

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: AN ESSENTIAL PILLAR FOR AATMA NIRBHAR BHARAT

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*“To wake up people, it must be awakened to women.
Once she moves forward, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves.”*

- Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

ABSTRACT

This paper talks about the theory of "women's empowerment, "a burning issue worldwide. "Women empowerment" and "equality between men and women" are universal issues on which society is always divided into two parts. One party favours women's empowerment, at the same time the other party opposes it. Mere assigning the work to women or joining with men is not women's empowerment rather it requires more. Women's empowerment means giving them equal opportunities and confidence in the workplace or at home to choose their way of life or adopt their own chosen careers or take decisions on social security. It is by improving and enhancing the economic, religious, political, social and legal status of women to ensure equal rights for them. Such rights are also part of the fundamental rights *i.e.*, "right to life and personal liberty" which includes live with self-respect and dignity. Women should be empowered such that the women can participate in religious, social and political activities. Women should get a safe and comfortable environment to work in. Women's unequal opportunities at work result in a lot of adverse impacts on the entire economy. It is true that women are as capable as men. When women are empowered by getting equal opportunities at work as well as by achieving equal status in the family, domestic violence also decreases.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Equal Opportunity, Life with Dignity.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of human civilization, women have always been regarded as the inferior sex. Their primary responsibility is to give birth to children, take care of them, and do household chores.¹ Since ancient times women have been considered to be the only machine to produce children. But things are very different today. When it comes to work or advancement, women are found standing at par with men. Nevertheless, women are still subject to a variety of preconceptions and prejudices which hurt their self-esteem. If a woman works in an office, she will not be assigned challenging responsibilities because men still believe in their superiority over women. He is made to realize at every step that he is not as capable as a man. Despite this, women manage better than their male counterparts by breaking all prejudices.²

Women are an essential pillar of the development of any family, society or nation. This is not a mere object of pleasure or a machine for the procreation of children. Women's empowerment can give a new dimension to society and contribute greatly to the rapid upliftment and development of society. Women are redesigning the world today. In Indian society, women have contributed to every field. Gargi, Savitri Devi Phule, Sarojini Naidu, Mahadevi Verma, Fatima Beewi, Indra Jaising, Indra Nooyi, Mother Teresa, Mary Kom, Kalpana Chawla, Pratibha Patil, Indira Gandhi etc. not only waved in their field but also gave a new direction to the country and the world.

Women have always been able to handle various tasks and obstacles, to ensure that their home and society are well-integrated and ordered. Improvement in the field of political, social, economic and health situations, all are essential goals for women's empowerment and autonomy. For the development of any nation, the women of that nation must first empower as the empowerment of women leads to the development of the society and from the society to the nation because women are the pillars of the society.³

The procedure of the development of women is known as women empowerment. The term empowerment may be demarcated in a diversity of ways. For example, empowerment can be described as involving women in the policymaking process. Women empowerment is one of the most important topics for the overall development of the country. Women can be empowered if they have equal access to opportunities in all fields as well as in their way of life, without any boundaries or limitations. Women's empowerment refers to the work done to improve the conditions of women by participating in education, literacy, skill development and awareness programmes, as well as providing training to empower them. Women empowerment is allowing women to make decisions for themselves in the community.⁴

METHODS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

¹ Dr Anuja Jain, "Gender Equality: Tool to Foster Women Empowerment" 01 IJEMASSS 27 (2019).

² *Research Proposal on Women Empowerment*, Useful Research Papers, Apr. 25, 2013, available at: <https://usefulresearchpapers.com/research-proposal-on-women-empowerment/> (last visited on January 05, 2022).

³ Rilanjana Talukdar, *The role of women in Atmanirbhar Bharat*, The Sentinel, Aug. 30, 2020, 12:05 PM, available at: <https://www.sentinelassam.com/editorial/the-role-of-women-in-atmanirbhar-bharat-498378> (last visited on January 05, 2022).

⁴ Women's empowerment, available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's_empowerment (last visited on January 05, 2022).

If a woman feels empowered, her decision-making abilities will undoubtedly impact the behaviour of her family and neighbours. As a result of these spillover effects, a "social multiplier" will emerge, with aggregate power exceeding individual power. Empowering women socioeconomically by increasing their awareness of their rights and responsibilities, as well as their access to resources, is a crucial step toward ensuring their safety. All efforts are being made to strengthen them to accomplish economic, social, cultural, and political development and welfare.⁵

- **Social Empowerment**

One of the most essential weapons for the advancement of women's status is social empowerment. The social empowerment of women indicates that they have acquired equal rights in society and that women are treated equally without discrimination based on sex. But in Indian society women are treated as the second citizen of the society, particularly in villages/ tribal areas. In these areas, women do not have the right to talk about social issues.

Sometimes we see that women hold the post/office but they are not allowed to take an independent decision rather the male member will take the decision. This type of situation suppresses the women's calibre. Women may be empowered only when such sex-based discrimination will be removed from the very root of men's minds.

Social empowerment is to be recognized as a process of establishing a sense of autonomy, self-reliance, self-confidence and acting individually and collectively to transform social relations. And also transforming the institutions and discourses that eliminate social discrimination that exist in society are transformed. All such types of enabling factors are known as social empowerment and sex, caste, region, based discrimination in society may be eliminated through social empowerment.⁶

- **Economic Empowerment**

Economic development of women is the realistic way to the involvement of them in India's development *i.e.*, *Atmanirbhar Bharat*. Economic empowerment means having the ability, talent and resources for women to enhance their economic and financial status and eliminate poverty. The economic empowerment of women paves the way for gender equality in society as well as poverty alleviation and economic development which is inclusive. Women contribute significantly to the economy in a variety of ways. Women make a significant contribution to the economy by working on farms, working in the fields, working in offices or working unpaid at home. Working women help to understand commercial work. Women, when they have the necessary skills and equal opportunities, can contribute a lot to the development of the markets and the welfare of the markets.⁷ The notion of '*Vocal for Local*' can only be realized if women, who make up about half of the population, are included in the programme and given equal opportunities in economic activities.⁸

- **Political Empowerment**

Women's political empowerment indicates their involvement in political spheres and government decision-making mechanisms. It boosts women's self-esteem and allows them to run for public office. If women are actively involved in public office and decision-making mechanisms. It generates the potential to create effective constitutional protections to transform society and protect women from social discrimination. Participation of women in all government institutions is the most important requirement for women's empowerment at this time.⁹ Women's political participation is a true sign of democracy, and it results in real political empowerment for women.¹⁰ With egregious women, the status of women in Indian politics is constantly improving. The Women's Reservation Bill was introduced in the Parliament to promote the representation of women in Parliament, though, despite its reappearance, it is still pending in the Lok Sabha. This recommends amending the country's Constitution to provide 33% reservations in the Lok Sabha and all state legislatures to women.¹¹ However, 33% of reservation has been provided in Panchayati Raj Institutions to empower women. The participation of women in Panchayati Raj institutions is ensured by Article 243D (3) of the Constitution, which mandates one-third reservation for women out of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election and the number of offices of panchayat chairpersons.¹²

- **Cultural Empowerment**

Farida Shaheed, UN expert said, "I have received and gathered information on many obstacles to women's cultural rights". Shaheed said, in her report submitted to the UN General Assembly, "in some countries solo female singing has been banned and restrictions have been placed on female musicians performing in public concerts." Cultural rights are becoming empowered as they give people control over their lives, allowing them to exercise other rights more easily.¹³ Women expressed their concern that the customs and traditions of society are restricting their personal growth. Women who are involved in fighting against these customs and traditions

⁵ Valasamma Antony, "Education and Empowerment: The key to women's empowerment", Kurukshehra Feb. 2006.

⁶ Miss Jumter Loya "Women Empowerment in India: An Analysis" 8 IJIRT 220 (2021).

⁷ About UN women *available at*: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women> (last visited on March 06, 2022).

⁸ *Supra*. footnote 6.

⁹ Keshab Chandra Mandal, "Concept and Types of Women Empowerments" 9 *IFTS (2013) available at*: http://americanscholarspress.us/journals/IFST/pdf/IFOTS-2-2013/IFOTS_v9_n2_art3.pdf (last visited on February 08, 2022).

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹ Women's Reservation Bill... *available at*: <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/women-s-reservation-bill-all-you-need-to-know-about-the-bill-which-is-yet-to-be-passed-in-lok-sabha-1653451-2020-03-07> (last visited on January 05, 2022).

¹² Ministry of Panchayati Raj, "Representation in Panchayats," PIB Delhi, 23 SEP 2020 2:42 PM, *available at*: <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1658145#:~:text=Clause%20283%29%20of%20Artie%20243D%20of%20the%20Constitution,and%20number%20of%20offices%20of%20chairpersons%20of%20Panchayats> (last visited on January 05, 2022).

¹³ Farida Shaheed, "Women's cultural rights: empowering and transformative" *available at*: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/WomenCulturalRights.aspx> (last visited on January 15, 2022).

of society are referred to as modern women and blamed that they are decreasing society's values.¹⁴ For the development of women's empowerment, it is essential that women should be empowered culturally as it is a big obstacle to women's empowerment, it should be removed.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

The government as well as various NGOs play a vital role in empowering women. Several programmes for women empowerment are being implemented by the Governments from time to time, some of which include the following:

- **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao**

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, on January 22, 2015, inaugurated the 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' programme at Panipat, Haryana, which is making a significant contribution to women empowerment. 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' has recognized the decline in the child-to-woman ratio and challenges related to women empowerment.¹⁵ Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao scheme's primary purpose is to spread awareness and enhance the efficacy of girl welfare activities. It was started by the 'Ministry of Health and Family Welfare', the 'Ministry of Women and Child Development' and the 'Ministry of Human Resource Development of India'.¹⁶ The mission works to ensure that girls are born, raised and educated without prejudice, and that empowered citizens of our country are produced. The campaign has been collaboratively developed at the national, state, district and community levels to bring together multiple stakeholders for rapid impact.¹⁷

- **Sukanya Samridhi Yojna**

Sukanya Samridhi Yojna is a modest deposit-based savings scheme for girls. On January 22, 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated 'Sukanya Samridhi Yojana', at Panipat, Haryana under the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' programme. Bank accounts can be created in any licensed commercial bank or Indian post office. The initial rate of interest was set at 9.1 per cent; however, it was later changed to 9.2 per cent at the end of March 2015 for FY 2015-16, and then again to 8.6 per cent for FY 2016-17 and currently, it is 7.6 per cent for FY 2020-21. It now gives an income tax credit of 7.6 per cent under Section 80(c) of the Income Tax Act of 1961. After the birth of the girl or till she reaches the age of ten years, the account can be started at any time. A minimum amount of Rs.250 is required to deposit in a year and the maximum limit of the deposit is Rs. 1.5 lakh every year. It will be valid for 21 years from the day when the bank account was opened or until the girl reaches the age of marriage, whichever comes first.¹⁸

- **Support for Training and Employment Programmes**

In 1986-87, the Central Scheme created the 'Support for Training and Employment Programme' for Women *i.e.*, also known as STEP. The goals of the STEP program were to have a big influence on women by improving their abilities for self-employment and wage work. The objective of these activities is to mobilize women to increase their abilities, organize productive assets, establish backward and forward connections, access to employment, make credit available, improve/organize support services, raise awareness, sensitize project staff, and gender sensitization, nutrition education etc. The STEP pilot was created to provide women with the skills they need to work productively. It also provides women with the required certificates and professional skills. It is open to any woman who has completed 16 years of age and is conducted directly through a non-governmental organization (NGO) that is assigned to a certain institution or organization.¹⁹

LEGISLATIONS:

- **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961²⁰**

This Act abolishes the dowry system which prevailed in society at large. It forbids the receiving or offering of dowry. The more dowry in marriage, the higher the status in society. This law provided for both give and take of dowry and also provided for punishment for the same.

- **The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987²¹**

Introducing this Act legislation empowered women in a real sense. Before this Act, the widow needed to burn herself with her husband (dead) for the sake of religious duty. This Act prevents the act of sati *i.e.*, voluntary or forcefully burning of an alive widow.

- **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005²²**

¹⁴ The Role of Culture in Women's Empowerment, Smile Foundation, Oct. 13, 2021, available at: <https://www.smilefoundationindia.org/blog/the-role-of-culture-in-womens-empowerment/#:~:text=Women%20get%20empowered%20when%20they%20challenge%20established%20norms,account%20for%20about%20half%20of%20the%20world%E2%80%99s%20population.>

¹⁵ Beti Bachao Beti Padhao available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beti_Bachao_Beti_Padhao (last visited on February 08, 2022).

¹⁶ Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana available at: <https://www.godigit.com/guides/government-schemes/beti-bachao-beti-padhao-yojana> (last visited on February 08,2022).

¹⁷ Asma News Network, "NEP 2020 To Introduce Adult and Lifelong Learning Program" available at: <https://www.asmaindia.in/blog/nep-2020-to-introduce-adult-and-lifelong-learning-program/> (last visited on February 08,2022).

¹⁸ Sukanya Samridhi Yojna available at: <https://www.policybazaar.com/life-insurance/child-plans/sukanya-samridhi-yojana/> (last visited on March 03 2022).

¹⁹ Ram Sawai, "Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)" available at: <https://govinfo.me/support-training-employment-programme> (last visited on February 08, 2022).

²⁰ The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (28 of 1961) (Amended in 1986).

²¹ The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 (3 of 1988).

²² Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (43 OF 2005).

This Act protects women from all types of violence by their husband or his relatives in the marital home. It ensures that women's rights provided by the Constitution are effectively protected.

➤ **The Hindu Succession Act (Amendment), 2005**²³

By amending the Hindu Succession Act Hindu girls give rights equal to sons in ancestral property. Now the girl has equal rights in the Hindu undivided property and she can claim partition in the ancestral property like a son.

➤ **The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013**²⁴

After the Supreme Court's Vishakha guidelines, this Act was passed by Legislation. This Act safeguards women at the workplace against sexual harassment. In addition, for the purposes of preventing and resolving complaints.

BENCHMARK CASE LAWS

❖ **Vinita Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma (2020)**²⁵

The Supreme Court held that the rights of daughters to equality, as guaranteed by Section 6, cannot be taken away from them which is acquired from birth. The provisions substituted in Section 6 grant the daughter the status of a coparcener whether she was born as a son with equal rights and liabilities before or after Amendment 2005.

The Supreme Court further observed that a daughter born before 09 September 2005, can claim the right, except for those dispositions, separation, division, or testamentary dispositions which took place before 20 December 2004, as laid down in Section 6(1).

❖ **Secretary, Ministry of Defence v. Babita Punia (2020)**²⁶

The Supreme Court said all concomitant benefits including rank, promotion, pension and financial incentives will be available to SSC women officers, who are granted a permanent commission as per the guidelines given in the case. However, these benefits will be available to serving officers and those who had filed writ petitions in the Delhi High Court, as well as those who retired during the proceedings.

❖ **Shayara Bano v. Union of India (2017)**²⁷

The Supreme Court declared triple talaq unconstitutional as it infringes on Article 14 of the Indian Constitution's basic right to equality. the fundamental right to equality guaranteed by Article 14 of the Indian Constitution. This form of divorce is arbitrary in the sense that a Muslim man can break the marital bond without making any effort to save it. Following this case, the government enacted the 'Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019' to ban the practices of triple talaq. According to the Act, if a Muslim man pronounces triple talaq to his wife, he will be liable for imprisonment up to 3 years.

❖ **Visakha and Others v. State of Rajasthan (1997)**²⁸

The Supreme Court in this case highlighted that the fundamental rights of the Indian Constitution will be violated. Women always face discrimination, and inequalities at their workplace because there are no specific laws regarding their rights in this regard. In this case, the court gave directions for the safety of women, which was a ray of hope for women. Legislation passed the 'Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013', several years after the court's guidelines.

❖ **McKinnon Mackenzie v. Audrey D'Costa (1987)**²⁹

The supreme court said that the employer cannot deliberately create such conditions of work so that he can discriminate between men and women. And by such discrimination, wean away women from special work. Unions and employers must meet the provisions of the Equal Remuneration Act.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The concept of women's empowerment has become a major problem in the twenty-first century, not just on a national level, but also on a global scale. It plays an important role that leads to the positive transformation and transformation of the existing society. The Centre and several state governments have undertaken various programmes and schemes to enable women's empowerment in India. They ensure gender equality and women's participation in each sector, but the government's initiative alone will not be sufficient to meet this objective. Individuals and society should work together to establish an environment free of gender discrimination and inequity as it is not possible to develop the nation without the development of women. If a nation wants to develop, the women of the country must be empowered first. Women must have full rights and opportunities to be self-reliant, engage in politics and decision-making processes and participate in the social, economic and political life of society to develop society and nation. The development of women in all sectors is essential for women's empowerment means social, religious, cultural, economic and political development must be.

Men and society should have full trust in the power of women and give them a chance to prove their mettle in every field. On whichever post and office, the women are sitting, give them the courage to face the same situations rather than give directions for discharging the duties or in sometimes men themselves discharge their duties and women live inside the house's perimeter wall. We have read in this paper that when women have got a chance, they have shown their ability. Not only this, in some areas, women also left behind men. In fact, women do not need anyone's support, they need only opportunities. Wherever they have got the chance, they have capitalized on chance. Society will only give a chance to women; they will become empowered themselves.

²³ The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 (39 of 2005).

²⁴ The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (14 of 3013).

²⁵ AIR 2020 SC 3717.

²⁶ (2020) 2 SCC (LS) 801, (2020) 7 SCC 469, AIR 2020 SC 1000.

²⁷ (2017) 9 SCC 1.

²⁸ AIR 1997 SC 3011.

²⁹ 1987 (2) BomCR 654, (1986) 88 BOMLR 516.