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Study of women empowerment in Indian society after independence

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Abstract

Women's empowerment can be defined to promoting women's sense of self-worth, their ability to determine their own choices, and their right to influence social change for themselves and others. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today. This paper will focus on the place of women in the society of India.

Keywords: Women empowerment, political environment, Indian society, independence

Introduction

Women constituted the key role in the arch of Indian society. No doubt the Rig Vedic Women in India enjoyed high status in society and their condition was good. Even the women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. But from enjoying free and esteemed positions in the Rig-Vedic society, women started being discriminated since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities (Saravanakumar, 2016) [7]. Indian society doubts that we are in the midst of a great revolution in the history of women. The voice of women is increasingly heard in Parliament, courts and in the streets. While women in the West had to fight for over a century to get some of their basic rights, (Altekar, 1983) [1] like the right to vote, the Constitution of India has given women equal rights with men from the beginning (Devandra, Kiran, 1985) [3]. The Ancient and medieval status of women in modern Indian society regarding Equality, Education, Marriage and Family life, Race and Gender, Religion and Culture is maintained or deteriorated.

During the Vedic Age wife was put in an esteemed position. She was considered as half of the man, his trust friend, companion in solitude, father in advice and the rest in passing the wilderness of Life. The women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. There were many women Rishis during this period. Though monogamy was mostly common, the richer section of the society indulged in polygamy. There was no sati system or early marriage. But from enjoying free and esteemed positions in the Rig-Vedic society, women started being discriminated since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities. Child marriage, widow burning or sati, the purdah and polygamy further worsened the women's position The Indian cultural tradition begins with the Vedas. It is generally believed that the Vedic period is spread over from 2000 BC to 500 B.C. Vedic women had economic freedom. Some women were engaged in teaching work. Home was the place of production. Spinning and weaving of clothes were done at home. Women also helped their husbands in agricultural pursuits.

The Ancient and medieval status of women in modern Indian society regarding Equality, Education, Marriage and Family life, Race and Gender, Religion and Culture is maintained or deteriorated. The Rig Vedic Women in India enjoyed high status in society. The women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard.

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In Vedic India, women did not enjoy an inferior status rather they occupied an honorable place. They had ample rights in the social and the religious fields and limited rights in the economic and the political fields.

Women empowerment

Women's empowerment defined in several ways, including accepting women's viewpoints or making an effort to seek them, raising the status of women through education, awareness, literacy, and training. Empowerment is about change, choice and power. It is a process of change by which the individuals and groups with little or no power gain the power and ability to make choices that affect their lives. Women empowerment is a stage of acquiring power for women in order to understand her rights and to perform her responsibilities towards oneself and others in a most effective way.

Characteristics of women empowerment

1. Women empowerment enables women to organise themselves to increase their self-reliance.
2. Women empowerment means women's control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology.
3. Women empowerment abolishes all gender-based discriminations in all institutions and structures of society.
4. Women empowerment means participation of women in policy and decision making process at domestic and public levels.
5. Empowerment of women enables women to realise their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.
6. Empowerment also means equal status to women.
7. Women empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological, political, cultural, familial and economic spheres and at various levels such as individual, group and community.
8. Women empowerment is a process of creating awareness and capacity building.

Women empowerment in Indian society

Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in development activities. For the beneficiaries of the women, the government has been adopted different schemes and programs i.e. the National Credit Fund for Women (1993), Food and Nutrition Board, Information and Mass Education etc. The most positive development last few years has been the growing involvement of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. Women are also involving in human development issues of child rearing, education, health, and gender parity. Many of them have gone into the making and marketing of a range of cottage products-pickles, tailoring, embroidery etc. The economic empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a sine-quo-non of progress for a country; hence, the issue of economic empowerment of women is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social thinkers and reformers.

Women rights in India

The guideline of equivalence status of women is cherished in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The

constitution provides equity to women, yet in addition enables the State to make provisions of positive discrimination in favour of women. Some of the significant articles are as per the following:

- Equality before law (Article 14).
- No Discrimination by state on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15(i))
- Special provision by state in favour of Women and Children (Article 15(3))
- Equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment (Article 16)
- Securing adequate means of livelihood for men and women equally [Article 39(a)]
- Equal pay for equal work [Article 39(d)]
- Promoting justice on basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid [Article 39(A)] Renounce practices derogatory to women [Article 51(A)(e)]
- 1/3 reservation for women in Panchayats [Article 243(D)] and in municipalities [Article 243(T)]
- Right to Property to Women [Article 300(a)]

Legislations

- Abolition of Sati Act, 1829
- Special Marriage Act, 1954
- Hindu Succession Act, 1956
- Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- Maternity Benefits Act, 1961
- Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
- Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- Sexual Harassment Bill, 2010

Government Schemes for Women Empowerment

The Government programmes for women development began as early as 1954 in India but the actual participation began only in 1974. The Government of India has over 34 schemes for women operated by different department and ministries. Some of these are as follows;

- Integrated Child Development Services 1975.
- Rastriya Mahila Kosh 1992-1993
- Mahila Samridhi Yojana 1993.
- Indira Mahila Yojana 1995.
- Women Entrepreneur Development programme given top priority in 1997-98.
- Dhanalakshmi 2008.
- Integrated Child Protection scheme 2009.
- Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls 2010.
- Creches care centre for the children of working and ailing mother.
- Short Stay Homes.
- Mahila Samakhya being implemented in about 9000 villages.
- Hostels for working women.
- Swayajdhya.
- Swadhar.
- National Mission for Empowerment of Women.
- Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women.
- The Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers.

Conclusion

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of

individuals and communities of women. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban / rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender based violence and political participation. The Empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

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