

Innovations

Women Empowerment and Modern India: A Feminist Impression

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Abstract:

In many ways, women and men have not always been treated equally. They were denied the right to possess property, received no share of their parent's assets, were denied the ability to vote, and were denied the freedom to choose their line of work or employment, among other things. Throughout history, an acknowledged male-dominated Indian society has been characterized by gender disparity. Men were supposed to go out and work, leaving women confined to the home. One of the main causes of the emergence of social ills like "Sati Pratha," "PardahSystem," "Child Marriage," "Dowry System," etc. was this division of labor. The conventional Indian mindset presupposes that women's roles are mostly concentrated on domestic tasks like cooking and child-rearing. In India, women are routinely discriminated against in the workplace, in society, in politics, and even more so in the cultural sphere. These prejudices and impairments are regularly practiced at all levels. Women's empowerment is the capacity for full control over one's own behavior. This entails having control over their material possessions, intellectual resources, and even ideas. It entails psychologically empowering women to assert themselves, which has up until now been restricted by the "gender roles" that have been ascribed to them, particularly in a culture like India that is resistant to change. Women's empowerment, which refers to strengthening and boosting the social, economic, political, including legal strength of women in order to ensure their equal rights, has been extensively explored during the past 20 years. The rising economy greatly benefits from the contributions of women. This essay discusses the various difficulties experienced by Indian women and the reasons why their empowerment is still necessary. It will also highlight the government's initiatives for women's emancipation and the contribution of women in building modern Indian society and economy.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Feminist view, Modern Society, Struggle of women, Indian Society, Indian Women.

"Just like charity begins at home, we have to start making a change from our home and society. We need to work together to make this world a better place for women."

- Union Minister Smriti Irani.

In the twenty-first century, the globe is rapidly developing and embracing the role that women play in advancing global society and the economy. Strengthening women's participation in decision-making, which is the most crucial factor in socioeconomic progress, requires their empowerment. Due to its male-dominated society, India is a developing nation with very poor economic conditions. The majority of women in the country, who make up about 50% of the total population, are still economically reliant and unemployed.

Women haven't always been treated equally to males in society. They were prohibited from owning property, did not have a share in their parents' assets, were not allowed to vote, were not able to pick and choose which jobs they wanted to work at, etc. Throughout history, a male-dominated Indian society has viewed gender disparity as normal. Men were supposed to go out and work, leaving women confined to the home. This division of labour was a major factor in the emergence of social ills like "Sati Pratha," "PardahSystem," "Child Marriage," "Dowry System," etc. in our society. The traditional Indian mentality assumes that the place of women is mainly concentrated to the household activities like kitchen work and the upbringing of

the children. There is systemic discrimination against women on the economic, social, political and cultural levels in India. Discrimination and disability are practised at every level day by day.

"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." - said Swami Vivekananda.

Women's empowerment is the capacity for full control over one's own behaviour. This entails having control over their material possessions, intellectual resources, and even ideas. It involves women's psychological ability to exert themselves, which has up until now been limited by the "gender roles" that have been ascribed to them, especially in a culture like India that opposes change. For the family, society, and nation to have a bright future, women must be empowered. In order to empower women, they must be supported in becoming self-sufficient, monetarily independent, confident in their abilities to handle any challenging circumstances, and actively involved in a variety of social and political development initiatives. Only when women receive an education will women's empowerment become more important. Women's empowerment, prosperity, progress, and welfare all heavily depend on education. In every community and nation, education has been acknowledged as a crucial force for social transformation and progress. Giving women the information, skills, and self-confidence they need to fully participate in the development process is only possible via education. Everyone should get an education, but women and girls especially need it to survive and be empowered. The eradication of numerous social ills, such as the dowry issue and unemployment issues, is aided by the education of women. Additionally, social harmony is very easily attained.

Future generations will lack education if women don't receive an education. Napoleon, a Greek warrior, famously remarked, "Give me a few educated moms, and I shall give you a heroic race," because of this. In order to eradicate unfair practises and gender discrimination against women, the Indian government has recently adopted a number of constitutional and legal protections. In order to protect women from all forms of crimes against them, there is a list of safety legislation for women in India. Human rights include women's rights. Health, education, political engagement, economic security, and the absence of violence are just a few of the numerous topics they cover. The complete and equal enjoyment of all forms of discrimination experienced by women is a vital requirement for the realisation of human rights, international peace and security, and sustainable development. Various NGOs play a significant role in the empowerment of women. The government offers numerous programmes and plans for women's empowerment. India's overall development is greatly influenced by the empowerment of women. So, in the twenty-first century, women's empowerment is a crucial instrument for the nation in order to properly flourish. Empowering women has the potential to transform many aspects of society and the nation. First and foremost, it is crucial that men, the government, lower classes, and women all work together to empower women if we want to see our nation thrive. Due to gender inequality and male dominance in Indian society, women's emancipation became necessary. Empowering women is crucial for the family, society, and country to have a bright future.

Literature Review:

Sobha, K & Ijmtst, Editor. (2021) in the work 'A Study on Women Empowerment in India' researched on building a societal and political climate where women can live free from oppression, exploitation, trepidation, discrimination, and the general sense of persecution. Being a woman in a historically male-dominated institution is a key component of women empowerment. Women in Western nations enjoy the same rights and status as men in all spheres of life. However, discrimination and limitations based on gender continue to exist in India. As a result, the position of women in Indian society will be the main topic discussed by them.

Panda, D. (2017) exploring on "Women Empowerment in India: Rational and Present state." He has discovered that while women's empowerment may not be essential for our country, it is essential for the long-term growth of a country. So let's start empowering women right away for our future security. It is necessary to alter Indian society's mentality toward women. The man ought to believe that equity and equality are becoming more prevalent in the world. Therefore, empowering women will result in prosperity for the next generation.

Suresh, P. & Sivakumar, T. (2017) issued their work named "Women Empowerment in India- A Changing Scenario." They noticed that empowering women primarily involves raising the economic, social, and political position of women, who have historically been underprivileged in society. It entails protecting kids from all sorts of assault.

Khatri, R. In her article titled "The Role of Education towards Women Empowerment in India" published in 2016, concentrates on how education and literacy affect women's empowerment. She also makes improvements to the changes that should be taken into account for women's empowerment and economic development.

Shettar, R. M. (2015), in the research work "A Study on Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment in India," suggested that women's empowerment can only be accomplished if their economic and social standing is raised. This could only be accomplished by implementing clear social and economic policies with the goal of promoting the overall development of women and educating them about their capacity to be resilient human beings. A significant percentage of the population has experienced some relief as a result of globalisation, liberalisation, and other socioeconomic influences. Women's empowerment in India still needs a lot of work in a number of areas, nevertheless.

Objectives of the paper:

The study's particular goals are listed below.

1. To learn more about women's education in ancient, colonial, and contemporary India.
2. To understand how women can be empowered.
3. To learn about violence toward women.
4. To examine the Indian Constitution's provisions for women's rights and legal protection.

Research Methodology:

This study is qualitative in nature. The researcher in this study gathered information from a variety of secondary sources, including websites, books, periodicals, journals, and tried to gather data from various government portals.

Discussion:

Despite the fact that the nation has made great strides in terms of education since gaining its independence, there is a significant achievement gap between women and men. In India, just 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate, compared to 82.14% of adult men. An illiterate woman is not only at the mercy of her husband or father, but she is also unaware that this is not the way women live all across the world. Additionally, the culture's expectations that the head of the household should make all family decisions are gradually ruining the society of the country. The gender imbalance in higher education, specialised professional trainings, and top leadership positions in any field hurt women terribly.

In the prehistoric Vedic age, women received excellent education. Ancient India provided free education for women. They were required to recite mantras and take part in Vedic rituals. Girls were free to participate in the Upanayana ceremony, lead a life of celibacy, and study the Vedas, Vedangas, and other disciplines alongside their brother students during the earlier Vedic and Upanishad era. The Vedas accord women a very noble and revered standing. The study of the Vedas qualified them for further education. The Rig Veda was composed by at least twenty women, the most renowned of whom are Lopamudra, Visavara, Sikata, Nivavari, and Ghosha. Vedic history is full of educated women who worked hard to achieve perfection. Maitreyee was interested in the idea of immortality, Gargi represented scholars at the court of King Janak, and Atreyi was a devoted pupil of the sages Valmiki and Agastya. Women had the highest levels of education throughout the Vedic era. Women received the same education as men and took part in intellectual discussions. The level of women's education during the Buddhist era was at its lowest point since Lord Buddha detested women and believed they were the root of all evils. Thus, he had advocated against allowing women to enter monasteries throughout his lifetime. But after some time, at the urging of his beloved pupil Ananda, Buddha had agreed to various conditions and reservations, allowing roughly 500 women, including his stepmother, to enrol in Bihar.

Female Education in Contemporary India:

The history of women's education in contemporary India begins in the years following Indian Independence. Important women should receive an education, as suggested by the University Education Commission (1948-1949), Modular Commission (1952-1953), Kothari Commission (1964-1966), National Policy in Education (1968), and National Policy for Education (1986). The Indian government is currently taking steps to ensure that all Indian women have access to education. Today's women appear to be reading more books than ever before. India made women's education a requirement, and female literacy has increased relative to male literacy. Currently, both boys and girls are entitled to free primary schooling up until the age of 14 by the Indian Constitution. Several steps are taken to improve women's education after independence.

Sl. No.	ensusYear	Persons	Males	Females	e-Female gap in literacy rate
1.	1901	5.35	9.83	0.60	9.23
2.	1911	5.92	10.56	1.05	9.51
3.	1921	7.16	12.21	1.81	10.40
4.	1931	9.50	15.59	2.93	12.66
5.	1941	16.10	24.90	7.30	17.60
6.	1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
7.	1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
8.	1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.99
9.	1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
10.	1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
11	2001	64.83	75.26	53.67	21.59
12	2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India

Women's Empowerment Role Models Design in three dimensions:

Women's empowerment is viewed as a long-term process that transforms them into decision-makers who develop options, manage resources, and make strategic life decisions (Lee-Rife, 2010). She placed special emphasis on first-order choices in life, such as choosing a career, getting married, and having children, and how they affect less significant second-order choices, such as teaching kids values, managing home decisions on a daily basis, and managing the family's well-being.



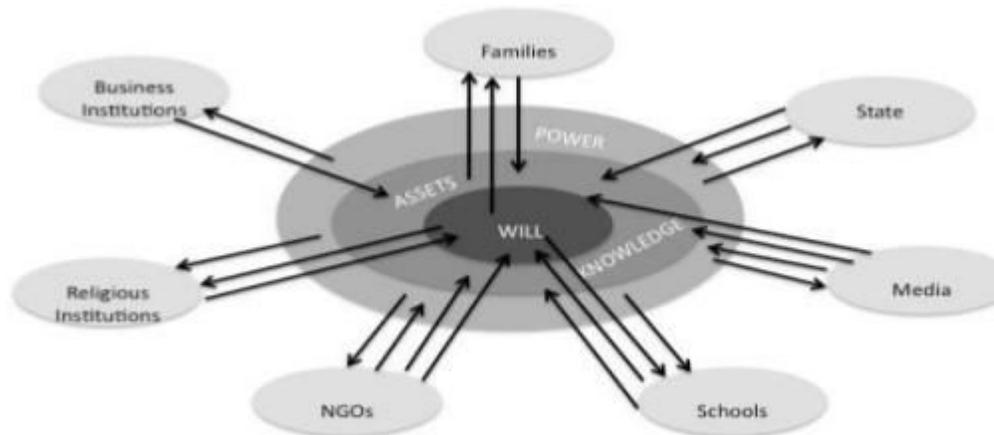
Source: Kabeer, (1999)

The researcher emphasised that empowerment is a necessary precondition for having access to resources because resources boost one's capacity to exercise choice (Kabeer, 1999). Kabeer emphasised that having access to resources alone is not enough for women; they must also be able to recognise and make use of them (Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender, 2002). According to Kabeer, empowerment is both a goal and a means to an end. For instance, one status is achieving education, another status is finding meaningful job, and a further step to it may be having influence over decisions pertaining to oneself or one's family. Therefore, obtaining an education can be a means to an end or an end in itself, but having the capacity for achievement is the ultimate goal of empowerment.

Framework for Thinking About The Commission on Women and Development:

The DAWN women's movement, Kabeer, Longwez, Rowlands, and Leon, as well as an international aid agency, the Commission for Women and Development, and the Belgian government developed an empowering framework and methodology. The panel believed that empowerment took place on two levels, namely the individual and the collective. However, the older model mainly focused on the individual components of empowerment and recognised the assets, knowledge, will, and capacity as the four key principles of empowerment. This paradigm divides resources into assets (material things that increase one's

economic power) and knowledge (which equips people with abilities like critical thinking, literacy, and technique). The ability to employ resources (assets, knowledge, and will) to make decisions and accept responsibility is defined as having the capacity. Will is then defined as the psychological strength or power within to make one's own choices.



(Source: Commission of Women and Development, 2007)

How the proposed models work:

The models covered in the second segment addressed variables affecting women's emancipation. The paradigms shared above examined three aspects of women's empowerment: economic empowerment, social empowerment, and political empowerment. These aspects of women's empowerment rely on legal safeguards, affirmative training policies, resource control, and numerous protective and promotion initiatives from the government, NGOs, and business world. In order to meet the Sustainable Development Goal on gender equality is must. The gaps between the current condition of women's empowerment in India and expectations from stakeholders are vividly discussed in this study.

Women's rights and constitutional provisions protecting women:

Basic rights and legal rights are the two types of rights that women in India have access to. The rights guaranteed by the constitution are those that are outlined in its many clauses. On the other hand, legal rights are those that are stipulated in the various laws (acts) passed by the parliament and state legislatures.

Women's Constitutional Rights The following is a list of the protections and privileges guaranteed to Indian women by the constitution:

1. Article 15(1) States are prohibited from discriminating against Indian citizens based on their sexual orientation.
2. Article 15(3) The state has the authority to make any gender-specific special provisions. In other words, this clause gives the government the authority to discriminate positively against women.
3. Article 16(2) No citizen shall be subjected to sex discrimination or be disqualified from holding any office or position under the state.
4. Forced labour and human trafficking are forbidden by Article 23(1).
5. Article 39(a) requires the state to guarantee an appropriate standard of living to both men and women.
6. Article 39(d) The state shall ensure that Indian men and women receive equal remuneration for equal effort.
7. Article 39(e) The state must make sure that women workers' health and strength are not exploited and that they are not coerced by economic necessity into occupations that are not a good fit for them.
8. Article 42 The state must provide for reasonable and humane working conditions and maternity leave.
9. Every Indian citizen is required under Article 51-A(e) to abandon behaviours that are disrespectful of women's dignity.
10. Article 243-D (3) Women must hold one-third of the seats in each panchayat that would be filled by direct election.

11. Article 243-D (4) Women are only allowed to hold one-third of the chairperson positions in the panchayats at each level.
12. Article 243-T (3) Every municipality shall reserve one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election for women.
13. Article 243-T (4) Women must be given preference for chairperson positions in municipalities in accordance with any provisions made by the state Legislature.

Legal Rights to women:

To following various legislations contain several rights and safeguards for women.

1. Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act 2005.
2. Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act 1956.
3. Indecent Representation of Women (prohibition) Act 1986.
4. Commission of Sati (prevention) Act 1987.
5. Dowry Prohibition Act 1961.
6. Maternity Benefit Act 1961.
7. Act of 1971 for Medical Abortion of Pregnancy.
8. The Pre-Natural Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act of 1994
9. The 1976 Equal Remuneration Act.
10. Muslim Marriage Dissolution Act of 1939.
- Act of 1986 protecting the rights of divorced Muslim women.
12. The 1984 Family Courts Act.
13. Indian Penal Code 1860, Section 13.
14. Code of Criminal Procedure, published in 1873.
15. The 1872 Indian Christian Marriage Act
16. Legal Services Authorities Act of 1987, Section 16.
17. The 1955 Hindu Marriage Act.
18. Hindu Succession Act of 1956, p. 18.
19. Minimum Wage Act of 1948, 19.
20. Factories Act of 1948 and the Mines Act of 1952.

Important Outcomes:

It is necessary to create awareness campaigns to inform women, particularly those from disadvantaged groups, about their legal rights. The history of women's education in India is examined in this paper. The history of women's education in Indian society shows that it was strong during the Vedic era. The general growth of India is greatly impacted by the education of women. There are several ways that women can be empowered, according to the current study. This study demonstrates that women are able to play an equal role in society alongside males when they are involved in making decisions in the social, economic, and political arenas. If women are encouraged to participate in all social, political, and economic aspects of the development process, the nation should be able to achieve sustainable development.

The current study shows that violence against women is widespread. A serious human rights violation is violence against women. The Indian government has made efforts to end violence against women and girls through a number of policies, legislation, and programmes. Also the current study demonstrates that numerous government agencies and non-governmental groups have provided opportunities through numerous plans, policies, and initiatives for women's empowerment. This report also demonstrates the government's efforts to promote social and economic independence for girls through a variety of programmes. The government recently introduced the Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao programme, which aims to provide girls financial and social independence.

Since 1986–1987, the Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) Scheme has been managed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development as a "Central Sector Scheme." The program's goal is to give women 16 years of age and older the competence and employability skills they need to start their own businesses or work for themselves. The grant under the Scheme is provided directly to a facility or organisation, including NGOs. The help will be offered in any industry,

including but not limited to agriculture, horticulture, food processing, handicrafts, computer and IT enable services, as well as soft skills and job-specific abilities like spoken English, gems and jewellery, travel and tourism, and hospitality (STEP, 2009).

Suggestion:

A few of the ideas are listed below:

- In order to improve women's empowerment, the government should place more focus on female education.
- More opportunities for women's empowerment should be created by the government.
- The government should educate women about the value of education and the availability of social services.
- To promote women's empowerment, the government and NGOs should organise numerous awareness campaigns.
- Adding more programmes geared toward encouraging female entrepreneurship could significantly improve the status of women in India.
- Governments must spend more money to create an atmosphere that is attentive to and supportive of girls.

Conclusion:

India's journey toward women's empowerment and gender equality began in 1947, when it attained independence. Even though there have been noticeable improvements in the areas of grassroots initiatives, human development, and legal reforms, New Delhi still has a long way to go in many areas of women's empowerment. To bridge the urban-rural divide and guarantee that rural women have equal access to healthcare, employment, education, and decision-making as their urban counterparts, more coordinated efforts are required. Since many of the obstacles to women's empowerment are attributed to patriarchal and patrilineal traditions that are ingrained in many South Asian civilizations, changing attitudes will be the most difficult challenge.

As a result, we can observe that in 21st century societies, women's empowerment for global development, their active role as agents of development, and their involvement and direction of their own growth are all acceptable. In the twenty-first century, women's education is crucial for their empowerment. Education is a crucial tool for empowering women and girls to take part in decisions that will affect their lives and help them rise in society. Women who are empowered become autonomous decision-makers. A nation may prosper socially, politically, and economically by empowering its women. A rural woman needs to be empowered from all angles in order to develop. For this, women should be given additional opportunities and benefits.

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