

# Women And Women Empowerment In India

**Dr. Hamakalavathy R.**

Assistant Professor, Department of History,  
Government First Grade College, Kolar, Karnataka, India

**Abstract:** *Women constituting half of the universe with almost 50% of population is subjected differently under the influence of patriarchal domination in the society. Women empowerment and women equality with men are the targets for the very existence of women. The need of the hour is to address the challenges of women empowerment so as to make women on par with men in all respects. Indian women's position gradually deteriorated from later Vedic period. Education plays a vital role in women emancipation and women empowerment. Education provides required awareness and is also a means to know their rights and privileges. Education is a tool for women, both for self-growth and the growth of society. Gender bias needs to be replaced with gender parity. Sex ratio is one of the key factors for development. There is an urgent need to encourage female child birth by eradicating female infanticide. To redress women problems several civil and criminal laws are enacted by government. It is peoples turn to see that the laws are implemented in letter and spirit to achieve women empowerment. Women can realize their collective strength through education, information sharing and training. To get women their due share and dignity a rapid change in the society is required. Social consciousness is vital for status of women. For India's development both men and women have to equally strive and be part of the fourth industrial revolution.*

**Keywords:** *Women, women empowerment, discrimination, criminal and civil laws, education, gender bias, gender gap report, society, fourth industrial revolution.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The women of the world in general and Indian women in particular are subjected to male and female discrimination. In India due to predominance of patriarch values male children are preferred to female children. In the social context even today, male preference and female negligence has almost become a workable policy in the rural areas. Female feticide, female infanticide, child marriage, child labor, trafficking, sexual exploitation, prostitution, neglect of health and education are the everlasting problems faced by women of all ages. To address all these problems and to attain equality with men, the subject of empowerment of women has attained prominence. With continued struggle women could achieve property rights, voting rights, and equality in civil rights. The struggle needs to be continued further to achieve fair share in the society at par with men.

## II. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment is an important aspect all over the world in general and India in particular. Inequalities between men and women and discrimination against women are age old issues all over the world. Hence women's quest for equality with man is a universal phenomenon. The universal mantra is "women empowerment" and "women equality with men" this reflects how women were and are dealt with when compared to men.

Women empowerment is to create a suitable environment for women and empower them to make decisions on their own for their personal as well as societies benefit. Women empowerment is in fact the ability of women to exercise full control over ones actions. Women empowerment influences women to increase and improve the social, economic, political and legal strength which in turn ensures equal right to women and makes them aware to fight and claim their rights in par with men.

#### A. THE NEED FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment ensures the following for women -

- ✓ To lead their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity
- ✓ To have control over their life at home, outside and at work place
- ✓ To make their own choices and decisions conducive to them
- ✓ To have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities
- ✓ To have equal status in the society
- ✓ To have equal rights for social and economic justice
- ✓ To take economic and financial decisions
- ✓ To get equal opportunity for education
- ✓ To have equal employment opportunity without any gender bias
- ✓ To have comfortable working conditions at workplace

#### B. THE CHALLENGES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT ARE

- ✓ The inherent superiority complex among males. Males do not allow their female counterparts to rise equal to them, if not higher to them
- ✓ High level of domestic responsibility
- ✓ Not allowing to participate in social, economic and religious activities
- ✓ Boy child gets preference for education and other things over the girl child
- ✓ Preference to have male child and girl child neglect
- ✓ Poor awareness among women about their legal rights
- ✓ Low awareness to promote and practice gender equality
- ✓ Low Level and percentage of women education
- ✓ Feminization of poverty
- ✓ Patriarchal values and limited livelihood options

Women population constitutes around 50% of the world population. A large number of women are unemployed, the world economy suffers because of the unequal opportunity for women at work place.

Swami Vivekananda said that *“there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of the women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing”*. Thus the inclusion of women empowerment as one of the prime goals in the 8<sup>th</sup> Millennium development goals underscores the relevance of this fact. India needs to transform its colossal women force into an effective human resource in order to achieve the status of a developed country and this is possible only through women empowerment. If women are empowered to participate fully in economic life of all sectors which are essential to build stronger economies it leads to improved quality of life of women, men, families and communities. It is essential to emancipate women from the vicious circles of social, economic, political, caste and gender based discrimination. Women empowerment does not mean defying men, rather it means replacing patriarchy with parity.

The following facets of women empowerment are required:

- ✓ Human right or individual right
- ✓ Social women empowerment

- ✓ Educational women empowerment
- ✓ Economic and occupational women empowerment
- ✓ Legal women empowerment
- ✓ Political women empowerment

#### III. POSITION OF WOMEN

The position enjoyed by women in India during Rig Vedic period deteriorated gradually in the later vedic civilization. Dark Age for the Indian women emerged with onset of the conquest of Mohammed Ghazini. Women were denied right to education, widow remarriage, right to inheritance, and ownership of property. Women were subjected to many social evils like child marriage, dowry system, sati etc.

The irony is though the goddesses of learning is Saraswathi, women were denied education. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century women were cruelly suppressed, oppressed, and exploited by men. Legalized prostitution was much in vogue. The increasing number of devadasi's in the temples and dancers at Raja's courts were given great importance by the rich men who were in hunt of immoral sex. Prostitutes were permitted to learn many vidya's while house wives were not permitted. The house wife become the property of man and was supposed to work for them and endure even misbehavior of man in the name of pativratham. Men were enjoying polygamy, people totally ignored and forgot the dictum *“mathru devo bhava”* which means mother – a women held high. India is known for its sobriquet male chauvinistic nation.

India as a nation is revered in a feminine form – i.e., Bharath Mata. It is Bharath Mata who is in turn a women that serves as the mother of every Indian. While such a women looks after every Indian child, women in general are simply being disregarded at the dominant men's best. Women have become marionettes in the hands of them. The women are subjected to dowry killings, female infanticide, domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, illegal trafficking, prostitution etc., in almost all areas like social, cultural, economic, education etc., a gender discrimination prevails. Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru said *“to awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves”*. The effective remedy for the evils is to ensure the right to equality. Gender equality facilitates the empowerment of women. Gender inequality, gender based discrimination and disparity certainly needs to be abolished. Gender constitutes the most profound differentiating division.

#### A. GLOBAL GENDER GAP REPORT 2016

The world economic forum in its global gender gap report 2016, ranks India at 87 out of 144 ranked countries in the world. There is a marked improvement from the 108<sup>th</sup> position in 2015. This report is an annual bench marking exercise that measures progress towards parity between men and women in four areas, viz., educational attainment, health and survival, economic opportunity and political empowerment. It is pertinent to note that, gender parity is equally fundamental to whether and how societies thrive. Ensuring the healthy

development and appropriate use of half of the world's total talent pool has a vast bearing on the growth, competitiveness and future readiness of economy and business worldwide.

India's gender gap stands at 68% across the four pillars of economy, education, health, and political representation. India has key investments in woman's education but has not removed the desired barriers to woman's participation in the work force, and is thus not seeing returns on their investments in terms of development of one half of the nation's human capital. The global economy is currently in transition to a fourth industrial revolution. According to Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of world economic forum *"the fourth industrial revolution is a technological revolution that will fundamentally alter the way we live, work and relate to one another"*. The fourth economic revolution is conceptualized as an upgrade on the third revolution and is marked by fusion of technologies straddling the physical, digital and biological world.

#### IV. ROLE OF EDUCATION IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Education is fundamental means to bring any desired change in society which is an accepted fact throughout the world. Education not only helps in the development of personality of a girl child but also determines the development and favorable attitude towards life. The basic aim of education is all round development of women both for self-growth and the growth of society. Aim of education is compared with the growth of a sapling, the change from the seed to the sapling and sapling to the tree is meaningful. Education helps women to transfer herself into a magnanimous tree with inculcating values among themselves. As the true education begins at home, the upliftment of women would be accompanied by the development of the family, the society, and in turn would lead towards a holistic development of nation. *"If you invest in a girl or a woman, you are investing in everyone else"*— said Melinda Gates of the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation.

The first and foremost problem which needs to be addressed is the atrocity being committed against females at birth and as well as at childhood. Though prenatal diagnostic techniques (prohibition of sex selection) act in 1994 was passed, female infanticide is continuing in some parts of India. Starting with birth in case of survival, the female child is subjected to discrimination throughout the life. Female children are neglected or biased in matters of nutrition, education and other important aspects of well-being. Parents obviously prefer male child over female child since they have to face hurdles of dowry and other expenses during the marriage of female. Sex ratio is one of the important indicators of development, in this aspect India is lagging with only 933 females per 1000 males. Females in their youth face the problem of early marriage and child birth. Not caring properly during pregnancy leads to many cases of maternal mortality. The MMR (Maternal Mortality Rate) i.e., the number of females dying during deliveries is high in India. In addition females are subjected to harassment for dowry and domestic violence. Acts of violence, exploitation and discrimination at the work places, public places and elsewhere are rampant.

Unless dramatic measures are taken to improve female literacy like creating skills and capability among women for enabling them to stand on their own feet and care for themselves and family, it will be difficult for India to prosper as a developed nation.

#### V. REDRESSAL OF WOMEN PROBLEMS

To address these problems and abuses of women many steps have been taken and continues to be taken by central and state governments. Criminal laws have been enacted against sati, dowry, female infanticide and feticide, eve teasing, rape, immoral trafficking, and other offences against women. Civil laws like Hindu Marriage Act 1955, the Hindu Women's right to Property Act 1937, Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act 1939, Domestic Violence Act 2015 etc., have been enacted. 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitution amendments provide 33% reservation for women in local bodies. Efforts are on to provide the same amount of reservation for women in state assemblies and parliament. National policy for the empowerment of women was formulated in 2001 (women empowerment year) and 24<sup>th</sup> January every year has been designated as National Girl Child day. To renew the interests in women issues, the year 1975 was declared as Women's Year, the decade 1975-1985 was declared as International Women's decade. Further, every year March 8<sup>th</sup> is being celebrated as International Women's Day. This is being utilized as a platform to introspect and work further for the women development and women empowerment. The national perspective plan in 1988 and national commission for women in 1992 were formed. Gender development index has been introduced by human development report from 1995.

The major drawback is that though the laws are enacted, the laws are hardly implemented in their letter and spirit. Laws remain a force on the paper and are ineffective in practice. It is sure that our real and basic growth will only come when women have a full chance to play their part in public life. Whenever they had such a chance, they are doing well than Men. Our laws are man-made and at the same time our society is dominated by men and hence it leads to very lopsided view of this matter. We are not objective since we are being grown in certain grooves of thought and actions but ultimately the future of India will probably depend more upon women than men.

#### A. GENDER BIAS IMPEDING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

According to Kamala Bhasin, gender refers to the socio cultural definition of man and women, the way societies distinguish men and women and assign their social roles. Gender bias is one of the root causes for the non-implementation of the respective laws to their full extent. Guardians of social defense such as police are often found to be culprits, the dispensers of justice like the judiciary are allegedly biased, the legislative and executive who are the operators of protective legislation go soft on masculine perpetrators. This distortion in providing justice calls for militant action and correction through conscientisation of the

people. Empowerment of women and punitive functions granted to social action groups and women police. Though women in India are elevated to legends in scriptures, they have suffered for long centuries. The social and legal culture could not lift the female gender to an equal level. For all this the best and suitable medicine is avoiding gender bias and hoping for gender justice.

Gender bias is visibly opposed by laws and invisibly sanctioned by social values and norms. Gender relations are social relations and in that process women are disadvantaged in their access to power, personal autonomy and even safety from physical violence. It is a pity that a man is praised for his virility and masculinity but a woman who allegedly sleeps once with a man other than the husband is stamped as worse than whore.

#### B. APPROACH PLAN FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Development of women have always been the central focus of planning since independence and there is no doubt about the fact. Empowerment is a major step in this direction, but at the same time it has to be seen in a relational context. A clear vision is needed to remove the obstacles to the path of women's emancipation both from the government and women themselves. Effort should be directed towards all round development of each and every section of Indian women by giving them their due share. Empowerment would be more relevant if women are educated, better informed and can take rational decisions. It is important to usher in changes in societal attitudes and perceptions with regard to the role of women in different spheres of life. Women could be empowered through education, information sharing, and training so that they realize their collective strength. This collective strength could be used to change the social situations to the benefit of women. The discrepancies in the ideology and practice of the empowerment policy of women in India constitutes its continued social, economic and political backwardness. There can be no progress unless their needs and interest are fully met. Empowerment would not hold any meaning unless they are made strong, alert and aware of their equal status in the society. Policies should be framed to bring them into main stream of society, it is important to educate the women. The need of the hour is to improve female literacy as education holds the key to development.

A perspective plan for women was conceived and several commissions on women like self-employed women's commission, commission on women in custody and national commission for women were appointed. A conference of chief justices of high courts was held in Sep 1992 to consider the possibility of adapting a code of conduct for the judges. All these welcome changes draw their strength from the constitution whose preamble expressed the solemn resolve to secure justice social political and economic to every person. With all these seemingly positive changes, women would seem to be much comfortable. But an analysis of empirical survey clearly brings out that despite all hype and hyperbole, life of an India women is still regulated less by constitutional guarantees and legal measures and more by traditions customs, and unwritten laws of the days of yore. Manu the supreme law giver still perhaps seems to control the thinking of the masses.

#### VI. INDIAN WOMEN AND SOCIAL SYSTEM

Indian women's human dignity is crushed by social system. The better part is that some social consciousness about the status of women and the protective laws has been aroused in recent years by education, mass media, and efforts of the social workers. Phenomenon like dowry demands, ill-treatment of women, eve teasing, superior status of men, privileged status of sons and bias against daughters have massive social sanctions behind them and hence they could not be wiped out completely despite progressive laws. Women are being suppressed for ages through social sanctions, religious cults, physical and psychic arts. Equality before law and equality of status is more in books than in the Morse of the Indian community. The pettiest part is that even in the fetus if the sex is identified or at birth when the sex is discovered the females have been put to permanent sleep.

The parameters of women empowerment under national policy on education 1996 are:

- ✓ Building a positive self-image and self confidence
- ✓ Developing ability to think critically
- ✓ Building up group cohesion and fostering decision making and action
- ✓ Ensuring equal participation in the process of bringing about social change
- ✓ Encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society
- ✓ Providing the where withal for economic independence.

In addition, women studies have been introduced with four dimension of teaching, research, training, and extension.

To plug the outrageousness perpetrated against women at work place, prevention of sexual harassment of women at work place bill 2010 has been passed. Mass campaigns need to be organized especially in the villages in favor of survival of female child and provision of human rights for her including education, health, etc., it is also essential to dispel the ghosts of the past and place women on an equal footing with men in order to pave the way for their empowerment - social, economic & education. Empowering women and thus rebuilding the society would take the nation on a path of greater development as Swami Vivekananda says "*countries and nations which do not respect women have never become great nor will ever be in future*"

#### VII. CONCLUSION

When the desired women empowerment happens, the empowered women is powerful beyond measure and beautiful beyond description. The real empowerment is attained only when they are wise enough and highly powered to make decisions. And women when authoritative would turn into economic carriers of India. Women and men must be equal partners in managing the challenges our country faces and in reaping the opportunities. Both voices are critical in ensuring the fourth industrial revolution delivers its promise for society. There is a clear value based case for promoting gender parity. Women are one half of the world's population and evidently deserve equal access to health, education, economic participation, earning potential and decision making power.

Women in India not yet equal to men, but there is no legal or constitutional barrier to equality. There is only the social barrier. Women in India want to have a respectable and meaningful social status which is free from all sorts of exploitation. No doubt Indian women cherish equality with men to certain extent. But more than that they expect a change in the attitude of men towards them and their positions and problems. They expect greater freedom, better education, self-defense, decent jobs, a proper and respectable treatment by men folk and socio economic environment free from all types of exploitation, this is what real Women Empowerment is.

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