



Women in Contemporary Indian Society

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Abstract - Women empowerment in India has evolved through a long historical and socio-cultural journey. Although Indian society has traditionally valued women and celebrated their contributions, their real status remained contradictory for centuries. Women were symbolically praised for their strength and sacrifice, yet their personal and social freedoms were limited by deep-rooted patriarchal norms. This duality restricted their independence, education, and participation in decision-making, slowing down the process of genuine empowerment. With the rise of social reform movements, educational awareness, and constitutional provisions, the path toward women empowerment gradually became stronger. Legal rights, improved access to education, and equality before the law created new opportunities for women to participate in public life. Today, women are advancing from rural governance to scientific research, proving their abilities in every sphere. Despite these achievements, empowerment remains incomplete due to persistent social evils such as female foeticide, domestic violence, dowry, child marriage, and gender discrimination. Safety concerns and unequal access to resources continue to hinder women's holistic development. Often, societal attitudes—more than legal measures—create barriers to women's freedom, mobility, and decision-making power. In the contemporary scenario, women empowerment signifies not only economic or educational progress but also the ability to make independent choices, break traditional constraints, and assert one's identity. As awareness grows and women gain confidence, they are becoming active participants in shaping society. Ensuring equal rights, dignity, and safety is essential for building an inclusive and progressive India. True women empowerment requires a shift in collective mindset along with the effective implementation of constitutional rights. When women are free from discrimination and provided equal opportunities, they contribute significantly to the nation's social, economic, and cultural development. Empowering women is therefore not only a moral responsibility but also a vital foundation for sustainable national progress.

Keywords - Development, Education, Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, Women's Rights.

I. Introduction

Women have always held a central position in society, yet their identity has often been limited by traditional structures. The text highlights that although women possess inherent strength, creativity, and the ability to nurture life, social norms have historically confined them to narrow roles. Women's subordination was reinforced through customs, economic dependency, and a lack of educational opportunities. However, modern society increasingly recognizes that true progress is impossible without women's active and equal participation. Today, women are overcoming barriers through access to education, legal rights, and greater participation in public life. Their contributions in science, engineering, administration, politics, and social



reforms demonstrate their capability when given equal opportunities. The transformation of women's roles—from restricted domestic boundaries to empowered social leadership—shows the changing mindset of society. Thus, women's empowerment is not only a necessity for gender equality but also the foundation for a just, progressive, and inclusive society.

II. Importance of Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment in today's society involves providing women with equal rights, opportunities, and the freedom to make their own decisions. Women constitute half of the nation's population, and if they remain backward, the progress of the country becomes impossible.

Therefore, for the upliftment of the family and society, it is essential to ensure women's education and empowerment. Empowering even one woman in every household can contribute significantly to social development. (Sharma, 2016, p.88). Although many countries, including India, have made progress through education, legal reforms, and awareness campaigns, women still face obstacles such as discrimination, workplace inequality, domestic responsibilities, and safety concerns. Women management is imperative for Integrated Development and for the betterment of any country's future as they play twin responsibilities of managing their families whereas at the same time juggling to earn to contribute in fulfilling the fabric desires of their families, nobody will ever ignore the importance of the role of a woman in their families. Now they have conjointly established themselves as equal contributors in managing the money needs of their homes. (Singh & Singh, 2020, pg.101). Freedom of decision making within and outside home makes them empowered women. Women have important role in progress of any family, society, and country. Indian history shows that women are an integral part of each moment from Hindu Mythology to India's struggle for independence and post-independence developing era. Equal participation in the social, political, and economic spheres including the institutions of governance and decision-making is women empowerment in true sense. Women are usually the most exploited and least privileged members of households and as the primary care givers of their families; they are often overburdened with domestic work for their families.

A society cannot develop if half of its population remains deprived, which makes women's education and self-reliance the greatest need of today. Until women become aware of their rights and capable of protecting them, they cannot uplift themselves, and inequality will continue. To end this inequality, women must come forward and take definite steps themselves so that true empowerment can begin. Only then will meaningful change occur in society and the condition of women become truly strong. (Shukla, 2017, p.165). The importance of empowerment lies in the choices, roles and responsibilities which are handled by women. It is very crucial to understand the choice of woman and her responsibilities towards her family and society. They have little or no autonomy in most cases when it comes to the sphere of decision making. Development in the field of science and technology, universalization of education, modernization and similar developments have changed the approach of people towards women up to a certain extent. These developments boosted the morale and self-confidence of women. Many of those women who could grab the opportunities



extended to them have proved that they are capable of discharging the responsibilities assigned to them on par with men. (Rao,2009, p.837). At the same time, new opportunities have emerged through digital literacy, economic participation, government initiatives, and changing social attitudes. Now modern society is transforming both the struggles and possibilities for women's empowerment.

Barriers to Women's Empowerment and the Path Forward

Traditional gender roles, patriarchal beliefs, and social expectations often limit women's autonomy. Barriers include early marriage, domestic workload, lack of mobility, and pressure to prioritize family over career. Gender stereotypes in media and society also shape women's self-perception. Transformative interventions—such as awareness programs, community support groups, gender-sensitive education, legal reforms, and media representation—can help overcome these barriers. This section explores how society can shift towards equality by changing both mindsets and systems. Some qualities to be developed by women to become truly empowered are awareness about risk prevailing at home, at work place, during traveling and staying outside home. They should have political, legal, economic, and health awareness. They should have a positive attitude towards life. They should set goals for the future and strive to achieve them with courage.

The three main dimensions of women's empowerment are self-respect, self-reliance, and self-confidence. If a woman is aware of herself and her rights, and if her sense of self-respect has grown, then she is empowered and capable. Economic independence is also essential, because women's empowerment does not mean giving her something as charity or favour, but making her sufficiently capable so that her personality can develop fully. (Kumar, 2018, pp. 255-256). The origin of the gender inequality is the root cause of male dominance society. In India, a woman still needs an anchor because of the challenges created by patriarchal norms. Social norms and family structure in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. The society is more biased in favour of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities. Due to gender bias in health and nutrition there is unusually high mortality rate in women reducing their population further especially in Asia, Africa and China. (Unnisa, 2019, pp. 160-161). The attainment in the field of income/employment and in educational front, the scenario of women empowerment seems to be comparatively poor. 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.

Socio-Economic and Cultural Obstacles to Women's Empowerment

Gender equality means that all genders should have equal access to resources, rights, and opportunities. Women's agency refers to their ability to make independent choices and influence their lives. A critical analysis shows that empowerment is not only dependent on laws but also on attitudes, societal norms, and the distribution of power within families and institutions. For true gender equality, women must enjoy both legal rights and social acceptance of their choices. Although both men and women often perform the same work, many employers still pay women lower wages, justifying this discrimination by claiming differences in physical strength. This belief reinforces unequal treatment and results in women being unfairly oppressed through wage



inequality. Due to poverty, illiteracy, and lack of awareness about labour laws and protective legislation, many women accept such exploitation because they have no alternative. Their vulnerable socio-economic condition forces them to take up work even in dangerous and hazardous industries, where they face increased risks and continued inequality. (Kumar, 2016, p.89).

The root causes of the problems faced by women workers still persist today. Poor economic conditions and financial dependency continue to contribute to their vulnerable situation. The nation can overcome these issues only by recognising that women are equal partners to men, gifted with the same mental abilities and entitled to the same opportunities. Treating women as companions rather than subordinates is essential for improving their status and ensuring fair and dignified working conditions. Raising the voice through this may strengthen legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of gender inequalities. Violence against women is a global issue affecting millions across age groups, social classes, ethnic communities, and regions. It represents not only individual suffering but also the deep structural inequalities that allow gender-based harm to persist. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), one in three women worldwide experiences physical violence in her lifetime. This ongoing crisis is rooted in long-standing cultural norms and unequal power relations that favour men. Among the strongest socio-cultural factors contributing to violence is the patriarchal system, which places men in dominant positions and limits women's freedom.

In many communities, traditional expectations uphold male authority and restrict women's autonomy, often normalising or excusing abusive behaviour as a way to preserve social order. (Elahi, 2024, pp. 86-88). Domestic violence remains one of the most widespread issues faced by women. Its prevalence is rooted in the orthodox and ignorant belief that women are physically and emotionally weaker than men. Among the various forms of domestic violence, verbal abuse is the most common, followed by financial abuse, while emotional abuse is reported least. The major causes identified include stress for verbal and financial violence, alcoholism for physical violence, and refusal to cohabit along with stress for emotional and social violence. These patterns are observed among both single-earner and dual-earner couples, showing that domestic violence persists across different economic settings. (Pendharkar, Tara, & Pandey, 2016, p.11). Working women in India continue to face significant social and economic challenges despite growing awareness about gender equality. Traditional family structures, unequal domestic responsibilities, and limited decision-making power often restrict their personal and professional growth. Many women struggle to balance paid employment with household duties due to societal expectations and lack of supportive infrastructure. Social prejudices, workplace discrimination, and inadequate access to education further hinder their empowerment. Strengthening women's financial independence, ensuring equal opportunities, and promoting supportive family and workplace environments are essential for building a more equitable society. (Mehra & Jayaswal, 2024, p.31).

Women's Education and Empowerment



Women's education constitutes a critical foundation for achieving social development and gender equality. Women's education is essential not only for personal development but also for psychological, social, and economic empowerment. Educated women gain improved decision-making ability, higher self-confidence, and greater participation in family and community life. Access to education enables them to overcome traditional restrictions and contributes to social transformation. Government initiatives and constitutional provisions have played a significant role in expanding educational opportunities for women.

Despite progress, persistent social norms still limit women's full educational attainment, highlighting the urgent need for continued efforts to promote equal and quality education for all women. (Kumari, 2016, p.48). If parents are reluctant to send their daughters to school because they are needed at home to help with domestic work, the idea of non-formal education often comes up as a solution—adjusting schooling to fit into the girls' work schedules. However, this approach shifts attention away from a deeper problem. We aim to highlight the link between child labour and education, with a special focus on girls' education. The argument is that unless policymakers clearly recognize children's full-time household work—done at the cost of their schooling—as a form of child labour, the goal of universal elementary education will remain out of reach. (Sonkar, 2011, p.106).

The women's movement in India has historically challenged cultural restrictions, social discrimination, and patriarchal customs that limited women's freedoms. Feminist voices have emphasized the need to reject oppressive traditions and establish equal rights for women in every sphere of life. The Indian Constitution, influenced strongly by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, guarantees equality through provisions such as equal pay, protection against discrimination, and rights to property, education, and employment. Articles 14, 15, 16, 39, and 42 collectively ensure women's social, economic, and political empowerment. Continued legislative efforts aim to eliminate practices like dowry, child marriage, and gender-based violence, reinforcing the commitment to women's dignity and human rights. (Kuril, 2016, p.42). Appropriate steps should be taken by the educational authorities with the participation of communities in order to bring the girl children to the main stream of education and development at every level.

Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality

Women's empowerment begins with awareness of their rights and the recognition of the many roles they fulfil within the family and society. A woman simultaneously contributes as a caregiver, educator, and manager of the household, making her indispensable to social development. As highlighted by leaders like Indira Gandhi, no society can achieve true progress until women receive their rightful status and opportunities. Women's intelligence, skill, and dedication have continually strengthened India's social and political spheres. Their active participation is therefore essential for building a balanced and progressive society. Women's empowerment is essential for improving their social, economic, and political status within society. For generations, women were denied equal rights and confined to limited roles, but modern social reforms and government efforts have emphasized the need to uplift their position. As women actively contribute to education, family welfare, and cultural development, their participation becomes crucial in shaping a progressive and balanced society.



Therefore, ensuring women's education, equality, and freedom is fundamental to achieving sustainable national development. (Kumari, 2020, p.17). Addressing discriminatory norms and practices is essential for building a society where women can exercise autonomy and agency. Women around the world nevertheless regularly suffer violations of their human rights throughout their lives and realizing women's human rights has not always been a priority. Achieving equality between women and men requires a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which women experience discrimination and are denied equality so as to develop appropriate strategies to eliminate such discrimination. (Kumar, 2019, p.104). Promoting gender-sensitive policies enables women to contribute more effectively to national progress and community development. A comprehensive approach to empowerment must include legal protection, social awareness, and active participation of all members of society.

III. Conclusion

Women's empowerment in the contemporary scenario is both a reflection of social transformation and a necessary condition for sustainable national development. Although significant progress has been made through education, legal reforms, and changing social attitudes, women continue to face structural inequalities rooted in patriarchy and socio-economic barriers. True empowerment requires more than policy changes; it demands a shift in collective mindsets, the dismantling of discriminatory practices, and the creation of environments where women can exercise autonomy, dignity, and decision-making power. Strengthening education, economic participation, and legal protection remains essential for closing gender gaps. When women are fully empowered, they become active contributors to social progress, ensuring a more just, equitable, and inclusive future for all.

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