



Importance of Women Empowerment

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There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of the women – Kofi Annan

Women in our country have enjoyed a pivotal position both in the family and society in the traditional times and were considered equal to men. Women were said to have divine power and were worshipped as Goddesses. But today in modern India, women are considered to be second grade citizens. The evil and masculine forces in the society resist their forward march.

Inspite the provisions of the Indian Constitution, women continue to be victims of exploitation. Instances of violence against women have an astonishing and grim variety to it – Gender discrimination, female infanticide, acid throwing, domestic violence stemming out of dowry, harassment, vile and brutal gang rapes and many more.

Woman is the Procreator, one who bores the destiny of tomorrow. But in our society, the birth of a girl child is unwanted. Despite the innumerable campaigns by government promoting gender equality, female feticide and infanticide has continued. The 2011 Census data shows the child sex ratio was as low as 919 female per 1000 males. In Punjab, Haryana, Gujrat and Delhi it was as low as 846, 834, 890 and 871 female per 1000 males respectively. There are 940 females per 1000 males.

It is very discouraging that India, which has successfully accomplished the mars mission in the maiden attempt and acclaimed the status of first Asian country to do so, is ranked 29th among 146 countries on the basis of Gender Inequality Index.

Denial of opportunities to the women also has adverse effect on India's economy. Women constitute only about 30% of the workforce and thus country's per capita incomes lags significantly. It becomes irrefutable to empower women through concerted efforts.

Swami Vivekananda has said, *"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of the women is improved, it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing"*.

Women empowerment means to liberate women from the vicious grip of gender-based, social, economical discrimination, giving equal opportunity and freedom to take life decisions. Men and women should enjoy same rights and perform same duties. The patriarchal Indian society should become society with parity.

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Education is an important and indispensable tool for women empowerment. It makes women aware of their rights and responsibilities. Education leads to rise in women's ability and capacity to control their lives. As per the 2011 Census, the total literacy rate in India is closely 75% and the rate of literacy among women is 65.45%. This means that more than 34% of women who are illiterate have limited ability to obtain and understand essential information, are dependent on others for living or stuck in low-paying, low-security work or can be the victim of extreme poverty. There is no ambiguity in saying that education is one key variable that influences various other social and economical factors like upliftment of women, economic growth, access to health care, better quality of life, health of infants, rate of infant mortality, access to better opportunity, increased life expectancy and well being of the family.

Mahatma Gandhi has rightly said, *"Educate one man, you educate one person, but educate a woman and you educate a whole civilization"*.

Justice delayed is justice denied, efforts should be taken to streamline the legal procedure to deliver fair and in-time justice to the victims of heinous crimes like rapes, sexual harassment, acid attack, trafficking and domestic violence. Harsh and punitive punishment should be given to the culprits. Such measures can assist in reduction of crimes against women and provide a safe environment for them.

During British rule, various social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidhyasagar, Jyotirao Phule and Mahatma Gandhi advocated women empowerment. Their efforts led to abolition of Sati and formulation of Widow Remarriage Act.

Various social, economical and political provisions have been incorporated in the Indian Constitution for women empowerment. These provisions, Right to Equality under Article 14 of the constitution guarantees to all Indian women equality before law; Equal Pay for Equal Work under Article 39(d), guards the economic rights of the women by guaranteeing equal pay for equal work; and Maternity Relief under article 42, allows provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane condition of work and maternity relief for women. Acts like the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, prohibits the request, payment or acceptance of dowry. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, provides for more effective protection of rights of women who are victim of domestic violence; Sexual Harassment of women at work place (Prevention, prohibition and redressal) Act, 2013, helps to create a conducive environment at work place where they are not subjected to any sort of sexual harassment. Prenatal Diagnostic techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act in 1994.

As per the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, all the local elected bodies reserve one-third of their seats for women. Women's Reservation bill(108th Amendment bill) proposes to reserves 33% of all seats in the lower house of parliament of India and in all legislative assemblies for women(this is pending in Lok Sabha)

Various initiatives have been taken and schemes are introduced to empower women by the Government of India. Some of them are as follows:

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- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme: It was started on 22nd January, 2015

Objective is to prevent gender biased sex selective elimination, ensure survival & protection of the girl child and to ensure education of the girl child.

- Balika *Samridhi* Yojna
- Kishori Sakti Yojna
- Nutrition Program for Adolescent Girls
- Women Helpline Scheme
- UJJAWALA : A Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation
- Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme For the Children of Working Mothers
- Ministry approves new projects under Ujjawala Scheme and continues existing projects
- SWADHAR Greh (A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances)
- Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)
- NARI SHAKTI PURASKAR
- Awardees of Stree Shakti Puruskar, 2014 & Awardees of Nari Shakti Puruskar
- Awardees of Rajya Mahila Samman & Zila Mahila Samman
- Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) - A Conditional Maternity Benefit Scheme

The above programs are devised for the upliftment of women. Importance should be given for their proper implementation.

Empowering women socially, economically, educationally, politically and legally has become a mandate now. It is time to create a world where all women can meet their potential without impediment or prejudice and invigorate the all round development.

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