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## VERSATILE AND EMBODIED ARCHITECT OF CIVILIZATION

A. ARSHA

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**Abstract:** Beauty has many metaphors. The most versatile and embodied is woman. She is the architect of civilizations, the nucleus of the family, the protector of the house, the inspiration and strength of men on every front. Women are now made to act like a man, look like a lady, and work like a donkey to keep her family and work life adhered. The history of mankind reveals that the women have been seen as preservers of social norms, traditions, customs, morality and family cohesiveness. Woman has been given a position of pride in every religion. Women are in a large scale being suppressed and bound to age old customs existing from time immemorial, irrespective of the religion followed by them. The rising awareness of what is happening to woman around the world today is a vital step towards improving their situation. In our country all the three wings of the government have the responsibility towards empowerment of women in the light of the fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy which acts as a ground for purposive interpretation to promote constitutional feminism. It is also the fundamental duty of every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. The Government has passed laws from time to time favouring the cause of women and to stop atrocities upon them. Women have always been discriminated against and have suffered and are suffering discrimination in silence. The economic dependence of women is the predominant cause for their subordination. Within the Indian Subcontinent there have been infinite variations on the status of women diverging according to the cultural milieu, family structure, class, caste, property rights and morals. The concept of women entrepreneurship is slowly increasing the living standards and empowering women substantially and is contributing to building confidence and behavioural changes in women. Women are friends, partners, lovers, family and human beings. It must be recognised that the reason the violence continues to occur is because men dominate the will of women. Efforts should be made to translate lessons learnt by the women's movement into the methods adopted for the implementation of laws and provide equality to women.

**Introduction:** Beauty has many metaphors. The most versatile and embodied is woman. She is the architect of civilizations, the nucleus of the family, the protector of the house, the inspiration and strength of men on every front. Women are now made to act like a man, look like a lady, and work like a donkey to keep her family and work life adhered. The history of mankind reveals that the women have been seen as preservers of social norms, traditions, customs, morality and family cohesiveness. Women are friends, partners, lovers, family and human beings. Women have always been discriminated against and have suffered discrimination in silence. According to Swami Vivekananda "There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing." It can be noted that in most part of the world the societies are trying to fly only on one wing by denying the rights for women.

The word empowerment may be described as a process which helps people to assert their control over the factors which affect their life. It flows from the power and is vesting where it does not exist or exist inadequately. The origin of the concept of empowerment dates back to the mid of 17<sup>th</sup> Century and it literally means 'to invest with authority'. After which in a later on stage it began to get a modern outlook from the days of civil rights movement in US during 1960. The concept of women empowerment refers to a continuous process where the powerless

people become conscious of their situation and organise themselves to improve it and access opportunities as an outcome of which women take control over their lives, set their own agenda, gain skills, solve problems and develop self reliance. The empowerment as a concept can be said to be happening at three levels, on the individual, group and societal or community level which are interconnected in a strong manner. The individual level deals with the individual women's abilities to take control over their lives, their perceptions about their own values and abilities to identify a goal and work towards it. The group level deals with the collective action and the sense of agency that woman experience together in a group; whereas the societal group deals with the permissiveness of the political and social climate, the societal norms and the public disclosure on what is possible and impossible for women to do, how to behave etc.

The process of empowerment has five dimensions being the Cognitive, psychological, economic, political and physical.

- (a) The cognitive dimension refers to a woman having an understanding of the conditions and causes of their subordination at the micro and macro levels. It involves making choices that may go against the cultural expectations and norms
- (b) The psychological dimension includes the belief that women can act at personal and societal levels

to improve their individual realities and the society in which they live.

- (c) The economic component requires that women has to access to and control over, productive resources, thus ensuring some degree of financial autonomy, she notes the changes in the economic balance of power don't necessarily alter traditional gender roles or norms
- (d) The political element entails that women have the capability to analyse, organise and mobilise for social change
- (e) The physical element of gaining control over one's body and sexuality and the ability to protect oneself against sexual violence to empowerment process.

Within the Indian Subcontinent, there have been infinite variations on the status of women diverging according to the cultural milieu, family structure, class, caste, property rights and morals. The society was characterised by a pluralistic and fragmented cultural, religious and political structure here there was no monolithic Hindu, Muslim or Christian authority. The most important point in understanding the value structure in Indian society is the dual concept of the female in the Hindu philosophy. On one hand, she is fertile, benevolent who is bestowed of property, whereas on the latter she is considered as aggressive, malevolent and destructive. In Vedic period, women enjoyed fair amount of freedom and equality. Women participated in all spheres like men. They studied in gurukuls and learned Vedas and were accomplished in art, music, dance and even warfare. The main characteristic of the Vedic period was the absence of the purdah system, equal rights was provided in selecting their partners and the dowry system was prevalent among only the higher class in the form of movable goods. It's from the post Vedic period that the position of the women began to decline and they were subjected to subordination, yet the law framers during that period recognised the right to property for the women.

With the advent of medieval era, the position of women further degraded and they were oppressed in the feudal social order. Their education and training was bought to a halt and they were not provided with the opportunity to represent themselves in any community affairs. It was during this period that social evils like sati, child marriage, female infanticide etc rose up in the society. The lifestyle of the people changed in a drastic way during the British Era of Colonial Power. It was during the British Era that awareness was created for the removal of social malaises. The British Government followed the principle of *divide et impera*. Hindu populations were governed by the rules of Hindu personal law and Muslims by Islamic personal law and so on.

Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra VidyaSagar, Aurobindo etc. raised their voice against the unjust practices against women and raised their issues on all issues relating to women and the various national movements during that period generated a high confidence and strength among women and fight against the customs of Sati, Child Marriage, temple prostitution etc as result of which laws such as Abolition of practice of Sati, Widow Remarriage Act etc came into effect.

A drastic change happened after independence and emergence of Constitution in our country. The Constitution is the basic document of a country having a special legal sanctity which sets the framework and the principal functions of the organs of government of a State and declares the principal governing the operations of these organs. The framers of the Constitution were conscious of the unequal treatment and discrimination meted out to the fairer sex from time immemorial and therefore included provisions for the upliftment of women. Constitution aims at creating legal norms, social philosophy and economic values, which are to be effected by striking synthesis, harmony and fundamental adjustment between individual rights and social interest to achieve the desired community goals.

The Indian Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, educational and political disadvantages faced by them. The Preamble to the Indian Constitution secures to all its citizens justice, equality of status and opportunity and provides to promote among all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. The Constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights and freedoms to attain these objectives. The Directive principles of state policy though are non justiciable are considered by the state in formulating the policies and laws. To uphold the constitutional mandate, several legislations have been enacted to ensure equal rights, to counter social discrimination and various forms of violence and atrocities and to support services. The atrocities against women can be classified under two headings

- (a) Crimes identified under the Indian Penal Code
- (b) The crimes identified under the special laws like The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1971 etc.

Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programmes has been aimed at advancement of women in different spheres. Right from the Fifth Five Year Plan

there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare development. It is from the Eighth Five year plan that the emphasis was shifted to empowerment from development of the cult. In 1971 a Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) was constituted on the request by the United Nations General Assembly. It was constituted to examine the status of women, the education and employment, to consider the problem of working women, examine the status of women as housewives etc. A Report title "Towards Equality" was submitted in 1974 which has been a landmark in the social history of India and it served to be an eye opener to the government, law makers, activists etc in understanding the wide gulf between what was intended in the Indian Constitution and what prevailed on ground in terms of laws, conventions and practices. On the basis of the findings and suggestions of the Committee, in order to ensure implementation of various measures, it was decided to constitute statutory autonomous institutions. In this context, the National Commission for women was established with the mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women. Several ratifications were also made to secure equal rights of women, in which the foremost is of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1993. The Cairo Conference of United Nations in 1994 on Population and Development called attention to women's empowerment as main central focus and a Gender Empowerment Measure was introduced. It reflects upon the women's participation in political power, education and health. In 1995 the report was submitted devoting to women empowerment. In 2001 the Ministry of Human Resource Development prepared a National Policy for empowerment of Women. The Policy aims at creating an environment so that women feel involved in the making of economic and social policies; to give equal share in social, economic and political aspects; to remove discrimination against women by enacting various laws; to encourage equal treatment of women in the society. Indian Ministry of Women and Child declared 2001 as the year of Women's Empowerment. The introduction of various National policies began by the Indian Government under the leadership of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Under her leadership a scheme known as Indira MahilaYojana was launched. Various schemes were later launched for women as MahilaSmridhiYojana, RashtriyaMahilaKosh, JananiSurakshaYojana etc. The Ministry of Women and Child Development has adopted a new initiative known as Gender Budgeting as part of Eleventh Five Year Plan as a tool for ensuring that adequate budgetary commitments are made for women. The Ministry as per the scheme

sponsors training programmes and workshops at the centre and in the states. It develops the training material, undertakes direct interactive sessions with identified ministries and provides technical support about the Gender Budgeting. In 2010, the Government of India on International day launched the National Mission for Empowerment of Women with an aim to strengthen the overall processes that promote the all round development of women. It aims at providing a single window service for all programmes run by the government for women under ages of various ministries. It aims at the holistic empowerment of women. The National Resource Centre for Women has been set up which functions as a national convergence centre for all schemes and programmes for women and it is the repository of knowledge, information, research and data on all gender related issues. It is the chief body servicing the National and State Mission Authority.

The Ministry of Child and Women implemented a Swayamsidha Programme an integrated scheme for the empowerment of women by establishing women self groups to empower women to have increased access to all kinds of resources that they are denied in addition to increasing their awareness and skill. The Scheme known as Support to Training cum Employment to Women was launched in 1987 to strengthen and improve the skills for employment opportunities for women below the poverty line in traditional sectors like agriculture, animal husbandry, cottage and village industries, handicrafts etc. where women were employed in a large scale. The NGO's are also in a large scale playing an important and significant role in the empowerment of women. Their works are more transparent and are becoming more effective in the society. The seminars, conferences and workshops organised by them are reaching the masses at large.

In spite of the various measures taken up by the society prior and after Independence, the Women haven't been fully empowered. Still in our Country women are discriminated and marginalised at every sector or level of society whether it be social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education etc. Women in general all over India are found to be economically very poor, though a very few are engaged in activities. Steps should be taken to improve the health status of women. Greater access for women to education must be ensured in the educational system. It is the grass root problem. According to Mahatma Gandhi, "If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate an entire family." Safety at the work place should be guaranteed to women through stricter implementation of the laws.

Empowerment of women is only a part of overall maintaining of women. The economic and social empowerment of women needs to be given more importance. The Non Governmental Organisations are playing a significant role in the empowerment of disadvantaged women. Empowerment by itself may not place women on an equal footing with men. The

greatest need of the hour is the change of the social attitude towards women. Women's empowerment means a lot, but the ultimate goal of the equalisation of man and women would materialise only when her complimentary role is accepted by the society. The Best thermometer to the progress of nation is its treatment of women – Swami Vivekananda

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A. Arsha

Lecturer in Law, Department of Commerce  
SCMS School of Technology and Management  
SCMS Campus, Prathap Nagar  
Muttom, AluvaKerala – 683106