to men, even then the condition of women in India is miserable. This paper attempts to grapple with the few challenges faced by the women in India in their family, society and nation like the dowry, female foeticide, denial of inheritance rights, sale and trafficking of girls etc. The objective of the paper is to evolve strategies to empower women uniformly like the men. However these goals are far from being realized in a country like India*

**Keywords:** Women's Rights, Empowerment, Challenges, Legal Provisions, Indian Penal Code.

### Introduction

Women emerged as a distinct interest group in the 19th century primarily because the bourgeoisie democratic revolutions of 17th and 18th century that excluded women from their concept of equality. This distinction was based on gender. Since then women as a commune had waged struggle for recognition of their rights as a human being. Women's execute multilateral role in the society i.e. as a breadwinner of her family, as a care taker of her family as a mother, wife, daughter and service provider to the society. In spite of the fact that the women's contribution to the country's development is equal to that of their male counterpart, still they experience a number of limitations that restrain them from comprehending their potential for expansion. It was against this background that the government's all over the world felt the need to prioritize the interests of women and their participation at every stage of the development process. Women as a core group of concern emerged as a major theme in the Millennium Development Goal. The term Women's empowerment implies the ability of the women take all the important decisions independently related to her throughout her life span that will ensure her success in all aspects of life. Few challenges faced by the women in India like the dowry, female foeticide, denial of inheritance, sale and trafficking of girls etc. The objective of the paper is to evolve strategies to empower women who are as human beings as men are.

The paper is divided into three sections. The section I lists the Various problems faced by Indian women .Section II focus on the steps undertaken by the Indian constitution to protect women's human rights. Section

III some plans for the women development and empowerment

### Various problems faced by Indian women :

#### Gender discrimination:

Discrimination against the girl child starts the moment she enters into the mother's womb. The child is exposed to gender differences since birth and in recent times even before birth, in the form of sex – determination tests leading to foeticide and female infanticide. The home, which is supposed to be the most secure place, is where women are most exposed to violence. If a girl child opens her eyes in any way, she is killed after her birth by different cruel methods in some parts of the country. Thus the very important "right to life" is denied to women.

#### Un-attraction of Female Education:

Education is considered as means of development of personality and awareness. Education is one of the most important human rights but the position of women's education in India is not at all satisfactory. Young girls may be bought up to believe that they are suited only to certain professions or in some cases to serve as wives and mothers. Despite in the improvement in the literacy rate after independence, there continues to be large gap between the literacy levels of men and women.

#### Dissatisfactory political status:

The political status of women in India is very unsatisfactory, particularly their representation in higher political institutions – Parliament and provincial Legislation which is of great under – representation which

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hampers their effective role in influencing the government initiatives and policies regarding women's welfare and development.

### **Negligence and poor health:**

According to the World Bank report, malnutrition is the major cause of female infertility. The presence of excessive malnutrition among female children as compared to male children is basically due to differences in the intra – family allocation of food between the male and female children. Normally, the male members are fed before the female members of the family. Sometimes due to economic distress and natural calamities like floods, droughts or earthquakes, the discrimination against the female child increases. Moreover it has been confirmed by various studies that the girl's diet is inferior to the boy's diet both in quality and quantity. Boys are given more nutritive foods like milk, eggs, butter, ghee, fruits, and vegetables as compared to girls.

### **Organizational problems:**

The employment of the women in agriculture, traditional industries and in sizeable section of new industries is declining at a very fast rate. The reason is that the adoption of new technological changes requires new skill, knowledge and training. And women in India, who constitute a large share of world's illiterate lacks such skills and knowledge. The studies have also showed that for the same task, women are paid less than the males. Technological changes in agriculture and industry are throwing out women from the production process. The women workers are concentrated only for certain jobs which require so – called female skills. Thus, Indian labour market is adverse to women workers.

### **Sexual Harassment:**

Eve teasing is an act of terror that violates a woman's body, space and self – respect. It is one of the many ways through which a woman is systematically made to feel inferior, weak and afraid. Whether it is an obscene word whispered into a woman's ear; offensive remarks on her appearance; any intrusive way of touching any part of women's body; a gesture which is perceived and intended to be vulgar: all these acts represent a violation of woman's person and her bodily integrity. Thus, eve teasing denies a woman's fundamental right to move freely and carry herself with dignity, solely on the basis of her sex.

### **Familiar and Social Problems**

**1) Child marriage :**Child marriage has been traditionally prevalent in India and continues to this date. Discrimination against the girl begins even before their birth and continues as they grow. According to the law, a girl cannot be married until

she has reached the age of 18 at least. But the girl in India is taken as a burden on the family. Sometimes the marriages are settled even before the birth of the child. Some believe that they marry girls at an early age so as to avoid the risk of their unmarried daughters getting pregnant. This shows that the reasons for child marriages in India are so baseless. Basically, this phenomenon of child marriage is linked to poverty, illiteracy, dowry, landlessness and other social evils. The impact of child marriage is widowhood, inadequate socialisation, education deprivation, lack of independence to select the life partner, lack of economic independence, low health/nutritional levels as a result of early/frequent pregnancies in an unprepared psychological state of young bride. So, all this indicated that immediate steps should be taken to stop the evil of Child Marriage.

- 2) Dowry harassment and bride burning:** The demand of dowry by the husband and his family and then killing of the bride because of not bringing enough dowry to the in – laws has become a very common crime these days. In spite of the Dowry prohibition Act passed by the government, which has made dowry demands in wedding illegal, the dowry incidents are increasing day by day. According to survey, around 5000 women die each year due to dowry deaths and at least a dozen die each day in "kitchen fires".
- 3) Rape:** Young girls in India often are the victims of rape. Almost 255 of rapes are of girls under 16 years of age. The law against rape is unchanged from 120 years. In rape cases, it is very torturing that the victim has to prove that she has been raped. The victim finds it difficult to undergo medical examination immediately after the trauma of assault. Besides this, the family too is reluctant to bring in prosecution due to family prestige and hard police procedures.
- 4) Domestic violence:** Wife beating, abuse by alcoholic husbands are the violence done against women which are never publicly acknowledged. The cause is mainly the man demanding the hard earned money of the wife for his drinking. But an Indian woman always tries to conceal it as they are ashamed of talking about it. Interference of in – laws and extra marital affairs of the husbands are the another cause of such violence. The pity women are unwilling to go to court because of lack of alternative support system.

Thus, all these violence done against women raises the question mark that how these special rights being given to women are helping them? What are the benefits of framing such laws for the women? Are they really helping them? Will the women really be given an equal status to men one day? All these questions are still unanswered. There is still long way to go to answer such questions

### Protection of Women's Human Rights by the Constitution of India

The constitution of India confers special rights upon women. The constitution makers were well aware of the subordinate and backward position of women in the society. They made some efforts for uplift of women in our society. The state is directed to provide for maternity relief to female workers under Article 42 of the Constitution, whereas Article 51-A declares it as a fundamental duty of every Indian citizen to renounce practices to respect the dignity of women. Indian Parliament has passed the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 for the proper implementation of Article 51-A. Indian Parliament over the years have taken significant steps for through legislations to achieve the goal of empowering the women in India. The significant among them are the Equal Remuneration Act, the Prevention of Immoral Traffic Act, the Sati (Widow Burning the rights of) Prevention Act, and the Dowry Prohibition Act etc. Apart from these, the 73rd and 74th Constitution (Amendment) Acts 14 provided for 33% reservation for women in both panchayat and Nagarpalika institutions as well as for the positions of chairpersons of these bodies. These two amendments removed the bottlenecks from the paths of women empowerment at the local level. Besides this, the government in India have enacted a variety of laws like Dowry Prohibition Act, Sati prevention Act etc to guarantee the rights of the women. Apart from this, in India, National Commission for Women had been established in 1990 to look into the women's problem. NCW have engaged them to deal with the cases relating to the violation of women's rights. They have pressurised the government to pass stricter laws to deal with the rape cases, domestic violence and to create a separate criminal code for the women etc.

### Following are some plans for the women development and empowerment

Indian government is always few rebel and conscious about women development. Time to time different schemes and plans has been implemented for the success of women.

#### 1. Mahila cosh yojana

This is first plan started for especially rural women of India in which self employment, stress on msme and supplementary occupation are the most priority factors.

#### 2. Training and employment programme for women (TEPW)

To build up the confidence, economically strong and for enhancing the productivity are the main targets of this plan.

#### 3. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)

For social and economical changes, financial improvements through various programmes are the main objects of this plan. Micro finance to poor women, agriculture women, shop keeping and handcrafts etc are important objects of this plan.

#### 4. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)

This is especially well-known for the overall development of teen age girls for the issues like nutrition, education, medical facilities and eradication of the different problems

#### 5. Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB)

This scheme is especially famous for stimulation of the NGO which work for development of women.

#### 6. Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)

For the improvement to the health and nutrition status of pregnant, lactating women and infants, child vaccination with sort out the various problems.

#### 7. Swayam Siddha yojana

Creation of self help groups with financial support and availability the fund for poor women in society.

#### 8. Short Stay Home for Women and Girls (SSH)

Arrangement of temporary accommodation of deprived, mentally affected, very poor, widow, exploited and rejected by society and family. With the help of this plan various works knowledge given and try to become self to such type of women.

#### 9. Swadhar

This plan is especially for the support of women those really want to do the advance type of work. Some financial support given by government to start the occupations.

### Suggestions for the effectiveness of Women empowerment

Involment in women's mobility and social interaction, Modification in working are and organization, Participation into each and every sphere of life, Utilization in recourses 5. Support and exposure from legislative and constitutional side, Sutaible coordination between women empowerment and globalization, Creation of convenient environment for women's at working places, Social and education empowerment for women, Role of NGOs and international agencies, Provision of finance for overall development for women, Avoidance and presentation to sexual harassment and domestic violence related issues, Coordination in administrative and political reformation process, Entrepreneurship application for equal participation at workplace, Supportive and positive role of media about women empowerment,

Representation of women at different places. Health related issues of girls and women, Participation in endowments and ownership of assets, Equal kinship pattern in society, Access to credit, inputs and extension services, training, etc. , Provision to employment, wages and terms of employment, and bias in division of labour and work burden, Permission to household, community and state resources: particularly food, education and health, Entrance to public decision-making.

As per the constitutional provisions, all women's should get food, water, shelter, clothing, health facilities, employment support and services for the convenient survival.

#### **Conclusion:**

Community awareness on the benefits of empowering women should be carried out in order that the empowerment may be supported by the community as whole. For the suitable construction of society, there is need to give special attention on women empowerment in India. Also traditional attitude has to change regarding women. Awareness programme, education and positive role of every indivisible will help to develop the status of women in India. Strict implementation, creation and support of legislative, judiciary will be beneficial to sort out the women related problems in India. Thus in short, the Millennium Development Goal on gender equality and women's empowerment can be realised in India only when the traditional practices like female infanticide, dowry deaths, honour killings by khap panchayats, domestic violence, or sexual abuse is eliminated. It is only then that gender equality and women's empowerment can become a reality.

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