

## Women empowerment

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The problem of women's development, therefore calls for sincere and dedicated efforts from the whole society, planners, administrators, philanthropists, social and educational workers. All the governmental and non-governmental organizations and developmental agencies need to work towards the development of women.

Development of women is directly and indirectly related to national development. The effective management and development of women such as abilities, skills and other potentialities are of paramount importance for the economic development of the country. According to World Bank Report, the development of women yields important inter-generational benefits and productivity gains in future. Raising better employment opportunities for women raises the status of the families and derives economic and social progress.

Unfortunately, women who constitute fifty percent of the population have long been neglected in their role as beneficiaries in the process of development. They are lagging behind socially, politically and economically in society. Women's position in employment, earnings, education health status and decision making has not shown much remarkable improvement.

The involvement of women in the economic and social development process in the country which has remained comparatively neglected area attracted the attention of the planners and economists in a big way since the United Nation's Declaration of Women's Decade (1974-85) basically aimed to end the existing discrimination towards women practised in varying degrees throughout the World Meet discussing with the state government the safety of women tourists as a reaction from the fear that such incidents will tarnish India's image. If one investigates the Prostitution houses, many women were cheated either forcefully pushed into brothels or deceived by their lovers.

### Importance of women's Education and Employment:-

The importance of Women's education in the development of society is well known and widely accepted. It develops women's personality, enriches them and adds to their awareness and self-esteem. It generates new and innovative ways of thinking. Education not only develops women's personality and awareness but also their productive capacity. For women in the workforce, even a little education greatly increases their earnings. A study conducted by National Sample Survey Organisation reveals that technically trained literate women earn three times than those of literate women.

### Attempts towards Development of women

In the nineteenth century, **Raja Ram Mohan Roy** was the first Indian who initiated Social Reform Movement and made people aware of the malpractices associated with '**sati**' customs. With Lord William Bentick's cooperation '**Sati**' practice was declared illegal in 1829. Raja Ram mohun Roy was also against the social evils like early marriage, polygamy and also supported the remarriage of widows and women's property rights. In 1828, he founded Brahma Samaj for social reforms. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was a great reformer. He attacked early marriage, polygamy and illiteracy among females. He was instrumental in passing Hindu Widow's Remarriage Act on July 26, 1856. B.M. Malbari was against early marriage and widowhood. It was with his efforts that the Age of Consent Act 1881 was passed.

The names of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, B.M. Malbari and Swami Dyananda were ranked first and foremost for advocating the cause of uplifting of women in India. Other notable social reformers are P.C. Banerjee, M.G. Ranade, Mahatma Phulay, Lokhitwadi, Durgaram and others who raised their voices against unjust practices. Swami Dayananada, Vivekananda and Gopala Krishna Gokhale made great efforts for the upliftment of women. Wiopal Krishna Gokhale made great efforts for the upliftment of women. Important reforms made with the great efforts of these social reformers during the nineteenth century included abolition of '**Sati**' and '**child marriage**', removal of restrictions on widows remarriage and provision of educational opportunities for women. During the years of freedom struggle, the process of emancipation of women gathered momentum under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

### Initiatives towards Womens's Development through National Plans:-

Realising the importance of development of women, Government of India after Independence enshrined the principles of gender equality and justice in the Preamble and number of other legislative gal measures that were initiated towards this end. In 1992, the National Commission for Women was set up to monitor the matters relating to constitutional and legal measures and safeguards provide for women. Further seventy third and seventy fourth Constitutional Amendments Act 1992 provided

reservation of one third of all seats and posts of Chairpersons of both rural and urban for women in institutions of local governance. Recently the United Progressive Alliance Government has promised one-third reservation for women, in Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha.

For improving the educational status of women, Government has adopted number of measures through its various Commissions, Committee on Women Education (1959), new schemes like Condensed Course for adult women and Bal Sevika Training Programmes were launched. Incentive schemes, such as providing free text-books and scholarships for girls, were started. Further, to promote enrolment and retention of girls in schools in backward areas, schemes like free uniforms and attendance ‘scholarships’ were introduced. Other policy initiatives in this regard include National Education Policy (1967-68) and National Committee on the Status of Women (1974). The National policy on Education Policy (1986) gave overriding priority to the removal of female illiteracy and laid emphasis on women’s participation in vocational, technical and professional education. The National Literacy Mission was set up in 1988 with the goal of attaining full literacy.

The Globalisation has the imminent danger of displacing a large number of self employed women also with the removal of all the quantitative restrictions on the imports of different commodities, the self employed women groups, especially in the formal sector, have started facing competition from the low priced imported consumer goods which are invading the Indian market. Thus Globalisation has opened up new challenges for the realization of the goal of women’s empowerment.

The Socio-economic and politico-legal changes that have taken place during the last three decades have definitely brought about perceptible changes in the status of women in the country. Some of these changes such as rapid increase in female life expectancy, literacy, employment, participation at grass root level democracy and increasing awareness about rights etc. have been strongly in the positive direction. These changes will definitely improve the status of women. For example the life expectancy of females at birth has increased to 62 years, the female infant mortality rate has come down to about seven per thousand live births and birth rate has fallen to about three children per woman.

The increase in literary rates over the last decades indicated India’s progress in education. Female literary rate in India has increased from thirty nine percent in 1991 to fifty four percent in 2001. Now women’s enrolment at graduate, post graduate and professional degree level constitutes 39.8 percent, which was 33.2 percent during the last decade. This clearly indicates increasing women’s participation in higher education. Moreover, girls outperformed boys in most of the states in all the courses.

On the socio-economic front, the Central Social Welfare Board was set up in 1953 during First Five Year Plan period which was given the responsibility for promoting and developing welfare services for women and children. The subsequent five year plans continued to follow the same welfare approach and the Government for women welfare adopted umpteen measures. The sixth Plan document included a chapter on Women’s Development. In 1985, a separate Department for Women and Children was set up in the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

The seventh plan (1986-91) operationalised the concern for empowerment articulated by the International Decade for women. The Eighth Plan, regarded women as equal partners in development process, marks a progress from the goal of development to that of empowerment of women. The ninth Plan (1997 – 2002) identified the urgent need to review the existing policies and programmes designed for the empowerment of women. The Tenth Plan approved aims at empowering women through translating the recently adopted National Policy for Empowerment of Women into action and ensuring survival, protection and development of women and children. Keeping in view the role of women in National Development, the allocation to the Department of Women and Children had been enhanced to Rupees Thirteen thousand seven and eight crores during the Tenth Five Year Plan.

#### **Women’s Participation in Personal Decision Making :-**

National Family Health Survey II data on the degree of autonomy and independence enjoyed by women for certain variables or on matters pertaining to their daily lives revealed that every tenth (9.4 percent) women in India is not involved in any of these decisions.

It has been revealed that the State of Punjab scores highest in almost all variables except in case of the decision to visit friends and relatives. The percentage of women who do not need permission to visit friends and relatives is the highest in Kerala.

### **Women's participation in Politics:**

No doubt, women's participation in public decision-making is gradually improving in India but in political decision-making, they still have very low space. In the last eight general elections, the percentage of women voters has been ranging from 51 to 59 percent. In the Thirteenth General Election, out of 296 million women electors, 56 percent participated as voters. Among contestants, female constitute a smaller number as compared to men. The Fourteenth General Election (2004) provides ample evidence of the same. Females constitute one hundred and forty seven, a very small number among all contestants.

Women's representation in Rajya Sabha and in Lok Sabha is extremely low. In Rajya Sabha there has been a low representation of women. The number of women members of Rajya Sabha was 14(5.8%) in 1970 which has reached up to 38 (15.5) in 1991, but in 1998, the number of women members were 18(7.3) only. Similarly in Lok Sabha, the number of women members were thirty nine (7.2 percent) in 1991 which has reached up to forty eight (9.02 percent) in 1999. During 2010, National Ruling Congress party headed by Dr. Manmohan Singh introduced the women's reservation bill at the Lok Sabha and it was passed amidst huge cry of men at the Parliament, whereas the same was defeated at the Rajya Sabha.

Men speaking about 'Equality' resist the society to give equality to women. The proposal of giving thirty three percent representation to women in the Parliament and in the State Assemblies is not put in force due to the resistance of male chauvinists. The women in power do not care to promote women. Today, In-laws are playing crucial part in dowry harassment and in breaking marital harmonies. If every woman vows not to receive dowry, the lives of women in our country will not end in dowry deaths. All these require women education from the root of the society. Women should be made aware of their freedom to live and their freedom to bring up themselves and their children. Woman as a loving daughter, but as a better half to a man, worshipped as a mother shall be treated with due regard to have a better society and thereby for a **"BETTER INDIA"**.

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