



EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN : AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to explain what 'Empowerment of Women' is in its real sense. It also tries to enquire why the empowerment of women is necessary for this present era of globalization. There is the need to empower women because they are lagging far behind men and they do not even enjoy the liberty to choose for themselves or even to decisions on their own since most women, are feeble by nature, They need to be empowered from outside, either by some government policies or some legislative measures which have been done by the Government of India quite emphatically. We need these laws to protect women from the various crimes committed against them. But only laws cannot ensure the protection and development of women, we also need to introduce newer policies that will benefit women and help them to march forward in life at par with men. There is above all, the need to awaken the minds of women, who have taken it for granted that they cannot break free from the shackles of domination, so it is better to spend the rest of their lives peacefully, so as to say with their families because the moment they will pop their rebellious heads out they will create an uproar in society or in their family. We need to change this dictum.

Keywords : Empowerment, domination, governmental policies, legislative measures, awareness, change in mentality.

Introduction : In this era of globalization when we are talking of all-around development and prosperity, it is really heartening to acknowledge the fact that women in India are still lagging behind in almost all spheres of life, be it political, social, economic, and so on. They are treated still as a commodity that can be bought and sold or a puppet in the hands of her 'owner' so, as to say. She is even today referred to as the 'inferior class' or the weaker section of the society, who have no right to live independently, and even if she tries, there are many, raised eyebrows, because this is seen as something 'rebellious' by the society. We, in general, highly appreciate the daring feats achieved by the same eminent women stalwarts or luminaries, for instance, Kalpana Chawla, Kiran Bedi, Indira Gandhi, Meira Kumar, Pratibha Devisingh Patel, Mary Kom, and so on. But when our own women dare to follow the path shown by them, we try our best to put hurdles in her way so that she

is not able to break the shackles of conservatism. How pathetic!

Objectives : The paper aims to highlight the necessity of empowerment of women as women's empowerment is automatically related to the development of society. For society to march forward the women's class need to be on equal footing with men. Thus, the paper seeks to suggest certain measures that can be adopted to bring about women's empowerment in totality.

Methodology : The paper is mainly based on secondary sources and the primary data from the CENSUS OF INDIA 2021. An attempt to establish the fact that women empowerment can only be brought about when women have the freedom to choose for themselves and for this they will require awareness which can develop only through proper education and to support a girl child's education some sort of financial assistance is essential. Women empowerment can be defined as a process in

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which women gain a greater share of control over resources, material, human, and intellectual like knowledge, information, ideas, and financial resources like money and access to money and control over decision making in the family, community, society, nation and to gain power (Bisnath&Elson, 1999). The Cambridge English dictionary defines empowerment as a means to authorize. According to the country report of the government of India, Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power (Batliwala, 1994). Page & Cuba (1999) define empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives, their society, by acting on issues they define as important. According to Schuler et.al.(1998) process of empowerment begins at the level of a woman's individual role in the household and eventually meaningful participation in the larger community. Kabeer (2001) defines empowerment as the expansion to improve their socio-economic and political conditions. He asserts that empowerment is an expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously defined to them

Discussion : In the simplest words, empowering the women means creating such an environment in which they can take independent decisions for their personal development and the development of society, in general. Empowerment is the process by which the person achieves increased control and participation in decision making which in turn helps to achieve an equal basis with men in various spheres – political, social, economic, cultural, and civil. The empowerment of women unlocks the door for the modernization of any society. In the 21st century, India is fast emerging as a global power but half of its population, the women across the country struggle to live life with dignity. Women are facing problems in every sphere of life whether employment access, health care, or property rights. The attention required is still not being paid to the issues that concern this section of the population. Women empowerment is still a distant dream. Empowerment of women is essential as women are the very essential part of the society as they are the heart and soul of this society. The whole human civilization stands

on their weak shoulders. They are the torch bearers who light the path of the child, who one day goes on to become a man in society. So, is it not our duty to show our gratitude to them? The best way we can show our gratitude to them is by creating an environment where they will be free from all kinds of subjugation, they will have the liberty to take decisions on their own. But, before discussing in detail what is the status of women today, we need to have knowledge about the status of women in older times, because without a solid understanding of the past we cannot build up a better future. The status of women in India has been fluctuating. It has gone through several changes during various historical changes. Historically speaking, women in India have passed through two phases of their life-the period of subjugation and the period of liberation. There still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programs, and related mechanisms on the hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on other hand India is fast developing but women in India continue to be discriminated. The declining sex ratio in India amply portray the discrimination shown towards women at the stage of birth – Census of 2011 reveals that in the age group 0-6 years the gender ratio is 914 girls to 1000 boys; The Crimes against women in India are growing at a rampant speed according to a global poll conducted by Thomson Reuters, India is the fourth most dangerous country in the world for women and the worst country for women among the G20 countries. We can get a better picture if we make a brief analysis of the crimes committed against women in India. The number of incidents of domestic violence in India is endemic and widespread predominantly against women. Around 40% of women in India are victims of domestic violence. National Crime Records Bureau reveals that a crime against a woman is committed every 3 minutes, a dowry death occurs every 77 minutes and one case of cruelty committed by either the husband or relative of the victim occurs every 9 minutes. These all occur despite the fact that women in India are legally protected from domestic abuse under the Protection of Women from Violence act, 2005 which came into force in 2006. In 1961 the

government of India passed the Dowry-Prohibition Act 1961, making cases of dowry demands in wedding arrangements illegal. However many cases of dowry-related domestic violence – suicides, murders have been reported. A 1997 report claimed that each year at least 5000 women in India die dowry-related deaths and at least a dozen die each day in 'Kitchen fires'. Female foeticide and sex-selection abortion are highly responsible for the declining sex ratio in India. The Indian Association for women's studies reported in 1998 that 10,000 female fetuses are aborted yearly. An editorial in the Times of India gave a figure of 50,000 abortions of female fetuses yearly, while another study gave a figure of 78,000 killed between 1978 and 1983. The conflicting statistics in these studies show that this crime against women is an undetectable crime, and the numbers are indicative of genocide. The declining sex ratio is another indication of female infanticide and sex-selection abortion. The 1901 census showed a sex ratio of 972 females per 1000 males. The census of 2011 reveals that in the age group 0-6 years the gender ratio is 914 girls to 1000 boys, this means for every 1000 boys, are at least 60-70 girls under the age of 6 years who are killed before or with 6 years after birth. This is the lowest gender ratio recorded since independence. In a massive achievement, India's sex ratio has improved in 2021 having 1020 females to every 1000 males clocking a female majority for the first time according to the National Family Health Survey-5. According to 2012 statistics, New Delhi has the highest number of rape reports among Indian cities. Sources show that rape cases in India have doubled between 1990 and 2008. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 24,206 rape cases were reported in 2011, but experts agree that the number of reported cases of sexual assault brings the total much higher. The latest estimates suggest that a new case of rape is reported every 22 minutes in India. The NCRB said that the number of rapes in the country rose by almost 3 percent to 24,923 with Delhi reporting 706 rapes in 2012 making it the city with the highest number of rapes. The December 16th Delhi gang rape was followed by protests demanding harsher punishment. In January 2013 the government was finally pushed to amend the existing rape law. Now the

minimum jail term for gang rape has gone up from 10 to 20 years. If a rape victim dies or is left in a vegetative state, the death penalty can now be awarded. The incidence of eve-teasing and sexual harassment is not new in India. As per recent statistics of the National Crime Records Bureau, a woman is molested every 24 minutes and is sexually harassed every 40 minutes. The Criminal law (Amendment) Act 2013 introduced changes to the IPC, making sexual harassment an expressed offense under section 354A, which is punishable up to 3 years of imprisonment and or with a fine. The Indian Parliament has passed the sexual harassment of women at the workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 which adds protection to the female workers in most workplaces. After independence, the government of India took several initiatives, programs, and policies for the empowerment of women in the country. The principles of gender justice are firmly established in the constitution. The Indian constitution further provides for affirmative action and positive discrimination by empowering the state to make special provisions for women. The following are some of the provisions having bearing on women's rights. Article 14: 'The state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.' **Article 15 (1):** It prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex. **Art 15 (3):** It embodies the exception which permits the state to make special provisions for women. **Art 16 :** It provides for equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. **Art 39 (a), (b), (c) :** Art 42 and 44 : In these articles, specific welfare provisions were made which were beneficial for women and aimed at achieving the goals of gender justice. **Art 51A (e) :** This article made it obligatory on everybody to renounce the practices which are derogatory to the dignity of women and treated the same as a fundamental duty of all citizens. The government of India has enacted several women-specific legislation to uphold constitutional mandate and to protect women against social discrimination, violence, and atrocities and also to prevent social evils like child marriage, dowry, rape, practice sati, etc. The crime against women under various legislations of government in India could be broadly classified into two categories –

First, the crimes identified under the IPC include rape, kidnapping, abduction, dowry death, sexual harassment, etc. Secondly, the crimes identified under the special law & are not gender-specific but some do have special provisions to safeguard women and their interests. It includes the Family Courts Act 1954, The Hindu Marriage Act 1955, The Special Marriage Act 1954, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1956, Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act 1979, etc. The government has attempted to create an environment through positive political-economic, social policies for the complete development of women. Government policy has been to promote women's participation in the political, social, economic life of a nation as identical access to health care, quality education, career and employment, social security, etc which are reflected in the 'Five Year plans'. In the first five-year plan, the issue to provide equal status to women in India was focused on. The government of India intends to strengthen the institutional mechanisms which exist at the central and state levels, through the provision of adequate resources, training, and advocacy, skills to effectively influence macro policies legislative programs, etc to achieve the empowerment of women. Special initiatives were taken by the government of India for building confidence and self-dependency among Indian women. Some of these include – National Commission for Women (NCW) was set up in 1992 as a statutory body with the specific mandate to monitor all matters related to constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc; Reservation for women in Panchayats and Municipalities: The 73rd and 74th amendment acts provide for reservation of seats for women in the election to the Panchayats and Municipalities, The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991-2000) to ensure survival, protection, and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up of a better future for the girl child, National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) to bring about advancement, development, and empowerment in all spheres of life through the creation of a more responsive judicial and legal system sensitive to women and mainstreaming a

gender perspective in the development process. The strengthening and formation of relevant institutional mechanisms and implementation of the international regional and sub-regional level was another commitment, The Ministry of Women and Child Development was created in 2006 and is the nodal ministry of the Government for the advancement of women and children.

It provides for more effective protection of the rights of the women guaranteed under the Constitution of India, who are victims of violence of any kind of occurring within the family. It provides for immediate and emergent relief for women in situations of violence of any kind at home. Implementation of ESCAP project on improvement of statistics on Gender Issues during 1994-96 by organizing workshops. These workshops laid the foundation for identifying various relevant issues including data requirements, data gaps in the field of gender statistics, and indicators on gender issues. The National Plan of Action (NPA) was prepared in 1998 for the improvement of statistics on gender to bridge the data gaps.

Conclusion : In spite of all these laws, legislations, and initiatives of the Government, Women in India continue to encounter hardships in their day-to-day life. We cannot deny the fact that empowerment has surely touched women of today, no doubt, they are far more independent than they were in the yesteryears. For instance, in the education field, the female literacy rate in 2001 was 53.67% but it has gone up to 65.46% in 2011. There is a need to educate women to create a better society, as we know the mother's lap is the first school for the child. For bringing about the empowerment of women, in general, we need, on one hand, to bring about a sea change in the mentality of the people around them, who instead of discouraging her would offer all assistance so that she can reach to her dream or goal. The government should not only make legislations to protect and promote the interests of women but should also make every effort to implement them effectively. From time to time it should conduct studies and surveys to get the real picture i.e. whether the policies are proving beneficial to women or not.

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