
OUR NATION AND ITS WOMEN

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Abstract: Women Empowerment: In the simplest of words 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. This can only happen if there is a channelized route for the empowerment of women.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, India, Challenges.

Introduction:

Status Of Women: In previous times, the status of women in India was inferior than men in the practical life. However, they had a higher status in scriptures. They are considered as the perfect home maker in the world. With their incomparable quality of calmness of their mind, they can easily handle even toughest situation. Indian women are completely devoted to their families. They're preached in the names of Goddess Saraswati, Goddess Durga, Parvati & Goddess Kali. Their condition remains unchanged even during the modern times with only little changes. In India, women were never given any right of liberty & equality. Their condition becomes even worse when they gave birth to girls. Men treated them in a humiliated manner. They were not only permitted not to step outside their house but also abstained from being educated.

- **Women status in the ancient India:** It's said, women enjoyed equivalent status & rights like their males counterparts. In addition they were properly educated in the early Vedic period¹. Women also had the freedom to select their husbands.²
- **Women Status In Medieval India:** The status of women in India deteriorated during the medieval period with the entrance of the Muslims. Several evil practices such as female infanticide, sati and child marriage were practiced during this period. 'Purdah' was introduced to the society. Polygamy was also common. Women also excelled in literature, music and arts. Some great-women rulers were Razia Sultana who was the only women-monarch to-rule-the throne of Delhi, Nur Jahan, Gond queen Durgavati who ruled for fifteen years before she was defeated in a battle by Ali emperor Akbar's. At this time girl were forced to get married at a very tender age. The southern India also practiced Devdasi tradition where girls were forced get married to trees or deity.
- **Women Status In Modern India:** During this time there was a little development in the women status. There were many women reformers in India who worked for the uplift & betterment of their female counterparts. The begun of Bhopal discarded the 'purdah' & fought in the revolt of 1857. Their education was elevated and English was introduced during this period. Various female writers emerged in the society. Women in India were given freedom & right such as freedom of expression & equality as

well as the right to be educated. Various prestigious positions at this period were held by women. However, some problems such as dowry, domestic violence, sex selective abortion, female infanticide are still prevalent. Preventive measures need to be taken to ensure that women are empowered in India.

What Can Help:

- **Social Empowerment:** Women are educated about the social benefits including awareness about the existing social problems in the society, good recognition & image in the family & community, role in making important decision in their family, plan & promote better education for their children, taking care of health of the aged and the children just to mention a few. Women are also allowed to participate in political and public life. Therefore, they are given a chance to serve the community including fighting for the basics amenities & welfare needs of the village community
- **EMPOWERING INDIAN WOMEN BY EDUCATION:** Most women are given a chance of finishing their education to the degree level. They are discouraged from getting married and raising a family when they are young. There are number of women education grants that offer help to women from poor background in order to give them a chance to be educated. There're various scholarships that benefits women in India to achieve their career by going back to school or various training institutions where they can further their education. Also, many NGO's in India offer support to women in order to benefit them in education.
- **Empowering Women In Business³:** The government of India set aside some reasonable amount of money which women who have business ideas can borrow in order to start businesses. Women are encouraged to start small business in order to have their own source of income thus they become independent.
- **Crimes Against Women:** The crimes against women fly directly against orchestrating women empowerment in India.⁴

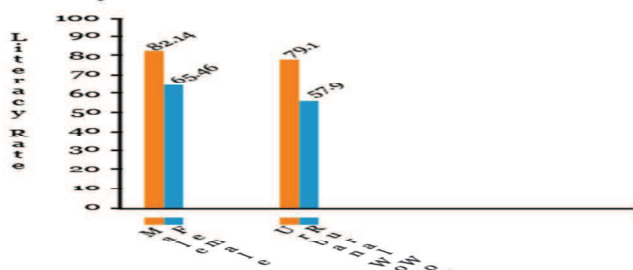
Challenges: There are several challenges that are currently plaguing the issues of women's rights in India. A few of these challenges are presented below. While a lot of these are redundant and quite basic issues faced across the country, these are contributory causes to the

overarching status of women in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India

Crime Head	'11	'12	Variation from '11 to '12 (%)
Rape	24,206	24,923	3.0
Kidnapping & Abduction	35,565	38,262	7.6
Dowry Death	8,618	8,233	-4.5
Torture	99,135	1,06,527	7.5
Molestation	42,968	45,351	5.5
Sexual Harassment	8,570	9,173	7.0
Importation of Girls	80	59	-26.3
Sati Prevention Act, 1987	1	0	-100.0
Immoral Traffic	2,435	2,563	5.3
Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986	453	141	-68.9
Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	6,619	9,038	36.5
Total	2,28,650	2,44,270	6.8

- **Education:** While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since its independence where education is concerned, the gap between women and men is severe.

Literacy Facts of Women in India



*Literacy rates relate to the population aged 7 years & above

Data Source: Census of India 2011

In spite of the UN Charter of Human Rights and the provisions of the Indian Constitution, women continue to be victims of exploitation. If careful attention is not paid and major steps are not taken, the situation will become extremely critical.⁵

- **Poverty In The Country:** About a third of the country's population lives on less than 1.25USD per day. The GINI index keeps rising slowly over the years, indicating that the inequality in the distribution of wealth in the country is increasing, currently hovering a little close to 33.9. Due to abject

poverty, women are exploited as domestic helps and wives whose incomes are usurped by the man of the house. Additionally, sex slaves are a direct outcome of poverty.⁶

- **Health & Safety:** The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country, and is an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned.

Rights Provided: Women in India face a lot of social inequalities ranging from gender specific abortions, mistreatment by their spouses, to eve teasing. Most women aren't aware of women rights in India and other times their legal rights are not protected as they should be. Women empowerment plays a significant role in letting them know their rights. The following issues infringe on women rights:

- **Female Foeticide:** Unlike in western cultures, Indians have a strong inclination for sons over daughters. Pregnancies are planned using differential contraception. Foetal foeticide has led to social discrimination against women and they are treated as second-rate citizens. 80% of the districts in India have recorded a high male sex ratio with the state of Punjab recording the highest ratio. An estimated ten million female fetuses have been aborted illegitimately in India.
- **Eve Teasing** is a euphemism for sexual harassment of females by males in public areas. This aggression differs in severity from mild brushing and taunts to the more serious groping in public areas. Some human rights organizations have been at the forefront lobbying against the use of this term. It is becoming increasingly difficult to prove such crimes because offenders have found clever ways of harassing women.
- **Bride Burning:** A type of domestic violence whereby a bride is killed by her husband or husband's family because of dowry dissatisfaction issues. This crime has been a problem since the year 1993. Perpetrators of this crime are punished accordingly by either giving them a death sentence or a life sentence. This problem can be alleviated by allowing women to have properties. This way, women would not need to marry for economic, legal or social reasons. As a result, the dowry practice would be disregarded.
- **Dowry:** In India, the dowry prohibition act which was enacted in 1961 outlaws the giving or receiving of dowry. However, it is still practiced to date. The dowry is considered as a bribe to the man so that he can agree to keep the woman, especially if she is too old to be unmarried. Dowry can be anything from cash to gifts. Dowry is not only given before the wedding but the husband's family expects to be given gifts and/or cash even after the wedding. This places a heavy financial strain on the bride's family. If strict measures are put in place to combat the dowry system, a lot of problems that face women can

be eliminated.

- **Rape:** This is among the most common crimes against women in India. Marital rape was made illegal in 1983 but it is still rampant. It is a crime that occurs every 54 minutes and it violates a woman and her privacy. In December 2012, a 23 year-old girl was gang raped in a public bus. The rapists penetrated her with a metallic rod and this destroyed her intestines which had to be removed through surgery. In most of these rape cases, the law fails the victim because of vague interpretations and this is absolute disrespect of women rights in India. Delays and humiliating cross examination of victims makes them afraid to come forward. As a result, many cases of rape go unreported.

Actions Taken To Empower Women:

- **Millennium Development Goal:** The United Nations Development Programme constituted eight MDG for ensuring equity and peace across the world. The MDGs are agreed-upon goals to reduce certain indicators of disparity across the world by the year 2015.

- **Ministry For Women & Child Development:** The Ministry for Women & Child Development was established as a department of the Ministry of Human Resource Development in the year 1985 to drive the holistic development of women and children in the country. In 2006 this department was given the status of a Ministry, with the powers to:- Formulate plans, policies and programmes; enacts/amends legislation, guiding and coordinating the efforts of both governmental and non-governmental organisations working in the field of Women and Child Development.
- **Swayamsidha Programme** an integrated scheme for the empowerment of women at a total cost of Rs. 116.30 Crores.
- **National Commission for Women**, a Department within the Ministry was set up exclusively to help women via online submission of complaints and their fast redressal. And is also a good resource of information for women and the Commission is committed to helping out women in need⁷.
"The thing women have yet to learn is nobody gives you power. You just take it." - **Roseanne Bar**

References:

1. These references are available from the works of Grammarians such as Katyayana and Patanjali.
2. This system was known as 'Swayamvar.'
3. This has proved that women can be even better than men if they are given an opportunity.
4. A report on the crimes against women by the National Crime Records Bureau comes up with some alarming statistics.
5. As said in a study conducted by the Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism
6. According to police estimates, a shocking 300,000 women and girls have been trafficked for exploitative sex work from Andhra Pradesh; of these just 3,000 have been rescued so far. The state is relatively prosperous, ranking fourth in terms of per capita GDP in India, but it is also home to some of the poorest people in the country.
7. Data taken from: womenempowermentinindia.com.

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