



EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA- HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Women Empowerment Means Emancipation Of Women From The Vicious Grip Of Social, Economical, Political, Cast Gender- Based Discrimination. It Means Granting Women The Freedom To Make Life Choices. Women Should Be Able To Express Her Thoughts And Imaginations Freely And Create Self Condence And To Negotiate For Power To Gain Asserts And Decision Making. Empowerment Is A Multi Dimensional Process Which Enables Individuals Or A Group Of Individuals To Realize The Identity And Powers In All Spears Of Life. Webster Dictionary Denes The Word Empowerment That The Situation Of Authority To Be Powerful. Empowerment Means A Process Which Gives Authority To Women To Challenge Any Situation. Therefore The Term Empowerment Has Multi Dimensional , And Focused To Describe The Process Wherein A Group Or Individuals Are Able To Enhance Their Status In Society And Allows Them To Participate In Overall Growth. In Other Word It Is An Active Multi Dimensional Process Which Enables Them To Realize Their Identity, Position, Power In All Spheres Of Life. This Freed Them From The All Kinds Of Customs, Beliefs, Faiths, And Evil Practices That Prevailed In The Society.

It Is Often Said That The Status And Position Of Women In Society Are The Best Way To Understand A Civilization, Its Progress And Its Shortcomings. In Case Of India, Women Have Come A Long Way From Women Sages And Scholars In The Rig Vedic Period To Women In The Armed Forces, IT Sector, Politics, Industry And Other Significant Areas While Balancing Their Role As A Daughter, Wife And Mother. This Journey Towards Modernization Has Not Been Easy. Women Have Had To Fight The Traditional Indian Male-Dominated Society To Emerge As Stronger And Independent Entities. While All These Are Positive Developments, Cases Of Rape, Harassment At Workplace And Dowry Deaths Are Rampant. Illiteracy And Ignorance About Their Rights Are Still Prevalent Among A Majority Of The Women. It Is In This Background This Paper Lays Stress On The Evolution, Status, Development Of Women And Their Empowerment In India From A Historical Point Of View.

Key Words: Empowerment, Women, Indian Constitution, Laws.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Position Of Women In India, A Historical Analysis:

Historical Evidence Proves That The Position Of Women In Indian Had Been Deteriorated Since Its Inception Of Indian History. During Rigvedic Period Women Enjoyed Equal Respect Liberty Along With Men In Society. She Is The Member Of Public Offices Like Sabah And Samity. Since The Inception Of The Later Vedic Civilization Women Were Denied The Rights To Education And Widow Remarriage, Denied The Rights Of Inheritance And Ownership Of Property. The Emergence Of Verna System Introduced By Manu Led To The Rise Of Supremacy Of Some Verna Men Over The Other Members Of The Society As Well As Women.

The History Of Women's Empowerment In The Ancient Age Is Quite Confusing Because On One Side It Encouraged Women To Choose Their Life Partner On Their Own And On The Other Side, They Were Forced To Perform Sati As Per Social Norms. The First Ever Social Network For Women Was Created In Ancient Age, And It Was Known As The "Bhikkuni Sangh". It Was Created By The "Enlightened Buddha". As Per Buddha, Women Too Can Achieve Nirvana By The Systematic Practice Of His Teachings (Dhamma). This Was An Unprecedented Step.

Though Women Had Given Respect In Family, Several Restrictions Were Imposed On The Rights Of Women And Other Members Of Society Out Of These Varna's. Some Verna's Were Excluded From Society They Were Give The Status Of Slaves To The Upper Verna's. Then These Verna's Fell In The Fold Of They Were Supreme Than The Other Fellow Beings, They Were Given Special Privileges, And Rights, They Monopolize Certain Profession Which Were Treated As High Position In The Society. Many People Were Denied To Get Education , Education Was The Only Privilege Of Few Verna's, Women Were Not Allowed To Get Education , Her Duties

Were Specically Mentioned She Begot The Children And Patronized Them , Serve Men And Fulll His Desires , She Was Not Allowed To Come Out Of The House . During Gupta Period, The Status Of Women Immensely Deteriorated. Dowry Becomes An Institution. During The Muslim Period Evil Practices Crept Into Society, To Protect The Child From The Atrocities Of Muslim Invaders Child Marriage, And Sati System, Parda System, Came Into Being. Women Were Restricted To The Kitchens; They Were Not Allowed To Wonder In The Public Without The Support Of Male Members. Untoucability Crept Into Society They Were Not Allowed Into The Main Village. But During The British Period, Many Social Reformers Such As Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Eswara Chandra Vidyasagar , And Jyothiba Phule ,Veerasalingam, Gurajada Apparao Started Agitation For The Empowerment Of Women. The Efforts Of Raja Ram Mohan Roy Led To The Abolition Of Sati. By The Efforts Of Vidyasagar , And Veerasalingam And Gurajada Apparao Widow Remarriage Act Was Passed. Later On Mahatma Gandhi And Nehru Advocated For The Women Rights. As A Result Of Their Concrete Efforts, The Status Of Women In Social Life, Economic And Political Life Began To Elevate In The Society.

Need For Women Empowerment:

In This Contemporary World, Women Need To Gain The Same Amount Of Power That Men Have. Now, It Is Time To Forget That Men Are The Only Holders Of Power. In India, Women Are Still Facing Different Obstacles In Male-Dominated Cultures. The Things Are Related To Women'S Status And Their Future. However, I Believe That Indian Women Are Slowly Getting Empowerment In The Sectors Like Education, Politics, The Work Force And Even More Power Within Their Own Households. The Worth Of Civilization Can Be Arbitrated By The Place Given To Women In The Society. Today, Women Are Busy Running In The Presidential Campaign. The Work Force Is Covered With Intellectual Women Who Currently Hold The CEO Positions At Large Companies Which Were Never Held By Indian Women In Long Ago. In Our Country, Women Have Reached A Long Way Eventually And Have Discovered A New Path For Them To Come. Women Rights Are Human Rights. The Concept Of Feminism Is Very Vogue. Feminist Usually Deals Out Balky Attention. Women'S Right And Changes Effort To Win Equality For Women Have Containing Women's Suffrage, Feminism, Women's Property Rights, Equal Opportunity In Work And Education, And Equal Pay. Now, The Future Of Women Is Seeking Out. More, We Have Come Across A More Image Of Gender Differences. Each Year, We Notice That The Headline As "Girls Outshine Boys" In CBSE, ICSE And State Board Results As Well. It Arrests Us Showing That Girls Are Now More Confident Of Getting Better-Paid Professional Jobs Than Their Flagging Male Counterparts. Clearly, There Is An Excellent Amount Of Reason For The Girls To Be More Confident Than Boys And This Is Because Of Their Remarkable Academic Feat Around The Nation. This Achievement Of Girls Is An Absolute Reversal Of What Would Have Been Expected A Generation Ago. This Is Likely To Steer To Higher-Income Jobs. The Empowerment Is An Aid To Help Women To Achieve Equality With Men Or, At Least, To Reduce Gender Gap Considerably. Without Empowerment Certain Social Roles Cannot Be Performed. Women Play A Distinct Role In The Economic Development. She Is The Chief Architect Of Family, The First Teacher; Supplier Of Labour Power And By Playing Main Role In The Development Of Agriculture, Industry, Service Sector, Socio-Culture Etc. Creates A Civilized Society. In The Visible And Invisible Form Women Contribute For Economic Development.

Empowerment If Ever Possible:

Women Empowerment Is Understood As A Very Narrow Term In Today World. When We Talk About Women Empowerment In India The Most Important Aspect That Comes Into Mind Is The Attitude Of The Society Towards Women. Women Are Still Considered As Burden And Liabilities And Properties. These Kind Of Attitudes Give Birth To The Evil Of Violence Against Women. Women Empowerment In India Is Not Possible Unless Violence Against Women Is Eradicated From The Society. Women's Rights And Issues Have Always Been A Subject Of Serious Concern Of Academicians, Intelligentsia And Policy Makers. The Women Issues Have Received Tremendous Attention In The Planning Circle And In Wide Intellectual Discussions And Forums At National And Global Platforms. However The Existing Lacuna In The Formulation And Execution Of The Policies Has Not Changed The Grass Root Situation To A Great Extent. The Continuity Of Changes In Socio-Economic And Psycho-Cultural Aspects Of Human Living Has Influenced The Role Of Women. With The Process Of Industrialization, Modernization And Globalization Showing Its Deep Impact On The Human Society All Over The World, The Role And Responsibilities Of Women Has Attained New Definition And Perspective. Further This Has Also Led To Addition Of Responsibilities And Widened The Role Of Women Who Also Shares The Financial Responsibilities .The Women Rights Are The Means By Which A Dignified Living Is Ensured Thereby

Safeguarding Her Privileges. Thus The Basic Fundamental Rights Of Speech, Freedom And Decision-Making Are Her Basic Rights As An Individual And Citizen. The Right For Education And Employment Are Significant For Women Development And National Development In The Wider Sense. The Power And Freedom To Exercise These Rights Is Women Empowerment. Women Rights And Empowerment Are Not Independent Of Each Other. The Women Empowerment Can Only Be Facilitated Only If She Is Able To Exercise Her Right In The Socioeconomic Spheres Of Decision-Making. In Last Few Years We Have Seen Considerable Improvement In Women Education In India. More And More Women Are Coming Out Of Houses And Opt For Education In India. That Is The Reason, Why We Are Seeing Lot Of Women On Top Positions In India.

Evolution Of Women Empowerment In India

From The Eighteenth Century Onwards, We Have, Besides Indian Sources, Western Evidence On The Condition Of Women. This Century, In Political Terms, Was A Major Break From The Past With The Decline Of The Mughal Empire After The Death Of Aurangzeb In AD 1707. Powerful Political Forces Were Released With The Emergence Of The Sikhs In Punjab, Strong Rajput States In Rajasthan, Muslim Independent States In Oudh And In Bengal, But Most Importantly With The Rise Of The Marathas. The Marathas Were To Become The Flavour Of The Eighteenth Century Until They Were Overshadowed By East India Company In The Late Eighteenth And Early Nineteenth Century. In The Nineteenth Century The Position Of Women Suffered In A Big Way With The Share Of Education Declining To Almost Nothing. The Existence Of Widespread Network Of Elementary Schools And Higher Educational Institutions Is Commented Upon The Foreign Observers But Girls' Attendance In Them Is Not Mentioned. It Is Possible That Due To Constant Internecine Warfare, It Was Not Safe To Send Girls To Schools. Contemporary European Writers Have Commented Upon The Piety, Chastity And Modesty Of Indian Women And Also Mentioned The Absence Of Insecurity In Their Movement. Purdah Was Observed In The North, Very Widely Among Hindus And Muslim Of The Higher Classes, Though It Was Not Prevalent Among The Poor. Maratha Women Moved Freely And So Did Women In South Except For The Landed Classes In Andhra Pradesh And Moplah Women In Malabar. Marriage For Women Were Almost Universal. Polygamy Was Confined To Princes And Men Of High Rank And Among Kulin Brahmins In Bengal. Remarriage Of Widows Was Not Common Among The Higher Classes. Non-Brahman Women In Maharashtra Could Remarry. Sati And Selling Into Slavery Of Girl Children And Young Women In Times Of Distress Was Prevalent Though They Were, In General, Treated Kindly. Exceptional Women, Both Among The Hindu And The Muslims, Asserted Themselves Politically. Ahalyabai Of Indore Was An Exemplary Ruler. The Wife Of Mused Quli Khan, Dardanah Begum, Urged Him To Fight Against Ali Verdi Khan When He Invaded Orissa. Zebunissa Begum, Wife Of Nawabshaja-Ud-Din, Assisted Her Husband In Administration. Significant Reform Movements For Improving The Status Of Women Were Not There Except For The Sikhs Who'S Gurus Insisted That Women Should Occupy Apposition Of Honour.

Empowerment Of Women After Independence

The Status Of Women In The Family, Their Illiteracy, Early Marriage, Widowhood Was Major Issues On Which The Social Reforms Movement In India Agitated For Over Two Centuries In India. The Patriarchal Society In India Had Pushed Down The Status Of Women, From The High Positions They Were Said To Occupy In The Vedic Period. Having Achieved Freedom From Foreign Domination, And Been Exposed To New Values That Emerged Through The United Nations, The Constitution Of India Emerged With All These Values Firmly Enriched In Its Framework. There Was A Special Space For Women Who Had Proved Themselves No Less Patriotic Or Less Energetic In The Freedom Struggle. Right From The Inception Of The Indian Republic In January 1950, The Right Of Women To Vote Was Recognized, And Women Have Exercised That Right Since Then. The Constitution Of India Provided For Women'S Equality With Men. The Special Provisions In The Constitution Of India Designed To Secure Equality Of Sexes And Non-Discrimination Are:

1-Equality Before Law And Equal Protection Of Law (Article 14). •

2-State Shall Not Discriminate Against Any Citizen On Grounds Only Of Religion, Race, Caste, Sex Or Place Of Birth. And The State Is Permitted To Make Any Provision For Women And Children. (Article 15). •

3-Equality Of Opportunity In Public Employment. (Article 16).

4-Equal Rights For Men And Women To Adequate Means Of Livelihood. (Article 39(A)).

5- Humane Conditions Of Work And Maternity Relief For Women. (Article 42).

6- To Secure For All Citizens A Uniform Civil Code Throughout The Country. (Article 44).

7- It Is A Constitutional Duty Of Every Citizen Of India To Renounce Practices Derogatory To The Dignity Of Women. (Article 51 A (E)).

8-Not Less Than One-Third Of The Total Number Of Seats To Be Filled By Direct Elections 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)).

9-Not Less Than One-Third Of The Total Number Of Offices Of Chairpersons In The Panchayats At Each Level To Be Reserved For Women (Article 243 D (4)).

10-Not Less Than One-Third Of The Total Number Of Seats To Be Filled By Direct Elections In Every Municipality To Be Reserved For Women And Such Seats To Be Allotted By Rotation To Different Constituencies Of A Municipality (Article 243 T (4)).

Legislative Measures For Safeguarding Women's Interest:

After Independence The Government Of India Has Taken Following Legislative Measures For Safeguarding Women's Interest.

- The Special Marriage Act, 1954- This Act Fixed The Age Of Marriage At 21 For Males And 18 For Females And Provided Right To Women For Inter-Caste Marriage, Love Marriage And Registered Marriage.
- The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955-Prohibits Child Marriage, Polygamy, Polyandry & Provides Equal Rights To Women To Divorce And To Remarry.
- The Hindu Succession Act, 1956- Provides Right To Parental Property.
- The Hindu Adoption And Maintenance Act, 1956 –According To This Act Childless Woman Can Adopt A Child And Claim Maintenance From Her Husband If She Is Divorced By Him.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961-Prevents Giving And Taking Dowry And Women Exploitation.
- The Suppression Of Immoral Traffic Of Women And Girls Act, 1956. • The Medical Termination Of Pregnancy Act, 1971.
- The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983.
- The Family Court Act, 1984.
- The Indecent Representation Of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986

Women's Reservation Bill

Since From 1990 Debates And Campaigns Within The Women's Movement In India Have Certainly Witnessed A New Focus On Women In Electoral Politics. Demands For Reservation Of Seats First At The Local Level Bodies (Village Councils And Municipalities) And Beginning In 1996, Through Vain Attempts To Pass Legislation For A One-Third Quota In State And National Assemblies Would Be Clear Indication Of India's Own Investment In The Dimension Of Gender Equality. Therefore The Passing Of The Women's Reservation Bill In The Rajya Sabha On 9 March, 2010 Marked A Historic Turning Point In The Story Of Indian Democracy.¹⁸

II. CONCLUSION:

To Conclude, It Might Be Observed That India Has Enacted Many Constitutional And Legislative Provisions For Empowerment Of Women. Many Development Schemes Especially For Women Have Also Been Launched For Improving Their Fortune. Such Measures Have Started Giving Positive Outcomes Relating To Women's Problems. But The Position Of Women In Our Country Still Leaves Much To Be Desired. Top Priority Should Be Given In Our Developmental Plans For Improving Female Literacy And Creating Skills And Capability Among Women For Enabling Them To Stand On Their Own Feet. Unless The Process Of Development Is Properly Engendered, It Shall Remain Endangered. One Concurrent Example Of Gender Discrimination Is Glass-Ceiling Effect. The Term "Glass Ceiling" Is Used To Describe An Invisible Barrier Where Women Are Deprived Of Opportunities At All Levels Of Employment And Are Discriminated Only Because They Are Women. No Doubt Women Have The Potential To Achieve An Equal Footing With Men. But, It Is The Social Practices And Male Attitudes That Are Making An Effective And Invisible Barrier Preventing Women From Rising Above A Certain Point. Empowerment Of Women Could Only Be Achieved If Their Economic And Social Status Is Improved. This Could Be Possible Only By Adopting Definite Social And Economic Policies With A View Of Total Development Of Women And To Make Them Realize That They Have The Potential To Be Strong Human Beings. The First And Foremost Priority Should Be Given To The Education Of Women, Which Is The Grass Root Problem. Swami Vivekananda Had Said "That Nation Which Doesn't Respect Women Will Never Become Great Now And Nor Will Ever In Future" And In Pursuit Of Making India A Great Nation, Let Us Work Towards Giving Women Their Much Deserved Status.

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