

## **POSITION, CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS FACED BY WOMEN IN THE JOURNEY FOR EMPOWERMENT THROUGH AGES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present paper is an attempt to define, analyse women empowerment and understand the challenges that women has been undergoing through ages in achieving the desired levels of empowerment are identified, important being a). access to productive resources b). sexual harassment, gender discrimination etc and tools for the desired factors which can empower them are also discussed.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Men and women are not only two basic components in our society but are considered as two wheels of a chariot that depends on each other to constitute a population. Women in India from vedic period till date have changed with times. She was suppressed, worshipped, respected while at the same time she was subjected to violence. Hence it is necessary to analyse her status in the various ages to assess her present position in the society. <sup>1,2</sup>

### **History of women in vedic period (1500 BC – 1000 BC)**

The Indian culture tradition begins with vedic period (300 BC to 600 BC). During this period, women were given complete freedom, she was treated as Ardhangini in a family and received equal education on par with man, marriages were not imposed on her, after completion of education she had a power to select her life partner. A spinster had a right to inherit her father's property. Prabhus has rightly remarked that in vedic period, women had equal rights in social, economic, political and religious fields.

**Status of women during the epic period (1000 BC to 500 BC)**

Epic age was regarded as golden age of women wherein she was well educated and accorded a honourable status in socio economical and political activities. She was depicted in two great epics as root of dharma, pleasure and prosperity when woman possessed unconditioned economic freedom. During Ramayana and Mahabharatha, women were accorded a respectable position. Hence they were called roots of Dharma, prosperity and enjoyment. Women were dignified with a respectable status, honoured, participated in all socio cultural activities on par with men. During Rig vedic period, all genders were offered the privilege of equal education and opportunities.

**Jainism and Buddhism period (600 BC to 200 BC)**

During this period, the women were encouraged to lead a liberal and honourable life, she achieved excellence in painting, music and fine arts. However, women's economic status deteriorated during this period as she was prohibited in political participation. During this era manu law stated that childhood of female must be subjected to her father, in youth to her husband and after death of her husband to her sons.

**Dharmasastra period**

The conflicting social and religious thoughts converted the position of women to the sub ordinate, women were deprived vedic learning, gender inequality creped into society. During Dharmasastras, Sati was in practice, women were barred from practicing religious activities women status began to decline in 200 BC in Dharmasastra period with manusmitri. Many research studies have emphasized the role played by Indian societal structures in molding the women status which overtime had hindered their progress. Women's dignified role and position were portrayed in the ancient era has been categorized into four distinct periods –

- A. Vedic epic period
- B. Epic period
- C. Jainism and Buddhist period
- D. Dharmasastra period

## **Modern times**

Though women constitute 50% of population, perform two third of the work but earn only one third of the total income and own less than one tenth of the world resources. She is considered to perform traditional duties and activities and also professional responsibilities, women are empowering so as to enable themselves to represent their interest and issues in a responsible and determined way so that she can use her opportunities to overcome her problems, her identity, knowledge, power in all spheres of life where she has to balance her career on par with her domestic chores.

The first Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, “You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women”.

## **What is empowering**

Empowering is an important tool for all round development of a country for reducing poverty, for participating in decision making, to have the power to control their own lives, to create a just social and economic order nationally and internationally and to improve prospects for the next generation. Empowering is a process which helps a women in better decision making so as to back up knowledge skills in a better way or to have control over circumstances that influence their lives or developing confidence in their capacity to shine in the current patriarchal society where they are considered as a subordinate to man.

Empowerment is a multi dimensional processes which helps a women to release their identity, resources, power and control, confidence, responsibilities to plan her lives and free themselves from customs, belief and practice imposed by society with progressing eras. <sup>1,-2</sup>

## **Strengths of women**

Abilities to learn quickly, dedication and commitment their persuasiveness open style of problem sowing, hard working, multitasking, willingness to take risk and chances graceful nature are the qualities that shine women personality.

## What is a need for empowerment

Empowerment of women is a need as woman is the first teacher of the future citizen who can infuse good qualities into her children, for improving her socio economic and political strength in an environment where there is no gender bias, she can take her own decision makes her self confident.<sup>3</sup> Human development report 1995 stresses that empowerment must be by people but not only for them. Women must participate in decision & process that shapes their lives, to exercise their choice which is not only valuable but also surest way for economic growth as such idea of engaging / performing multi tasking has become a mandatory / accepted social norm in her career advancement.<sup>3,4</sup>

In this contemporary world, girls are outshining boys in academics, girls are becoming more confident, getting high pay in professional jobs due to their academic feats which were not expected in the ancient era. Empowerment of woman is need of an hour as she is chief architect, first mentor. Yet discrimination against women and girls remains the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality despite of several organization agreements and supporting projects are implemented for improving health and expanding women's choice in life. The women doesn't have an ability to control or plan their family *Neil et al, 2018*.

## Challenges / barriers to women empowerment

Today, woman wishes to pursue her career and on par with her commitment towards family faces challenges / barrier in the working environment to rise to top position in her career spheres.

- 1. Discriminatory societal norms:-** The biggest barrier is the mindset of society where woman is expected to go to work after performing her domestic works like cooking, taking good care of her family members including elders. Many women find it very hard to cope up with the situation without help / support from the family members. And there are many instances where they are criticized for neglecting the needs of the family instead of depending more on their career. She is asked to concentrate more on affairs of her husband's family than on her parents side thus is a great hindrance in woman empowerment.
- 2. Access to productive resources:-** Another most difficult challenge is woman rights to land and other productive resources that are essential to improve her standard of living and ensure right to equality that prevent a women's access to use or control over immovable property and other important economic assets which are under the control of her husband, brother, son, etc.<sup>5,6</sup>

- 3. Sexual harassment:-** Sexual harassment is a type of harassment involving unwelcome behavior which can be verbal, physical or written which can affect people in different ways that makes some one feel upset, scared, offended or humiliated.<sup>7</sup> Previously in the name of traditions and customs women were denied rights and opportunities thus making them centric to family responsibilities and thereby derailing their careers. The sexual harassment can include sexual rumors (in person, by text or social media and jokes which are against the law.

The outcome of sexual harassment can have a negative psychological health and job related outcomes. The health and psychological related outcome includes anger, irritation, depression, sickness or even suicide. On the other side job related outcomes includes lower job satisfaction, absenteeism, career interruption, decreased commitment etc. Women in senior position are made vulnerable by that the fact that they are women. The coping strategies are be assertive, confronting, denial, reporting the incidence, advocacy seeking etc. More institutionalized combating efforts are also needed to prevent work place sexual harassment Some things that help to avoid the situation - Know the truth that it is not your fault tell the person to stop, share or report it to an adult / close friends / relatives get support from police or other trusted people.

- 4. Gender discrimination:-** This persists globally in the work place, educational settings in relationship and organization on the whole in the system. The reason for this discrimination is unequal access to education. Legal rights to employment. (only 6 Nations have given legal rights to women) job segregation death of legal safe guards, lack of corporeal autonomy, inadequate health care, religious freedom and racism which has an impact on physical and mental health. Hence there is a need for gender equality for financial freedom and equal access to education. Gender equality is 5<sup>th</sup> goal among the 17 sustainable development goals adopted by United Nations is necessary for empowering women to eliminate all forms of violence's and harmful practices against women to ensure equal opportunities for leadership at all levels to undertake reforms to ensure universal access to health and women rights to economic resources financial services in accordance with laws. 8. 9. 10
- 5. Adult literacy program results in improvement of women equality as empowerment means moving from the weak position to execute a power to educate women, establishment of schools, colleges and universities by providing a package of concessions in form of free books, uniform, boarding and lodging, free cycles and so on can bring reduction in inequality.**

6. Political empowerment is a must for all round development of the women but impartment of social education is needed before giving a concrete shape to their political empowerment and also to give due share to each and every section of the women.

### **A few tools for women empowerment**

1. Right to education are important for women development and growth. A leisure time of one to two hours is enough for learning purpose without leaving her job which gives a economic status and which is not acceptable by her family members. As literacy is the foundation steps towards women empowerment, to understand family health, social political management which affects women's empowerment create a healthy environment. When women are educated and empowered they are well aware of their rights and deserve to be treated on par with others. <sup>11, 12</sup>
2. **Women empowerment through self help groups:-** Self help group are mass movements by women to shape their destiny to enhance their fund base. Development of women and children in rural area program (DWCRA, 1993) aims to provide self employment, empowerment to women living in neighborhoods with similar socio economic background to act up any economic activity suited for their skills, trade on basis of their resources in agriculture and allied activities. In this public and private partnership. <sup>13, 14, 15</sup>
3. Women need confidence to fight against all the atrocities against her and also to eliminate the inferior complexity.
4. Women are not given an opportunity to study, though the government are making serious attempt to fight and root out the evils prevailing from time to time in under developed and developing countries. Hence a united stand is needed to voice her opinion from a common platform through social media, educate on the roots of violence, stop victim blaming, be supportive, be a mentor, organize training programs and workshops so on.

But a change in attitude towards women and within woman can in real sense empower them.

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