

Women Empowerment In 21st Century India

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Abstract: Today in India the concept of Women Empowerment is a vital issue. In the Rigvedic period women were given equal status with men. But the scenario changed in the post Vedic period. The discrimination between men and women started taking shape in the Epic Age. Male dominance became more pronounced in the age to follow. During the Sultanate period despite the era of Razia Sultan social status of women both in Hindu and Muslim communities were pretty low. She was regarded as the property of men and the system of purdah was very much prevalent. There was very little change in the status of women in the Mughal Age. In pre independence era the history of Indian Freedom struggle would be incomplete without mentioning the sacrifices of Indian women like Rani Laxmibai, Hazrat Mahal, Rani Avantibai Lodhi of Ramgarh etc. In early 19th century remarkable contribution was made by Sarojini Naidu, Anne Besant, Madam Cama, Kamala Neheru, Kasturba Gandhi and the list is endless. Later on after independence we find that an Indian politician and a central figure of the Indian National Congress became the 3rd Prime Minister of India. She was none other than Indira Gandhi. She served as Prime Minister from January 1966 to March 1977 and again from January 1980 until her assassination in October 1984. In 1999 Indira Gandhi was named as “ Women Of The Millennium” in an online poll organized by the BBC. In 2020 Gandhi was named by Time Magazine among the world’s 100 powerful women who defined the last century. So Women Empowerment in India has played a major role in bringing up the structural and cultural changes in India.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, 21st century

Introduction

“In Vedas we find Jatra Nari Pujjante Ramante Tatra Devata Which means Wherever Women is respected, God resides there Man can never be a women’s equal in the spirit of selfless service with which nature has endowed her” ~ Mahatma Gandhi

“There is no chance for the welfare of the World unless the condition of Women is improved” ~Swami Vivekananda.

To me Women Empowerment literally means their ability to speak for themselves, freedom to make their own choices, to understand their self worth and their right to influence social change free from social taboos inflicted on them. Empowering and protecting Women is not only important for their sake but for the overall development of human society. The

process of Empowering women includes accepting her viewpoints, or making an effort to seek them, raising the status of women through education, awareness, literacy and training.

It's a women who plays a role of a daughter, wife and mother in one life. It's the women who constitutes a family and enriches the Society. Economic development of a women not only enhances her family but leads to the expansion of the financial condition of the entire Nation. In the 21st century women are giving leadership in every field of society, be it sports, commerce and industry, education, politics, health, navy, army, agriculture and so on. Active involvement of women is necessary for the upliftment of the society. Today it is significant for a women to enjoy equal status with men in all walks of life. Discrimination and harassment of women not only endangers the society but also brings shame for the whole Nation. In India Constitution and Legal provisions have been made to stop gender discriminations.

Constitutional Provisions

In Article 14 of the Constitution of India, we find that equal status was guaranteed to all citizens of India. Moreover Article 15 empowers the government to make special provisions for women. Women are free to participate in all religious, cultural, economic and political activities. Women are protected by the Constitution against exploitation and they are entitled to vote. The Constitution has given women equal rights and opportunities in every field.

There are several legislations safeguarding women's interests.

The Hindu Marriage Act 1955

This act provides women with equal rights to divorce and remarry.

The Hindu Succession Act 1956

The act provides women with the right and claim our parents property.

The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956

A women's right to adopt a child and claim maintenance from her husband in case of divorce is ensured by this act.

Special Marriage Act 1954

It provides women with the right to inter caste marriage, love marriage and is only permitted for the girls above 18 years.

Dowry Prohibition Act 1961

This protects women from exploitation by declaring taking of dowry as an unlawful activity.

Various Rights Of Women

We find that after independence educational rights of women have been promoted. The government has provided scholarships for women pursuing higher studies. Separate schools and colleges have been established for women so that they can enhance their careers. Women

have been recruited in all posts such as teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers, police officers, bankers all over India. Women have excelled themselves in armed forces as well be it military, air force and navy.

Women in independent India are not very much aware of their rights. The government of India has tried to ensure certain opportunities for women like reserving 33% of seats for women for their active participation in politics. They have introduced schemes like IRDP, Jawahar Rojkar Yojna and TRYSEM. Enhancement of Literacy rate of women is one of the major objectives of the government. The 73rd Amendment Act of the Constitution (1993) have reserved separate seats for women in Panchayets.

Proficiency Of Women In Various Fields

Education :Neena Gupta

Born and brought up in Kolkata, Neena becomes the third woman to receive the prestigious Ramanujan Award 2021. Neena received the award for her commendable performance in the field of affine algebraic geometry and commutative algebra particularly for her solution to the Zariski cancellation problem for affine spaces.

Sports: Jhulan Nisith Goswami

Jhulan is an Indian international cricketer and the former captain of Indian National Women's Cricket Team. An all rounder, Goswami is regarded as one of the greatest fast bowlers of all times. She won the ICC Women's Player of the Year Award [2007].

Politics : Mamata Banerjee

Miss Mamata Banerjee is an Indian politician who is serving as the 9th and current Chief Minister of West Bengal since 2011. She is the first women to hold the office as the CM of Bengal. She founded the All India Trinamool Congress. She is often referred to as Didi in Bengal. Her popularity has soared with her policies like Duare Sarkar, Lakhi Bhandar and Swastha Sathi.

Entertainment :Kajol

Kajol Devgan is one of the most successful actresses of Hindi Film Industry. She is the recipient of numerous awards including six Filmfare Awards. In 2011, she was honoured with Padmashree, the fourth highest civilian honour of the country by the Government of India. She has featured in several blockbusters like Baazigar (1993), Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (1995), Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (1998), Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham (2001), Fanaa (2006), Dilwale (2015) etc

Industry : Lovey Burman

She is the person behind the most famous confectionary Kookie Jar. She had started the business as a hobby, but the success went beyond her expectations and soon became the bestselling brand for cakes, pastries, puffs, breads and so on. The success of Kookie Jar

practically rests on her shoulders. Devoted efforts of Lovey and her team has made Kookie Jar so successful.

Defence : Nivedita Choudhary

Flight Lt Nivedita Choudhary became the first women from the Indian Air Force (IAF) to summit the Mount Everest. She was also the first woman from Rajasthan to achieve this feat. It was in October 2009 that Choudhary, an IAF officer of the squadron in Agra chanced upon a broadcast calling for volunteers for IAF's woman expedition to Everest. She volunteered without realizing that three years later she would do what no other woman in the air force had ever done.

Conclusion

We cannot say that the status of Indian women had radically changed in the 21st century. The measures taken by the Government have not been completely implemented in the society. In a country like India till date customs and traditions are given much more importance. Yet we find a gradual change taking place. Education is a key factor. High profile women achievers are considered as role models. The examples set by them will prompt the others to follow in their footsteps. India will definitely have more and more women entrepreneurs in the coming years.

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