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**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT- THE NEED AND THE ROUTE.**

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**Abstract:** The status of the women in the present Indian society has always been an issue of concern. The problems that women face and the male hegemony is also included in such concerns. These issues are highly debatable from the cultural, social and political point of view. The miseries which the women face in the Indian society is not unknown to us. They have to go through all the possible hurdles in order to survive. From Sita to Sati and Draupadi, it was women who suffered. The patriarchal nature of society, the lack of resources for the female sex and looking at them as a taboo, gender inequality and preference for male child are a few concerns which we should focus upon. This paper talks about the desperate need of women empowerment and their development in our Indian society. The whole idea behind this paper is to promote the women's status. This paper primarily deals with the vulnerable status of women in India and throws a light on important matters like, education, employment, access to resources, health, government policies, health and security of women in India and how will they empower a woman. The paper will initially explain the present societal norms as per the women in the society goes, their thinking and approach towards the female status, followed by the problems hindering their growth and finally would explain the measures required to uplift the women's status in order to empower them.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Education, Employment, Male Hegemony.

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**Women in India- Vulnerable among the Vulnerable:**

The status of women in India is what I personally think 'Vulnerable among the vulnerable'. There could be a plethora of reasons behind it, few of them are as mentioned below:

- The Gender perspective- From the time of ancient India, women are considered as the weaker sex of the society. The cultural norms made them the household person provided they survived else the practice was to kill the female child as the whole Indian society preferred male child over female one, neglecting the fact that female were not present who would even give birth. Later with the advancement of technology sex determination began and the child was killed in the womb itself. This common view still exists.
- Limitations in mobility and social restrictions from the ancient period women were not allowed to leave the house and go outside, nor were they allowed to work. The parda system or the burqa system hindered their social growth. They were considered to be the person made entirely for the domestic purpose and for giving births and making food. Further, they were not and even still are not allowed to talk to any outside persons, or to make friends with them. They were not given the access to any sort of resources, including, media or newspapers or society.
- Social identity- whether earlier or currently on many positions we find the lack of the original identity of a woman. They were and still associated with the male counterpart. It is the women who still have to change her name or to leave her house after the wedlock and she is the one who has to bring dowry. They are known in the society as someone's wife and do not carry their own identity. This very conventional process had hindered the growth and progress of women in society.
- Sexual Abuse- Women in the society are viewed as an object of sex and a factory of producing children. Because of the patriarchal nature of the society they

have been assaulted on many occasions. They become the prime victim of sexual abuse in the society, rape by unknowns and marital rape and domestic violence by their own family. The security concern becomes the prime motive and the need of the hour.

- Childbirth and pregnancy related factors- marriage at an early age, then bearing children when they are not physically ready. Not only this even when the body is ready sometimes the mind isn't still they are forced to bear children and further through sex determination technologies if the child in the womb is a female child they have to undergo an abortion and the culture continues till she bears a male child, which severely affects her mind and body.
- Literacy factors- Female child was hardly sent to school and for that matter even today they are not allowed to at some places. They are denied the basic education, schooling or training because of which they remain a backward in the society and are unable to enjoy or gain access to the available resources. On the other hand, even if the women in more qualified as compared to man and is at the same position, she is paid less for the simple reason she being a woman.
- Socially assigned role- over the period of time the female sex is considered and regarded as a household person. The social norms and conventions have, through practice and customs assigned them certain role and domain within which they are required to work and are not allowed to cross the same. Roles such as, keeping after the house, cooking, bearing kids, looking after old and sick people of the house, be secondary to their husbands and never leave the house. From the above discussion, it is evident that there exists an ocean of problems and issues which women have to face and suffer. Whether it is the gender inequality or the vulnerable condition, they have to live with the same, I would like to name it as "Gender Marginalization" they have been totally cut off from the

real and the outside world and are made to live with it. The conditions in the modern world have though slightly changed, but the conventional and customary norms in many societies still prevail. True that in the urban society such practices are rarely seen nowadays but the other reality is that still in many urban areas women are living with those principles that 'she should not speak a word against her husband or in laws', so maybe because of such deceive we are unable to make out the reality. But the condition in rural areas is no better. They still live and survive with the above mentioned problems. In urban areas at least they have functionaries to look into their matter, the rural population is deprived of it.

Now let us analyze the methods of women empowerment and need of the same.

**Women's Empowerment - The Need of the Hour:**

The word empowerment with respect to women in the Indian policy was used in 1986 in the Educational Policy which is known as the "NPE 1986" and the title of the chapter was "Education for Women's Equality and Empowerment". This dealt with two aspects of empowerment, firstly it explained the concept of self empowerment that is women being able to help themselves through whatever is imparted to them and use them to get strength for themselves. It may be education, health or so on and then secondly is that they should be able to help others to become empowered.

Women's Empowerment helps in the development of the society. This means individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. As per the United Nations Development Fund for women (UNIFEM), the term women's empowerment means:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed.
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.
- Gaining the ability to generate choices, exercise bargaining power.
- Developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

The condition of women in our society is deteriorating, we must understand and analyze the solution to this problem. The empowerment of this sex of the society cannot be attained until and unless we make the following essentials available to them-

- Proper Education.
- Marriage and Son Preference.
- Proper Health and Safe Motherhood.
- Proper Employment.
- Self Dependent and Control Over Own Earnings.
- Access to Resources.
- Safety.
- Government Policies.

**Proper Education:** *Educate a man and you educate an individual, educate a woman and you educate the entire family.*

The most important and genuine reason of backwardness of the women in the society is lack of education. The women are being deprived of proper schooling and training. From the ancient times, the female part of the society is not sent to school, and even today in many rural as well as in the urban places females are kept aloof from the world of education. The women in the society are expected to learn the household activities and get married and hence not given an education. But the only and sole empowerment of women can be met only if they are given proper education.

The situation faced by women in India is bleakest of the world. Among all discrimination, most damaging and denial of opportunities that these women suffer is the denial of proper education.

*Literacy itself gives you status, illiteracy is a pejorative word in the society.*

Education will help in penning the mind and enhancing the self esteem of the women and will help in building up the self confidence in oneself along with a sense of positive self worth. Education will further help to improve their economic growth and help them to gain social and political opportunities. This will also help in higher productivity of the labor force.

When educated, women will understand and realize its position in the society. They will understand their rights and liberties that they have been guaranteed with, this will help them to plan and run their life according to their will as they will be able to come up and forward and claim the basic human entitlements. They can, through education, chalk out their family planning, they can control the population growth. When educated, they will have the full control over the household resources and can make the other resources available to them.

Not only will education help the present female society, but education will also make such female less gender biased while sending their own kids to the school.

*Inequality in education is like distortionary Tax that misallocates resources thereby reducing the economic growth.*

**Marriage and Son Preference:** Indian society usually considers a female child as a liability. All that the parents want is to get the girl wedded and make her leave the house. This is the usual practice all across India. Further, because of the same reason the girl is wedded at an early age and that too to a man 6 to 8 years elder to her.

Early age, marriage is an indicator which indicates the low status of the women in the society. Early age, marriage also curtails women access to education, which is the most important element of empowerment. The early marriage age also adverse the reproductive function of women by having a negative health consequences of early childbearing. Having a child when

the body is still maturing increases the child and maternal mortality rate. The urge for a son, which makes the women go under several abortion phases further worsen the health. Sexually inexperienced women getting married to sexually experienced men results in brutality and marital rapes as well and also increases the risk of HIV.

Early marriage typically cuts short the time needed to develop and mature unhampered by responsibilities of marriage and children. They are at an early age thrown into the world of several responsibilities like child bearing, nurturing, taking care of the home and family, doing household work even when they are not ready for it, whether mentally or physically because of which they lose their independence, health, access to resources and gain on physical ailments and early deaths. Married girls because of young age, they are unlikely to be accorded with much power or independence which hinders their overall growth.

Moreover, the son preference has reasonably curtailed the empowerment of women by depriving them in number. A female child is over represented when dead and underrepresented when born. The sex selection technology and pre-natal diagnostic techniques have further helped in the crime of son preference over a girl. Infanticide is a common practice in many cities across India, which has remarkably dropped the female population in India.

The empowerment of women cannot be achieved without women. It is a high time we start 'preserving' women because the rate at which they are being killed a day will come when they will turn extinct. Moreover, they should not be treated as a liability. Most of the household crimes occur because they are not educated and made dependent. We should promote female education and also promote their independence in order to help them survive the patriarchal world.

**Health and safe motherhood:** Another tough time that women faces is that with her health. The conditions are pathetic in the rural India, the women out there are totally neglected. The fact that they are left alone at home and are not allowed to leave the same the basic requirements are usually not met with. Further, due to lack of medical facilities the condition just gets worsened. Being the housewives, their demands are usually ignored and neglected. Moreover, women are highly prone to anemia, which is a commonly found deficiency in women, which happens usually when they bear their first child and then bears the second when they are not ready for the same.

Child marriage is one of the primary reason which affects the health of both the mother and the child. When the woman is not physically and mentally prepared to bear a child, but is forced to do so, her health is highly affected. Not only this, but when a woman is made to go through a continuous abortion, because of the son preference culture in our country she loses on her health and becomes anemic.

One needs to understand that, early childbearing by

women increases their death chances. The physical and mental conditions are always to be kept in mind when a woman bears a child. Moreover, there should be a proper gap of at least 3 years between the first and second child. Proper check and balance should be maintained in order to avoid abortion and people should understand that in today's world, there is no difference between a son and a daughter.

Health is the most important element in the empowerment of a woman and a healthy woman is an empowered woman. Her health is her life and hence one should not compromise with their health. She should have the liberty to decide when is she ready for a child followed by a second one. She should be given proper medical facilities and the basic requirements is to be met with along with her liberty to take her own decisions.

**Proper Employment:** Facts shows that women carry 2/3rd of the burden of the world, yet receive only 1/10th of the world's income. Unemployment and lack of financial autonomy becomes another major hindrance in women empowerment. There has to be an equal work and economic participation of women. They are highly efficient and have a tendency of multi-tasking and hence can contribute to the nation's economy as well. Employment will help them attain a control over their own earnings, which helps them to become self dependent, for cash in formal sector can empower women by providing them financial independence, this will provide them with an alternative social identity, they will have their own social circle and social identity along with an exposure to the power structure.

*Women are unpaid at home and underpaid at work.*

Primarily, it is really difficult for a woman to enter into the working sector because of the discriminating nature of the employers. They prefer men over women, women are even discriminated when it comes to pay. They are paid less as compared to men. Working women are not allowed to get married, else they will seek maternity leave and many companies even make them sign agreement with clauses such as, no maternity leave will be given or if one gets married during the work course will be sacked off.

Job opportunities along with equal pay and add on privileges for being a woman will help in empowering them. Men and women both are equally capable for a work and so there should not be any biasness in the payment of salary, moreover just because women bear children should not be the reason to not to give them a job or remove them from the same. Working organizations should promote maternity leave and should provide with extra care and incentives as well.

**Self Dependent & Control Over Own Earnings:** *Housewives are the only category of workers who are not paid.*

Due to lack of education and less or no independence women find themselves highly dependent upon man for their day to day need. In all the male dominated society they have almost no say in any decision. They cannot

avail any cultural or economic resources and are also kept aloof from the society. Women can get empowered and become self dependent provided they have their own earnings, which can be attained through proper jobs. They need to have the liberty of moving out and socializing as well. If they are provided with substantial earnings the dominant element of their husband will be totally erased. Working women have a say in the decision making, they have the liberty to take their own decision and live the life according to their wish without any external intrusion. This way a woman is financially and morally empowered and for the male dominant society, it is difficult to overpower a working and an earning woman, who is totally self dependent.

**Access to Resources:** Women are that element of the society who are usually over represented in qualities but underrepresented in wealth. They are deprived all possible access to resources when their movement is curtailed, they are deprived of education, when they are suppressed by the male members of the society.

What empowerment demands are an unhindered and unfettered access to all forms of resources to women in all possible manners. They should have an access to media to express themselves freely, to know the happenings of the society and the world, they should be posted with the current affairs in order to be upfront with other members of the society. They should be allowed to move outside in order to make a social group and not just stay at home doing household works, they should be allowed to make their own working groups and get self employed, which will invest them with powers of decision making and esteem living.

Hence, until and unless the women are exposed to the available basic and primary resources, no matter how much we try and implement rules, no empowerment would result. To empower women give her the benefits of available and much needed access to the resources.

**Safety:** *No woman can feel empowered unless she feels safe.*

One of the most crucial and important points to be discussed under the ambit of women empowerment is the safety of a woman. Women are constantly the target of eve teasing, voyeurism, rapes, sexual assault, domestic violence, forced prostitution and trafficking. National crime bureau states that every 29 minutes one woman is raped in the NCT of Delhi. Street violence in urban cities is growing at an unpleasantly high rate. Women are no longer safe on the streets alone. Stalking has now become a trend. No matter how much educated or self dependent a woman is, it is really hard and extremely difficult for her to overcome such challenges which is directly attacking her modesty.

Girls from rural areas are forced into prostitution, girls are being sold in an open market, they are being stalked and raped in the open air on the streets, they are being assaulted sexually. Such crimes have nothing to do with, how empowered the women is. Being physically weak, it is really hard for them to encounter such issues which they have to face in their day to day life. Moreover the

such issues have also entered the domestic and private domain of marriage, where women are forced into sexual intercourse resulting into marital rapes and when they are tortured over the topic of dowry and being assaulted brutally resulting in domestic violence.

So the cycle of empowerment remains totally vague and incomplete if women are not safe and secured. We need to look into such issues and come up with a quick and reasonable and effective solution, which can prevent such atrocities against women. The empowerment of a woman is incomplete without her being safe. So safety should be one of the prime and prioritized area of discussion under the ambit of empowerment of women.

**Government Policies:** Government should play an important role in empowering women. They should take up and implement new and effective policies in the favor of the same. Policies which provide them with jobs, education, livelihood, safety, gender equality, policies related to women's rights and liberties, allowing them reservations and many such enactments that would help in the process of women empowerment.

The government can implement the idea of protective discrimination through which they can provide reservations for women in various fields. Reservations in jobs, along with some special incentives and concessions like, relaxation in pay, age and etc. as well as reservations in the field of education which will motivate them to be a part of the education system. Moreover the government should enact various social legislations that will benefit women and serve for gender justice along with other legislations and laws that will suffice the purpose for the protection of women against rape, infanticide and such other criminal activities.

Many a times the government fails in the effective enactment of such policies, the policies look good on papers, but are not usually effectively executed and which is the biggest drawback. One should not only develop such important and required instruments which would enhance the conditions of women in the society, but also execute it in the most suitable and efficient manner in order to give all the maximum possible benefits to the women. The government is highly capable of meeting the demands of the women of the society and are the one who can reach out to their need in time provided they commit their energy in doing so.

**Conclusion:** The status of a woman in India is ironic in itself. On one hand, we worship them as a deity or a Goddess and on the other hand, we treat them as a slave to our home, at one hand, she is considered as a 'Devi' and in some rural India she is branded as witch or 'Dayan'. From the very ancient period the women have been treated as a tool and have been ostracized whether it was Draupadi in Mahabharata or Sita in Ramayana the condition had never been good. The entire female community has been marginalized ever since.

The need of the hour is to empower them, help them bring them upfront. Women are one of the most important elements, rather asset of our society, the world would come to an end if there were no women.



The importance of women is as equal, rather more than men, they are to be treated like humans. We cannot let one part of society suffer and live in darkness, this will disturb the balance of nature. In order to maintain the balance of nature, both the male and the female are to be treated equally.

In order to empower women we should firstly allow their social, political and economic participation. They should be educated properly, as half of the women related issues will be wiped out once the woman is educated. Her health should be taken care of, the culture of son preference is to be abolished, the motherhood of every woman is to be respected. Further, they should be provided with proper employment, which will make them self-dependent, they should also be allowed to have a sufficient control over their own earnings which will give them an upper hand in decision making power. Other than that government should play an active role in the process of empowering women. Protective discriminatory policies and enactments for

women safety and upliftment will help in women empowerment.

The need and promotion of women's empowerment as a development goal is based on the two sided argument, firstly, the idea of social justice, an important aspect of human welfare and secondly, their empowerment will help in reduction of poverty and promoting the National economy. Moreover, one should identify all those cultural, economic and social factors which act as a roadblock in the way of women empowerment and accordingly the loophole in such policies and other ground level problems are to be analyzed and scrutinized in such a fashion in order to help and secure the empowerment of women in the society.

**Acknowledgment:** I would like to thank my parents for their support and love, I would also like to extend my gratitude to my institution for their incessant support along with the organizers of the ICWE, 2014 for showing faith in my work.

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