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## Women empowerment – The need of the hour

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### Abstract

The Indian culture and tradition is considered to be the oldest in the world. In our culture women are worshipped. India is a democratic country but still we face the problem of sex determination which starts from birth and continues till death. Women are an important and an integral part of the society. We just cannot function without her. She is a daughter, a wife, a mother, a friend, a sister, a grandmother. Women are deprived of their rights, education etc. They are supposed to be confined in the four walls of the house. Female infanticide, rape, sexual harassment, lack of education, household responsibilities, child marriages, malnutrition, human trafficking, marital rape, unemployment are some major issues concerning women in our country. Women have always been considered inferior to men. Ours is a male dominated society, even in the present scenario parents are happy when a male child is born. Women are considered as a medium to look after and take care and keep everyone happy. She can neither be independent nor can she voice her opinions. Throughout her life she is dependent on a male person. As said by Manu "Women are supposed to be in the custody of their father when they are children, they must be in the custody of their husband when married and under the custody of her son in her old age or as widows. She should not be allowed to assert herself independently." But in the present this scenario is changing. Many government agencies and NGOs have taken up the cause of women empowerment. Empowering women is the need of the hour as it causes a major hurdle in the progress and development of the country. Their powers have to be understood and channelized in the country's progress. Not only women but also men should realize their responsibilities and share them. Both are equally important. Women need to change their mindset and voice their issues. They should identify their potential and no longer think of themselves as weak but become psychologically, mentally and physically strong. We have examples of Durga, Rani Laxmibai, Jijabai, Indira Gandhi, Kiran Bedi, Kalpana Chawla and many more to look upon. The problem lies deep rooted in the minds of people but positive changes are seen.

**Keywords:** sex determination, psychologically, empowerment, Female infanticide

### Introduction

"To awaken the people it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move the village moves, the nation moves."

-Jawaharlal Nehru

Women empowerment is a burning issue of the present times. Inequalities between men and women have been going on since years. Women no longer want to restrict themselves in the four walls of the houses and have demanded their rights and equal status with men in education, employment, politics, inheritance, voting. The status of women in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century was very low. It has risen in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Women empowerment is empowering women to take their own decisions and lead an independent life. It frees them all types of restrictions. This is necessary for the growth and progress of the family, society and country. Women constitute half of the population of the country. Women should be aware of their rights to be leveled equal to men and get involved in activities and shoulder responsibilities and know about the happening around them in the society and the country. Women empowerment can change the face of the country. A woman shoulders all the responsibilities of the household and can equally shoulder other responsibilities too. God has gifted men and women with different unique talents. So both are important in decision making. Women are born tough. They undergo many hardships and

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challenges in their lives. They embrace tough situations and so they have a unique inner strength and capacity to shoulder responsibilities.

Today we find women in almost all walks of life and fields. Today the scenario has changed. This weaker section has risen to their inner call and proving their efficiency and capability everywhere. Today girls are doing better than boys in the various exams and getting better degrees. Many are successful doctors, engineers, lawyers, nurses, sales officers, IT employees etc. The Armed Forces have also recognized their potential and have opened doors to recruit them. Now women will also be seen as Pilots of fighter planes. Women have become bread earners in many families.

The government has passed laws for the protection of women. It is also implementing the Sawayamsidha programme. Many women associations have been formed and launching movements. Women are no longer treated as "objects". In addition dowry system, Sati, widowhood, domestic violence are either removed or checked. The Ministry for Women & Child Development has been established for the development and formulating plans and policies for women and children in the country. The private sector is also shouldering the efforts to promote gender equality at work places and empowering women. The UN women and United Nations Global compact have designed 7 Principles to offer guidance to private sector. They are as follows:

- 1) Establish high- level corporate leadership for gender equality.
- 2) Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.
- 3) Ensure the health, safety and well- being of all women and men workers.
- 4) Promote education, training and professional development for women.
- 5) Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
- 6) Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
- 7) Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

### Ways for Empowering Women

- 1) **Create safe work places:** This is an important issue which cannot be neglected. If workplaces are unsafe women may hesitate to work at such places. If workplaces are made safer more people will send their daughters and wives to work.
- 2) **Female Education:** By educating women the economy of the country will increase. Women will become independent and also become bread earners of the family.
- 3) **Awareness:** This will contribute in making the women aware about her rights. It will help her to get better nutrition. It will enable them to take active part in politics. More women will raise their voices against injustice and inequalities.

Women empowerment will strengthen the social, economic And educational powers of the women. There will be no Gender bias and all will share equal rights in community.

### Challenges

- 1) Male dominated society
- 2) Domestic responsibilities

### 3) Restrictions imposed from household

Today Indian women participate in various sports and games. Women serve as MPs, MLAs. Women have achieved name and fame internationally. M.S. Subalakshmi, Lata Mangeshkar, Pratibha Patil, Saina Nehwal, Sania Mirza, Aishwarya Rai, Sushmita Sen have made the country proud. There is no sphere where women are incompetent. But on the contrary the law discriminates between men and women. A wife is burnt for not fulfilling dowry demands. Literary rate of women is still very low. Though the status of women in India is high the position of women in our country is not satisfactory. Historical studies and our scriptures reveal that women enjoyed a high status during the early Vedic period (2000 BC – 1000 BC). The women enjoyed equal status to that of men. The Rigveda is full of evidence that women had the access to acquire highest knowledge. Qualified women were given the highest social status according to Rigveda in those days. Marriage was not compulsory in those days but the condition of women deteriorated in the vedic and epic period. They were not considered equal to men and also deprived of education. They were deprived of their rights and privileges and considered inferior. Wives became silent partners, who accompanied their husbands. Buddhism and Jainism were too indifferent towards women but later accepted them. The condition of women in India declined with the passage of time. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century there was a wave of change and a revival of the society took place and there was a considerable change in the status of women. Saints preached the equality of sexes.

The fight for women empowerment has not started today. It had started in India from the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many women understood the plight of women and rose to voice their demands and spread awareness and work for their betterment. Ramabai Ranade (1862-1924), was an Indian social worker and one of the first women's rights activists, president of the first All India Women Conference, and a prominent figure in establishing Seva Sadan, an organization for educating girls in Pune. She was the first Indian woman to address a public meeting in English in 1883. Women were not allowed to go to school and become literate in those days. After her marriage, started to learn reading and writing with strong support and encouragement from her husband, starting with her native language Marathi, she worked hard to master English. She started 'Hindu Ladies Social Club' in Mumbai to develop public speaking among women. Ramabai devoted her life for the improvement of women's lives. She opened girl's school in Pune ". She would regularly visit the Central Prison, especially the women's wing, to kindle self-esteem amongst prison inmates.

Parvatibai Athavale was one of India's great social reformers. She made major contributions in social upliftment of women, particularly Hindu widows. She went to the U.S. to collect funds and donations for the widow education and their upliftment, as she herself had become a widow early in life and had to shave off her head and stop wearing jewellery. She decided to discard the signs of widowhood. All her life she worked for the upliftment and rights of widows.

Tarabai Modak, known as the "Montessori Mother", has made a significant contribution to preschool education in India. She brought a silent revolution in the tribal community of kosbad. She was the first Indian Principal of Barten female college of Education at Rajkot. She read Maria Montessori's writing and decided to educate her own

daughter accordingly. She helped establish the Nutan BAL Shikshan Sangh for the spread and development of preprimary school and teacher training. She started the Gram BAL Shiksha Kendra at Bordi. She has written a number of books for children and parents in marathi and gujarati. She has also written books on child education in English. In 1962, she was honoured with the title of Padma Bhushan.

Laxmibai Kelkar was the founder of Rashtra Sevika Samiti, an organization to enunciate a sense of patriotism and social awareness in people. Mrunal Gore was a Women's rights activist and veteran socialist leader, who dedicated her life for serving the poor and the marginalised sections of society. She brought the issue of safe drinking water and was popularly known as "*Pani Wali Bai*" who had created waves during sixties, seventies and eighties by mobilizing women from local, middle and working class women with protest rallies and raising issues concerning sanitation, water, price rise, black marketing essential items, tribal women's woes.

Today women are in the fore front even in the rural areas. In the rural areas women have come together and formed Self Help groups that are instrumental in changing the condition of women and binding them and knitting them closely. They develop leadership qualities in them and enable them to become small enterpreneurs. SHG is a small group of poor women from the same socio-economic background, who come together to solve their common problems and promote small savings among its members. Group members are engaged in livelihood activities like cattle rearing, tailoring jobs, artificial jewellery, making candles welding etc. These are facilitated by NGOs. Women self-help group members are also elected as Gram pradhans. Members have used loans to pay off their debts.

Today there are many women who fought against the odds, faced challenges and have become successful entrepreneurs today. Shri mahila Griha Udyog Lijjat Papad, is a women's co-operative which manufactures consumer goods was started by 7 gujarati housewives in Mumbai.

Chetna Gala Sinha, found the Mann Deshi Mahila Sahakari Bank, India's first rural financial institution, in 1992 to make rural women financially independent and to save them from the torture of money lenders in Satara district of Maharashtra. She understood the problems of the local people and offered to help the people maximum benefit of schemes offered by the government. The women pooled their resources and gave it to one of its members to start a business. It has made several women capable of taking care of their family. They now send their children to school and their standard has increased.

Nirmala Kandalgaoonkar, is the founder of Vivam Agro Tech, providers of vermicomposting, grew in a small town of Maharashtra. She launched a venture to develop environment products using earthworms. The company now works with large corporate and self – help groups for bio gas projects.

Cheryl Huffton, started Dream Weavers, after quitting her job as a school teacher. Inspired by her daughter to help people, who were less fortunate and in extremely bad condition to be independent. She did not have the needed money and started with Rs 500/-. She bought a sewing machine in installments and a few metres cloth. Her daughter taught her to design, cut and stitch. The mother daughter duo designed inner wear for ladies, aprons and other items used in spas, parlours. It was initially very tough, but today they have big clients to deliver. Today they have obtained an import – export license.

Patricia Narayan, a winner of 'Ficci Woman Entrepreneur of the year', started her career 30 years ago by selling eateries on Marina beach. Her marriage failed, she had 2 kids to take care of. She was interested in cooking and tried new dishes. She started making pickles, jams, squashes at home and sold them. The other cart sellers sold tea and cigarettes, so she decided to sell cutlets, samosam, fresh juice and tea. As her business flourished she added ice creams, French fries and sandwiches. She would personally stand and sell the products. She got an offer to run a canteen, which she accepted. She lost her daughter and son- in- law in a road accident. Later she and her son started the first restaurant 'Sandeepha' in her daughter's memory.

Sarala Bastian, always wanted to be independent. She got married at a age when she should be studying, 17. Her father gave her Rs 15,000 to start a business. She started a mushroom farm in their backyard. Today she is a successful entrepreneur. In the initial days it was a lot of struggle, going to markets requesting shop keepers to keep her products, but now there is no looking back.

There are many more inspiring stories of Narishakti who braved all odds and showed that they were unique in a way.

### Conclusion

The hard work of few of these women and many others aroused the interest of others and many women joined the force and worked for the empowerment of women. The seeds for empowering women were sown by these great women and today we are getting the fruits of their hard work. There are a few areas where it is lacking but we should have faith and all should join the movement. Swami Vivekananda said "Arise awake and stop not until the goal is reached". Let the new sun rise and may the country bask in its glory. It's a long way to go but we should have faith that we shall overcome someday.

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