

Women Empowerment in India: A Burning Issue

Divya M. Modhiya^{1*}

ABSTRACT

India with its diversity and rich heritage has an ugly side to it. If women have been worshipped as Goddess, there has been “sati” too. A silent witness, the oppressed women have come a long way. Though the situation has improved some facts (education rate, sexual harassment among others) are daunting. Many women have broken the barriers and we would still witness a lot more. To help women is to help society. And through this journey of women empowerment our nation will achieve its dream. The dream of reviving its past glory. To become the “golden peacock” again. Since 1911, the March 8th is celebrated around the world as International Women's Day. Many groups around the world choose different themes each year relevant to global and local gender issues. The UN declared an International Women's Day theme for 2013 and it is “A promise is a promise: Time for action to end violence against women”. And this is very crucial for India. Women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development and pro-poor growth. Achieving women's economic empowerment requires sound public policies, a holistic approach and long-term commitment and gender-specific perspectives must be integrated at the design stage of policy and programming. Women must have more equitable access to assets and services; infrastructure programmes should be designed to benefit the poor, both men and women, and employment opportunities must be improved while increasing recognition of women's vast unpaid work. Innovative approaches and partnerships include increased dialogue among development actors, improved co-ordination amongst donors and support for women organising at the national and global level.

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, India*

"Feminism isn't about making women strong. Women are already strong. It's about changing the way the world perceives that strength."

— G.D. Anderson

The topic on “Women Empowerment” is a burning issue all over the world. “Women empowerment” and “women equality with men” is a universal issue. According to the provisions of the Constitution of India, it is a legal point to grant equality to women in the society in all spheres just like male. The Department of Women and Child Development

¹ M.A. , M.Ed., Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar

[*Responding Author](#)

Received: February 21, 2016; Revision Received: April 25, 2016; Accepted: June 25, 2016

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functions well in this field for the proper development of the women and child in India. Women are given a top place in India from the ancient time however they were not given empowerment to participate in all areas. They need to be strong, aware and alert every moment for their growth and development. Empowering women is the main motto of the development department because an empowered mother with child makes the bright future of any nation.

"Women are leaders everywhere you look—from the CEO who runs a Fortune 500 company to the housewife who raises her children and heads her household. Our country was built by strong women, and we will continue to break down walls and defy stereotypes."

—Nancy Pelosi

The most famous saying said by the **Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru** is **"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"**. In India, to empower the women, first it needs to kill all the demons killing women's rights and values in the society such as dowry system, illiteracy, sexual harassment, inequality, female infanticide, and domestic violence against women, rape, prostitution, illegal trafficking and other issues. Gender discrimination in the nation brings cultural, social, economic and educational differences which push country back. The most effective remedy to kill such devils is making women empowered by ensuring the Right to Equality mentioned in the Constitution of India.

Giving priority to the gender equality facilitates women empowerment all over the country. To get the high level goal of women empowerment, it should be promoted from the childhood in each and every family. It needs women to be strong physically, mentally and socially. Since the better education can be started at home from childhood, the upliftment of women needs healthy family to bring a holistic development of the nation. Still in many backward areas, there is a trend of early marriage and childbirth because of the poverty, insecurity and illiteracy of the parents. In order to empower women, various steps have been taken by the government to prevent violence, social separation, gender discrimination and abuse against women.

108th Constitutional Amendment Bill (also called Women's Reservation Bill) was passed to reserve one-third of the seats for women only in the Lok Sabha to make them actively involved in every area. In other fields also the seats for women have been reserved for their active participation without any limitation and competition. Various mass campaigns need to be organized in the backward rural areas to make them aware about the real values of women and all the facilities available by the government for their bright future. They need to be promoted for the survival and proper education of female child to really bring the dream of women empowerment come true.

What is Empowerment?

The World Bank (2002) defines empowerment as the "expansion of the assets and capabilities [of individuals]...to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives." Kabeer's (2001) popular definition adds a layer of complexity to the simple component of control and states that empowerment is "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where the ability was previously denied to them." According to Malhotra et al. (2002), Kabeer's conceptualization of empowerment is

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particularly relevant because it contains both the element of process and the elements of human agency and choice, with empowerment implying “choices made from the vantage point of real alternatives” and without “punishingly high costs.” Basu and Koolwal (2005) add that choice must extend to the ability to choose NOT to do something without fearing the consequences.

The meaning of Women Empowerment

In the simplest of words it is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society.

Women want to be treated as equals so much so that if a woman rises to the top of her field it should be a commonplace occurrence that draws nothing more than a raised eyebrow at the gender. This can only happen if there is a channelized route for the empowerment of women.

Thus it is no real surprise that women empowerment in India is a hotly discussed topic with no real solution looming in the horizon except to doubly redouble our efforts and continue to target the sources of all the violence and ill-will towards women.

Women Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society.

Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as:

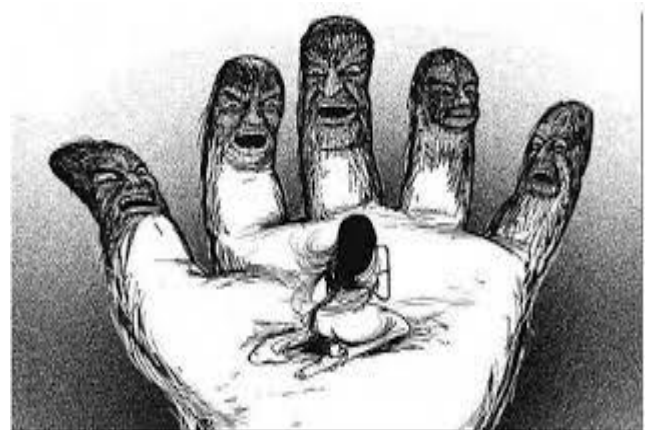
- freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity,
- have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace,
- to make their own choices and decisions,
- have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities,
- have equal social status in the society,
- have equal rights for social and economic justice,
- determine financial and economic choices,
- get equal opportunity for education,
- get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias,
- get safe and comfortable working environment,

What are the main problems?

- Lack of education,
- Financial constraint,
- Family responsibility,
- Low mobility,
- Low ability to bear risk,
- Low need for achievement,
- Absence of ambition for the achievement,
- Social status.

Needs for Women Empowerment

“Women are worshipped as goddess in INDIA, But not given her true position.”



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Women are deprived of:

- Decision Making Power
- Freedom Of Movement
- Access to Employment
- Access to Education
- Exposure to Media
- Domestic Violence



1. Decision Making Power

NEW DELHI: Women empowerment may be the key slogan for every government since independence, but the findings of a government report show women still lag way behind men in having a say in decision making and in their participation in economic activity.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO)'s publication "Women and Men in India 2014" found that women occupied seven out of 45 ministerial positions in the Narendra Modi's council of ministers, which is a little more than 15%, against around 10% in 2004.

In 2014 general election, only 62 females have been elected constituting more than 11% share in the 16th lokSabha.

Though female participation in elections went up from 56% in 15th Lok Sabha elections to 66% in the current one (16th Lok Sabha) in 2014, the male participation also improved from 60% to 67% during the same period.

Out of 62 women parliamentarians, 20 are in the age group 41-50. As far as qualifications and professions go, 34% of the women MPs are social & political workers and 44% post graduates. Among male members, the maximum (31%) are from an agricultural background, 42% are graduates & only 29% are postgraduates.

Women's participation is much less than desirable in states, where women have only an 8% share in legislative assemblies and 4% in legislative councils as on August 2014..

In panchayati raj institutions, overall 46.7% women are present with maximum 58.6% in Jharkhand and minimum 32.3% in Goa as on 1st March, 2013. Observers felt that the better representation for women in local bodies is due to provision for 50% reservation.

Women are at the receiving end as far as their representation in All-India and Central Group A Services are concerned. Only 14% females were in Indian Administrative Service, 19% in Indian Foreign Services and 12% in Indian Trade Service.

2. Freedom of Movement

The history of Indian Freedom Struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the contributions of women. The sacrifice made by the women of India will occupy the foremost place. They fought with true spirit and undaunted courage and faced various tortures, exploitations and hardships to earn us freedom.

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When most of the men freedom fighters were in prison the women came forward and took charge of the struggle. The list of great women whose names have gone down in history for their dedication and undying devotion to the service of India is a long one.

Woman's participation in India's freedom struggle began as early as in 1817. Bhima Bai Holkar fought bravely against the British colonel Malcolm and defeated him in guerilla warfare. Many women including Rani Channama of Kittur, Rani Begam Hazrat Mahal of Avadh fought against British East India company in the 19th century; 30 years before the "First War of Independence 1857"

The role played by women in the War of Independence (the Great Revolt) of 1857 was creditable and invited the admiration even leaders of the Revolt. Rani of Ramgarh, Rani Jindan Kaur, Rani Tace Bai, Baiza Bai, Chauhan Rani, Tapasvini Maharani daringly led their troops into the battlefield.

Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi whose heroism and superb leadership laid an outstanding example of real patriotism. Indian women who joined the national movement belonged to educated and liberal families, as well as those from the rural areas and from all walk of life, all castes, religions and communities.

Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Vijayalakshmi Pandit and Annie Beasant in the 20th century are the names which are remembered even today for their singular contribution both in battlefield and in political field.

Let us elucidate the role of Indian women who participated in the freedom struggle against British East India Company and British Empire and made great and rich contributions in various ways.

3. Access to employment :

Women age 15-49 are about half as likely as men in the same age group to be employed: 43% vs. 87%

- The relationship of employment and wealth for women suggests that, for many women, employment is largely a result of economic necessity.
- Even with controls for education, age, and wealth, marriage is negatively associated with a woman's likelihood of being employed and is positively associated with a man's likelihood of being employed
- Most employed women work for someone else, away from home, and continuously throughout the year; about one in three women do not receive monetary compensation for their work or receive at least part of their payment in kind
- Most employed women work in agriculture; only 7% work in professional, technical, or managerial occupations. Women age 15-49 are about half as likely as men in the same age group to be employed: 43% vs. 87%

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4. Access to education :

Children's school attendance

Only two-thirds of girls and three-fourths of boys age 6-17 years are attending school. The sex ratio of children attending school is 889 girls per 1,000 boys

Literacy and educational attainment among adults

The percentage of ever-married women with 10 or more years of education has risen very slowly from 11% in NFHS-1 to 17% in NFHS-3.

- Educational attainment remains very low: even among the 20-29 age group, only 27% of women have 10 or more years of education.
- Forty-one percent of women age 15-49 have never been to school.

5. Exposure to media :

- Women have lower access to media than men in every age group.
- About 71 per cent of women are exposed to media as compared to 88 per cent in case of men.
- Twenty nine per cent of women do not have access to media regularly. Since it is an important source of empowerment, greater proportion of women without having access to media reflects the relatively disadvantageous position of women in relation to men with regards to empowerment.

6. Domestic violence :

- About two in five currently married women age 15-49 have experienced spousal violence in their current marriage, and among women who have ever experienced such violence, more than two in three have experienced violence in the past year.
- Recent experience of spousal violence varies little by marital duration, but, as expected, ever experience of spousal violence increases with marital duration.
- Higher education and wealth consistently lower women's risk of spousal violence; and husbands' consumption of alcohol and having a mother who was beaten by her spouse significantly increase the risk.
- Although women who agree that wife beating is justified have a higher prevalence of violence, one out of three women who do not agree that wife beating is justified have also experienced violence.

The Importance Of Women Empowerment

1. Under-employed and unemployed: Women population constitutes around 50% of the world population. A large number of women around the world are unemployed. The world economy suffers a lot because of the unequal opportunity for women at workplaces.

2. Equally competent and intelligent: Women are equally competent. Nowadays, women are even ahead of men in many socio-economic activities.

3. Talented: Women are as talented as men. Previously, women were not allowed higher education like men and hence their talents were wasted. But nowadays, they are also allowed to go for higher studies and it encourages women to show their talents which will not only benefit her individually but to the whole world at large.

4. Overall development of society: The main advantage of Women Empowerment is that there will be an overall development of the society. The money that women earn does not only help them and or their family, but it also help develop the society.

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5. Economic Benefits: Women Empowerment also leads to more economic benefits not to the individuals but to the society as well. Unlike earlier days when they stayed at home only and do only kitchen stuffs, nowadays, they roam outside and also earn money like the male members of the society. Women empowerment helps women to stand on their own legs, become independent and also to earn for their family which grows country's economy.

6. Reduction in domestic violence: Women Empowerment leads to decrease in domestic violence. Uneducated women are at higher risk for domestic violence than educated women.

7. Reduction in corruption: Women Empowerment is also advantageous in case of corruption. Women empowerment helps women to get educated and know their rights and duties and hence can stop corruption.

8. Reduce Poverty: Women Empowerment also reduces poverty. Sometimes, the money earned by the male member of the family is not sufficient to meet the demands of the family. The added earnings of women helps the family to come out of poverty trap.

9. National Development: Women are increasingly participating in the national development process. They are making the nation proud by their outstanding performances almost every spheres including medical science, social service, engineering, etc.

10. Irreplaceable in some sectors: Women are considered irreplaceable for certain jobs.

The Principles Of Women Empowerment

- Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality
- Treat all women and men fairly at work—respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination
- Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers
- Promote education, training and professional development for women
- Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women
- Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy
- Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality

Objective of the study :

The following are the specific objectives:

- To know the need of women empowerment.
- To analyse the factors influencing the economic empowerment of women.
- To assess the awareness of women empowerment in India.
- To Study the constitutional laws which are beneficial to the empowerment of the women
- To identify the constraints of economic empowerment of women.
- To offer useful suggestions in the light of findings.

Crimes Against Women :

You might be listening to news, reading newspaper or magazine, you would have gone through incidents and accidents with women



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in India. While any other article on women's empowerment in India will take a look at our rich heritage and enlightened societies of the past where women were treated as equals, the concept of "India" itself evolved quite recently, relative to the sum of its parts' histories. But the TRUTH is that in the modern India, the woman has always been a second grade citizen, no matter what its esteemed leaders have said or done. The crimes against women fly directly against orchestrating women empowerment in India. A report on the crimes against women by the National Crime Records Bureau comes up with some alarming statistics:

Sr No.	Crime Head	Year 2008	Year 2009	Year 2011	Year 2012	Year 2013	Year 2014	Year 2015	% Variation in 2015 over 2014
1	Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)	19,348	20,737	21,467	21,397	22,172	24,206	24,923	3.0
2	Kidnapping & Abduction (Sec. 363 to 373 IPC)	17,414	20,416	22,939	25,741	29,795	35,565	38,262	7.6
3	Dowry Death (Sec 302/304 IPC)	7,618	8,093	8,172	8,383	8,391	8,618	8,233	-4.5
4	Torture (Sec. 498-A IPC)	63,128	75,930	81,344	89,546	94,041	99,135	1,06,527	7.5
5	Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC)	36,617	38,734	40,413	38,711	40,613	42,968	45,351	5.5
6	Sexual Harassment (Sec. 509 IPC)	9,966	10,950	12,214	11,009	9,961	8,570	9,173	7.0
7	Importation of Girls (Sec. 366-B IPC)	67	61	67	48	36	80	59	-26.3
8	Sati Prevention Act, 1987	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	-100.0
9	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956	4,541	3,568	2,659	2,474	2,499	2,435	2,563	5.3
10	Indecent Representation	1,562	1,200	1,025	845	895	453	141	-68.9

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Sr No.	Crime Head	Year 2008	Year 2009	Year 2011	Year 2012	Year 2013	Year 2014	Year 2015	% Variation in 2015 over 2014
	of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986								
11	Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	4,504	5,623	5,555	5,650	5,182	6,619	9,038	36.5
	Total	1,64,765	1,85,312	1,95,856	2,03,804	2,13,585	2,28,650	2,44,270	6.8

CONCLUSION

Women represent half the world's population, and gender inequality exists in every nation on the planet. Until women are given the same opportunities that men are, entire societies will be destined to perform below their true potentials. The greatest need of the hour is change of social attitude to women.

"The equality of women and men is not a condition whose effects will be limited to half of the world's population. Its operationalization will revolutionize all facets of human society."

"When God created man and woman, he was thinking, 'Who shall I give the power to, to give birth to the next human being?' And God chose woman. And this is the big evidence that women are powerful."

"Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance."

Kofi Annan

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Acknowledgements

The authors profoundly appreciate all the people who have successfully contributed to ensuring this paper in place. Their contributions are acknowledged however their names cannot be mentioned.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Modhiya. D.M (2016). Women Empowerment in India: A Burning Issue. *International Journal of Social Impact*, 1(2), 102-111. DIP: 18.02.016/20160102, DOI: 10.25215/2455/0102016