

# Empowerment of women in india



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According to McLeod, the concept 'Empowerment' derives from Latin word 'potere' which means "to be able". From the view of sociological aspect, empowerment is a multi-dimensional, multi-tiered and multifaceted concept. The term empowerment has different meanings in different socio-cultural and political contexts. World Bank Report 2000/2001 describes empowerment as a process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.

According to country report of Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power" India, which is a conglomerate of diverse ethnic, linguistic and geographical features, today is at the cusp of a paradigm change in its growth and its position in the world. However, India is even known for its sobriquet 'male-chauvinistic nation'. Indian myths describe our country as 'Mother India' who is a woman that serves as the mother of every Indian. While such a woman looks after every Indian child, women in general are simply being disregarded at the dominant men's best.

But we should not forget that history is a witness to the women who have in the past demonstrated unique leadership capabilities. Razia Sultana, Rani of Jhansi Laxmibai, Sarojini Naidu and Indira Gandhi are the examples of women empowerment. Earlier, most women were able to demonstrate the leadership qualities only on their home fronts, as in Indian society man has always acted as the master of the scene and the decision regarding the issue of empowering women has always been taken by him. God has gifted women with compassion, tender-heartedness, caring nature, concern for others.

These are very positive signs which imply that women can be leaders. Though some women have shown their mettle yet a large number of them have to sharpen their leadership qualities in various ways. In order to help women to be in limelight, they need to be empowered. Therefore, empowerment of women is the prerequisite to transform a developing country into a developed country. Empowerment of women had come out of the consensus arrived at the 40th Session of the UN commission on status of women in New York on March 11, 1996.

In this session ' Empowerment of Women' has been depicted as conferment of power by means of law in all matters affecting gender interests, related to family well-being and socioeconomic national affairs, providing for participation in decision making in all such matters. Famous American novelist of 19th century, Louisa May Alcott correctly opines- " When women are the advisor, the Lords of creation don't take the advice till they have persuaded themselves that it is just what they intended to do; then they act upon it and if it succeeds, they give the weaker vessel half the credit of it; if fails, they generously give herself the whole".

The need for Women Empowerment was felt in India long back. Raja Rammohan Roy, the religious, social, and educational reformer and ' the maker of Modern India', demanded inheritance property rights for Women, gave tremendous effort to abolish the defunct custom ' Sati', the Hindu funeral practice. Key figure of Bengali Renaissance, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar , championed the uplift of the status of women in India. Jyotirao Phule, Pearicharan Sarkar etc also fought for uplift of women.

Later, Mahatma Gandhi had announced at the Second round table conference that his aim was to establish a political society in India, in which women would enjoy the same rights as men and the teeming millions of India would be ensures dignity and justice-social, economic and political. Empowerment of women needs to begin with her participation in different spheres of life. Education is a great determinant in this regard. To achieve empowerment, women have to be educated and aware of their rights and privileges in a modern society.

It is education which can bring about awareness in them related to their social status, injustice and differentiation meted out to them. Besides, economic independence is a major factor which can contribute in empowering women. India in the very beginning realised this need. The architect of Indian Constitution was of the opinion that unless and until women are empowered, nothing was going to bring about any change in their destiny.

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres.

India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is

the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. According to the 2001 Census, the percentage of female literacy in the country is 54% up from 9% 1951 by implementation of several constitutional privileges, legislative support for women, and some yojana and mission.

Constitutional Privileges for Women includes Equality before law for women (Article 14), The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (i)), The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15 (3)), The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)) equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)), The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42), Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat (Article 243 D(3)).

To uphold the Constitutional mandate, India has enacted various legislative measures intended to ensure equal rights, to counter social discrimination and various forms of violence and atrocities and to provide support services especially to working women. The Government has given greater focus to issues relating to women through creation of an independent Ministry of Women and Child Development, initiation of legislation that has taken the

country closer to complete legal equality for women, gender budgeting and initiation of programs for greater inclusion of women.

Although all laws are not gender specific, the provisions of law affecting women significantly have been reviewed periodically and amendments carried out to keep pace with the emerging requirements. Some acts which have special provisions to safeguard women and their interests are The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 with amendment in 2005, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995), Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 and The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

Apart from these, In January 1992, the Government set-up a statutory body named ' National Commission for Women' with a specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc. The Department of Women & Child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource Development has prepared a " National Policy for the Empowerment of Women" in the year 2001. The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. On 8th March, 1996, on the occasion of International Women's Day, the parliament passed resolution to set up a Standing Committee for the ' improvement of the status of women' in India and the committee on Empowerment of women was constituted in April, 1997.

Empowerment is now increasingly seen as a process by which the one's without power gain greater control over their lives. The Cairo conference in 1994 organized by UN on Population and Development called attention to women's empowerment as a central focus and UNDP developed the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which focuses on the three variables that reflect women's participation in society in every aspects. 1995 UNDP report was devoted to women's empowerment. The intervention strategy for empowering women to have informed and effective choices on their health and nutrition and for the development of children and adolescents has to be multi-pronged.

Such as, Antyodaya Anna Yojana(2000), National Rural Health Mission, 2005, Janani Suraksha Yojana, 2005, Indira Sahara, 2000, Mukhya Mantri Antodaya Pusthaar Yojana, 2009, Hindu Succession Act, 1995, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, 1993, Apna Beti Apna Dhan Yojana, Haryana(1994), Kamdhenu Yojana, Maharashtra, Girls Child Protection Scheme, Andhra Pradesh etc. There are two main programmes in the Department of Women and Child Development, which aim at convergence of services delivery at the grass root level. Those are Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), which reaches 85 percent of the villages in the country and Integrated Women's Empowerment Programme(IWEP), formerly Indira Mahila Yojana, which extends to 650 blocks operate through the self help groups of women.

In the field of education, 2180 residential Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya schools have been sanctioned and are providing elementary education to 1, 82, 000 out of school girls. Gaun ki Beti, Kisori Balika Divas Yojana, Ladli Laksmi Yojana, Cycle Praday Yojana etc schemes were launched by the

Government for empowering the girls in India. In spite of several acts, laws, schemes, women and girls face violence in various forms in their daily life. This takes the form of female foeticide and infanticide, rape dowry death and more indirect forms such as abandonment of older women. Sexual harassment is one of the horrendous factors that suppress women.

Molestation of a teenage girl by a group of nearly twenty men in a public place in Guwahati is a shame on Indian humanity. Therefore, our efforts should be directed towards the all around development of each and every section of Indian women, not confining the benefit to a particular section of women in society, by giving them their due share. It is a must to protect their chastity, modesty and dignity and ensure their dignified position in society. Without removing social stigma, enduring progress and development could not be achieved. For this, the governmental and non-governmental organisations including media should come forward and play an active role in creating awareness in society.

We need to focus particularly on women, because in every society they struggle against gender norms that limit their resources and opportunities for improvement and because we know that women empowerment is a tremendous resource for social change and a broader fight against global poverty. The task is not too difficult to achieve. The honesty and sincerity on the part of those involved is a must. If the lots of women change, definitely it will have a positive impact on society. Hence, the women's empowerment is the need of the hour. It would be worthy to conclude with the famous speech of Swami Vivekananda " There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless



the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing. ”