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Women empowerment in India: need and importance

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Abstract

Women empowerment means giving power to women to ensure their full participation in Social, Political, Economic and spiritual arena. Women empowerment refers to provide recognition to women's basic human rights and providing them equal status to men. It aims at equality with men in matters of education, employment, inheritance, marriage, politics etc. Women should have equal opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life.

Empowerment is a process that gives freedom to a person in decision making, it enables a women to realize their identity, position and status in society.

Women are the real architects of the society.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Social, Economic, Political, equal Opportunities, status.

1. Introduction

Women Empowerment-Why

"I raise up my voice – not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard ... we cannot succeed when half of us are held back." – Malala Yousafzai

Women forms half of our population which means you cannot expect the development of the country by depriving women from their rights. It is essential to empower women to participate in economic life across all sectors to build stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for society.

Women's rights are secured under the Constitution of India — mainly, equality, dignity, and freedom from discrimination. Our constitution provides various safeguards to secure women's human rights.

The Preamble to the constitution of India assures Justice-social, economic and political and Equality of Status and opportunity and dignity to the individual.

1.1 The fundamental rights provides following measures for women

Article 14 ensures Women the right to equality.

Article 15(1) specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.

Article 15(3) empowers the state to take affirmative actions in favour of women.

Article 16 provides for equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office.

1.2 Directive Principles of State Policy

Directive principles of State Policy also contains important provisions regarding women empowerment and it is the duty of the government to apply these principles while making laws or formulating any policy. Some of them are:

- Article 39 (a) provides that the State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- Article 39 (d) speaks about equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- Article 42 provides that the State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

1.3 Fundamental Duties

Article 51 (A) (e) expects from the citizen of the country to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

1.4 Other Constitutional Provisions

Through 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment of 1993, a very important political right has been given to women which is very effective for women empowerment in India. With this amendment women were given 33.33 percent reservation in seats at different levels of elections in local governance i.e. at Panchayat, Block and Municipality elections.

It is evident that our Constitution provides empowerment to women through its various provisions and the State is bound to apply these principles in taking policy decisions as well as in enacting laws.

2. Historical Background

Inequalities between men and women and discrimination against women have also been age-old issues all over the world. In our country also women always remained a deprived section of the society. They have been treated as an object.

In ancient times the women enjoyed a respectable status in the society. They married at a mature age and were free to select their husbands through different customs. The position of women in

India deteriorated during medieval period when traditions like Sati Pratha ((self-immolation by the women with their husbands), Child Marriage, Jauhar, Devdasis, Dowry and polygamy were prevalent in the society.

Indian Social Reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy emphasized on Equality, Liberty and justice for women raised their voices against discriminatory practices against women and through his social movements against these bad traditions the British govt abolished the Sati tradition. Similarly several other social reformers such as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, Acharya Vinoba Bhave etc. worked for women empowerment in India. Through their efforts various laws e.g. Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, The Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929 for improving the conditions of women were enacted.

3. Current Scenario

Women are becoming increasingly conscious of their rights and capabilities. Women in India now participate fully in areas such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sectors, science and technology, etc.

Increase in literacy among women resulted into largest number of professionally qualified women in India. Our country has largest number of Doctors, Surgeons, Scientists, and Professors than the United States. The mindset of people are changing slowly and now daughters are treated equal to sons. Parents provide better education to their daughters for making them self-dependent.

The women are now challenging men in every field and proving that they are equally capable of doing everything that a man can do. In Olympics held at Rio Brazil in the year 2016, the women performed better than men and the players like P V Sindhu, Sakshi Malik secured medals for India. There are other names like Saina Nehwal, Sania Mirza,

Deepa Karmakar, Marykom, Geeta Faughat etc who played for the country and made country proud.

Similarly the women are actively participating in politics thus raising women's voice and participating in governance. There are a no. of women like Indira Gandhi, Uma Bharti, Mamta Banerjee, Jaylalitha, Mayawati etc who played a vital role in Indian Politics.

The subject of empowerment of women has becoming a burning issue all over the world including India since last few decades. Many agencies of United Nations in their reports have emphasized that gender issue is to be given utmost priority. It is held that women now cannot be asked to wait for any more for equality.

4. Steps taken towards Women Empowerment

Government of India is also taking new initiatives for promoting equal rights for women. The concept of "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" is an important step in this direction. Through this programme the awareness for saving Girl Child and Educating girl is created among society. The programme is adopted by many states and the respective state governments are working actively for making the initiative successful.

4.1 Various Enactments

The government of India have also enacted few acts for securing women rights and raising their status in the country. A few of them have been listed

- The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.
- The Medical termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.
- The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987.
- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.
- The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961.
- The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Protection and) Act, 2013.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

"It is said that when you teach a man you teach one individual whereas when you teach a woman you teach a family".

Thus to think about the development of Country first we need to think about the development of women. For this we need to take some steps which will promote the status of women in the society.

5.1 Education: Special emphasis needs to be given on providing better education to women. Increasing access to appropriate, affordable and quality education. Improving women's access to vocational training, Science and technology etc.

5.2 Employment: Teach Job Skills and making them self-Reliant. The low status of women cannot be raised without providing them employment. So appropriate opportunities needs to be generated to improve the economic status of women. They should be facilitated to equal access to resources, employment, markets and trades.

5.3 Improving sex ratio through various awareness programmes.

5.4 Health: Special nutritional programmes to be designed to cater the health requirements of the women. Preventive programmes for promoting women health needs to be strengthened. Special efforts to be done to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health issues.

5.5 Integrated steps to be taken to prevent and eliminate violence against women. Trafficking in women to be stopped and rehabilitation of victims of prostitution and trafficking.

For promoting developmental efforts for women at different levels and creating needed channels for women to participate effectively in decisions that affect their lives.

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