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Empowering Women in India: A Comprehensive Study

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ABSTRACT

This in-depth research aims to analyze the current state of women's empowerment in India, particularly emphasising various aspects, including education, employment, health, and environmental and cultural variables. This research aims to identify significant challenges and promising avenues for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment within the complex socio-economic landscape of India. This is accomplished through a meticulous review of existing literature, analysis of statistical data, and examination of relevant case studies.

KEYWORDS: Women Empowerment, India, Gender Equality, Socio-cultural Factors, Education, Employment, Health, Case Studies, Gender Gap, Policy Interventions, Economic Empowerment, Political Participation, Legal Reforms, Social Norms, Intersectionality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women play a crucial role in the development of Indian culture. Undoubtedly, the women of Rig Vedic India were accorded a high level of respect and had a significant place in the community. Even women were capable of attaining high levels of spirituality and knowledge. This was a possibility throughout history. Despite women's liberated and important positions in Rig-Vedic society, they started to confront prejudice in education and other domains from the Later-Vedic period forward (Saravanakumar, 2016). Indian culture does not anticipate any major shifts in women's historical narratives anytime soon. Women's voices are rising to the forefront in the halls of power, the courts, and the streets. Unlike in the West, where women fought for almost a century to get basic rights like voting, women in India today have equal rights with men according to the Indian Constitution. This starkly contrasts the Western context, where women's rights were fought for almost a century. (Devandra and Kiran, 1985). Modern Indian society either upholds or downplays the position of women in ancient and mediaeval India about matters of equality, education, marriage and family life, racial and gender dynamics, religion, and culture.

There was a great deal of reverence for spouses throughout the Vedic period. In their eyes, she was the other half of the man, his confidante, his friend in times of need, his lonely companion, and his guide through life's challenges. The ladies had the opportunity to achieve high levels of intelligence and spirituality when they were given the chance. In this period, a handful of women held the position of Rishi. The most affluent members of society followed the practice of polygamy despite the common belief that monogamy is the



norm. Neither the sati system nor early marriage was practised.

On the other hand, beginning in the Later-Vedic era, women began to face discrimination in various domains, such as education and other amenities, after enjoying free and prominent roles in the Rig-Vedic society. The social status of women declined due to certain practices, such as widow burning, purdah, and child marriage. The foundation of India's cultural legacy is the Vedas. Most agree that the Vedic period began around 2000 B.C. and ended around 500 B.C. The ladies of Veda were free to do as they liked with their money. There were a couple of ladies who were educators. In the production plant, the home was the place. Creating clothing through weaving and spinning was done at home. While their husbands were engaged in farming activities, wives assisted them. During the Middle Ages, which lasted from 500 to 1500 AD, Indian women experienced a particularly difficult time because their position continued to decline. On the contrary, it was the 'dark period' for women in medieval India, which was not their time.

Modern Indian society either upholds or downplays the position of women in ancient and mediaeval India about matters of equality, education, marriage and family life, racial and gender dynamics, religion, and culture. The women of the Rigvedic tradition were pivotal figures in Indian culture. The ladies had the opportunity to achieve high levels of intelligence and spirituality when they were given the chance. Rather than being relegated to a lower status, women in Vedic India had a position of respected authority. In politics and economics, they had very few privileges but many advantages in the social and religious spheres. In contrast to the perception that they were inferior to males or subordinate to them, they were seen as equals. There is a connection between our nationalism and the phrase "Vande Mataram," we have always held our homeland in high regard as our homeland, "Bharat Mata."

Objectives of the Study:

1. To study the historical profile of Indian Women.
2. To know the need for Women's Empowerment.
3. To study the Government Schemes for Women's Empowerment.
4. To offer useful suggestions in the light of Findings.



2. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

All that matters is power, the ability to make choices, and transformation. It is a process of transformation that provides individuals and groups who are less powerful or less powerful themselves with the chance to make decisions that will affect their lives. The term "women's empowerment" describes giving women the power to know their rights and effectively carry out their duties to themselves and others. Sayulu, Sardar, and Sridevi (2005) have asserted, "Women empowerment is any process that provides greater autonomy to women through the sharing of relevant information and provision of control over factors affecting their performance".

2.1. Characteristics of Women's Empowerment

The empowerment of women encompasses a variety of aspects. They are as described below:

1. Women can feel more independent and confident in themselves when they are empowered as women.
2. Empowering women gives them the power to understand their rights and fulfil their responsibilities to themselves and others in the best way possible.
3. Women who are empowered can better organize themselves to become more independent.
4. Women who are empowered have more liberty.
5. Women's empowerment entails giving them authority over material possessions, intellectual property, and ideologies.
6. Women's empowerment eliminates gender-based discrimination in all societal structures and organizations.
7. Women's empowerment refers to their involvement in national and international policy and decision-making processes.
8. Women can achieve their full potential and be authentic in every aspect of life when given the power to do so.



9. A further facet of women's empowerment is achieving equal status.
10. The emancipation of women occurs on several scales, encompassing the personal, collective, societal, institutional, cultural, familial, and economic spheres.
11. Raising awareness and developing ability are two steps in empowering women.

2.2. Importance of Women's Empowerment

As they gain agency, women are empowered to change the structures and circumstances that limit their choices and have a voice in societal decision-making on economic, political, and social concerns. This process of emancipation is ongoing and ever-evolving. It was in reaction to a state-backed campaign for women's empowerment that the 73rd Amendment was presented. This amendment ensured that women would hold 33% of the seats in panchayats and the workforce. Many saw the establishment of the Panchayat reservation as a watershed moment in India's long struggle for gender equality. The nation's continued economic success depends on women's emancipation, as they constitute half of the population. If we want to build a respectable nation, says A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, a former president of Pakistan, we must empower women since that ensures social stability. Because of women's unique perspectives and experiences, empowering women is essential for building decent homes, lovely communities, and honourable countries. Everyone agrees that a nation can't progress without empowering its women, which is true worldwide. Similar to this situation in India, the strategy for progress has stressed the empowerment of women, which is a result of the global struggle for women's emancipation. Even though 2001 was officially designated as the Women's Empowerment Year, previous initiatives focused on ensuring women had equal access to resources. A program to empower women in India was launched in 2001 as part of the country's National Policy. Between 2003 and 2004, a National Plan of Action for Women's Empowerment was implemented to guarantee its most effective execution. The Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002–2007) had a framework to empower women. A time restriction and predetermined goals and objectives were part of this approach.

Economic and social factors play a role in women's empowerment, so the Indian government has adopted a four-pronged approach prioritising economic development, social empowerment, and gender equality. The current system's effectiveness depends on several initiatives, programs, and tactics the government has implemented. Several bills were passed in 2005, including those protecting women from domestic violence, ending immoral trafficking, ensuring rural employment, preventing sati, establishing Hindu succession,



amending prenatal diagnostic techniques, and more. The Ministry of Women and Child Development has established several programs. Nutrition Program for Pre-Adolescent Girls, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (which offers small-scale loans), Swayamsiddha, STEP, and Kishori Shakti Yojana are among these initiatives. These are only a few of the numerous methods the government has tried to improve gender parity and economic standing. Also, creches and working women's accommodations have been constructed to help working women gain economic independence and social status. The eleventh five-year plan aims to eradicate discrimination against women and include gender viewpoints in the development process. It also aims to enhance the legislative framework in this area. By bolstering gender mainstreaming and eradicating institutional and structural barriers, the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012–2017) aims to ensure that women's status and circumstances improve. The plan's execution will make this a reality.

3. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

If women are to be self-sufficient and economically independent, have strong self-esteem so that they can deal with any hard situations, and be permitted to participate in development projects, then they should be empowered. The government has implemented numerous initiatives and programs to improve women's lives. The Food and Nutrition Board (FNB), the Information and Mass Education (IME), the National Credit Fund for Women (1993), and other such programs are examples.

One encouraging trend that has emerged in recent years is the rising representation of women in Panchayati Raj institutions. A good number of women serve as council members at the village level. In addition, women are concerned with issues of gender equality, education, health, and childrearing in the context of human growth. Many have begun manufacturing and selling a wide range of cottage goods, including pickles, clothes, needlework, and other items. Reformers, social activists, and political theorists emphasise women's economic independence. This is because it is often recognized as an essential component of a nation's economic progress.

3.1. Women's Rights in India

The Indian Constitution has some provisions that maintain women's equal standing. These laws include the Preamble, Main Rights, Main Duties, and Directive Principles. Although the Constitution guarantees women's equality, the state also grants the power to legislate discrimination against males. Listed below are some of the particularly notable articles.



- Equality before the law [Article 14]
- No Discrimination by state on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them [Article15(i)]
- Special provision by state in favour of Women and Children [Article 15(3)]
- Equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment [Article 16]
- Securing adequate means of livelihood for men and women equally [Article 39(a)]
- Equal pay for equal work [Article 39(d)]
- Promoting justice based on equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid [Article 39(A)]
- Renounce practices derogatory to women [Article 51(A)(e)]
- 1/3 reservation for women in panchayats [Article 243(D)] and in municipalities [Article 243(T)]
- Right to Property to Women [Article 300(a)]

3.2. Legislations

- Abolition of Sati Act,1829
- Special Marriage Act,1954
- Hindu Succession Act,1956
- Dowry Prohibition Act,1961
- Maternity Benefits Act, 1961
- Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
- Domestic Violence Act,2005
- Sexual Harassment Bill, 2010(Ram, 2004)



3.2. Government Schemes for Women Empowerment

In India, the government began implementing initiatives for the advancement of women as early as 1954; however, it wasn't until 1974 that women actively participated in these programs. Over thirty-four initiatives tailor-made for women are now being overseen by some departments and ministries that fall under the jurisdiction of the Government of India. Below are some examples of these:

1. Rastria Mahila Kosh (RMK) 1992-1993
2. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) October, 1993.
3. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) 1995.
4. Women Entrepreneur Development Programme Given Top Priority in 1997-98.
5. Mahila Samakhya is being Implemented in About 9000 Villages.
6. Swayasjdha.
7. Swa Shakti Group.
8. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP).
9. Swalamban.
10. Crèches/ Day care centre for the children of working and ailing mothers.
11. Hostels for working women.
12. Swadhar.
13. National Mission for Empowerment of Women.
14. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (1975),
15. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls (RGSEAG) (2010).
16. The Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers.



17. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) (2009-2010).
18. Dhanalakahmi (2008).
19. Short Stay Homes.
20. Ujjawala (2007).

3.3. Suggestions

1. Establishing awareness campaigns is essential to educate women, particularly those who belong to marginalized groups, about the rights they are entitled to.
2. The most important thing is to prioritize women's education as it is the main cause of the problem. This highlights the critical need to prioritize women's education.
3. Strictly implemented programs and regulations are crucial for eradicating the pervasive bad behaviours in society.
4. Women ought to have the right to work and be given the necessary protections and assistance to ensure they can work. Equal pay and treatment for women in the workplace is necessary if we want to see women's status in society rise.

4. CONCLUSION

According to the findings of this study, there is an immediate and pressing requirement for holistic approaches to women's empowerment in India. Stakeholders can cultivate a climate favourable to women's empowerment by eliminating structural impediments to education, promoting inclusive economic opportunities, assuring adequate healthcare services, and challenging discriminatory societal conventions. Furthermore, to bring about long-lasting changes, it is essential to implement specific policy interventions, legislative reforms, and initiatives that recognize and address the intersectionality of gender with other identities. India can reach its inclusive growth and sustainable development potential via concerted efforts across sectors. This may be accomplished by providing its women with the tools they need to flourish and participate fully in society.



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