



## **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT, GENDER JUSTICE & THE EQUALITY CHALLENGES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Women's Empowerment is the process in which women elaborate and recreate what it is that they can be, do, and accomplish in a circumstance that they previously were denied. Empowerment can be defined in many ways, however, when talking about women's empowerment, empowerment means accepting and allowing people (women) who are on the outside of the decision-making process into it. "This puts a strong emphasis on participation in political structures and formal decision-making and, in the economic sphere, on the ability to obtain an income that enables participation in economic decision-making." Empowerment is the process that creates power in individuals over their own lives, society, and in their communities. People are empowered when they are able to access the opportunities available to them without limitations and restrictions such as in education, profession and lifestyle. Feeling entitled to make your own decisions creates a sense of empowerment. Empowerment includes the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment is all about equipping and allowing women to make life-determining decisions through the different problems in society.*

**Keywords:** - Women empowerment, Reforms, Feminism, Metoo

### **INTRODUCTION**

Women empowerment means to empower women with the full social rights, economic stability, political rights, judicial strength and other rights. Women should get proper rights in the society like a man without any gender discrimination between men and women. Women

should know as well as get the proper fundamental rights once they born. A woman can be considered with women empowerment when:

- She gets respect and dignity.
- She lives her life independently according to her own lifestyle at home or outside.
- She feels free to take her own decision according to her choice.
- She gets equal rights in the society like a man.
- She does not feel gender discrimination in any field.
- She feels safe and secure whether at home or outside at work place, street, etc.

Women Empowerment has become a highly debated social issue not only in India but also around the Globe. Is the woman's voice heard or it continues to be neglected despite all the civilization advancement?

### **Economic empowerment**

Economic empowerment increases women's agency, access to formal government programs, mobility outside the home, economic independence, and purchasing power. Policy makers are suggested to support job training to aid in entrance in the formal markets. One recommendation is to provide more formal education opportunities for women that would allow for higher bargaining power in the home. They would have more access to higher wages outside the home; and as a result, make it easier for women to get a job in the market.

Strengthening women's access to property inheritance and land rights is another method used to economically empower women. This would allow them better means of asset accumulation, capital, and bargaining power needed to address gender inequalities. Often, women in developing and underdeveloped countries are legally restricted from their land on the sole basis of gender. Having a right to their land gives women a sort of bargaining power that they wouldn't normally have; in turn, they gain more opportunities for economic independence and formal financial institutions.

### **Political Empowerment**

Political empowerment supports creating policies that would best support gender equality and agency for women in both the public and private spheres. Popular methods that have been suggested are to create affirmative action policies that have a quota for the number of women in policy making and parliament positions. As of 2017, the global average of women whom hold lower and single house parliament positions is 23.6 percent. Further recommendations have been to increase women's rights to vote, voice opinions, and the ability to run for office with a fair chance of being elected. Because women are typically associated with child care

and domestic responsibilities in the home, they have less time dedicated to entering the labour market and running their business. Policies that increase their bargaining power in the household would include policies that account for cases of divorce, policies for better welfare for women, and policies that give women control over resources (such as property rights). However, participation is not limited to the realm of politics. It can include participation in the household, in schools, and the ability to make choices for oneself. Some theorists believe that bargaining power and agency in the household must be achieved before one can move onto broader political participation.

### **Barriers to women Empowerment**

Recent studies also show that women face more barriers in the workplace than do men. Gender-related barriers involve sexual harassment, unfair hiring practices, career progression, and unequal pay where women are paid less than men are for performing the same job.<sup>1</sup> When taking the median earnings of men and women who worked full-time, year-round, government data from 2014 showed that women made \$0.79 for every dollar a man earned. The average earnings for working mothers came out to even less—\$0.71 for every dollar a father made, according to a 2014 study conducted by the National Partnership for Women and Children. While much of the public discussion of the "wage gap" has focused around women getting equal pay for the same work as their male peers, many women struggle with what is called the "pregnancy penalty". The main problem is that it is difficult to measure, but some experts say that the possibility of having a baby can be enough for employers to push women back from their line. Therefore, women are put in a position where they need to make the decision of whether to maintain in the workforce or have children. This problem has sparked the debate over maternity leave in the United States and many other countries in the world.

### **The Internet as a Tool of Empowerment**

The growing access of the web in the late 20th century has allowed women to empower themselves by using various tools on the Internet. With the introduction of the World Wide Web, women have begun to use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter for online activism. Through online activism, women are able to empower themselves by organizing campaigns and voicing their opinions for equality rights without feeling oppressed by members of society. For example, on May 29, 2013, an online campaign started by 100 female advocates forced the leading social networking website, Facebook, to take down various pages that spread hatred about women.

In recent years, blogging has also become a powerful tool for the educational empowerment of women. According to a study done by the University of California, Los Angeles, medical



patients who read and write about their disease are often in a much happier mood and more knowledgeable than those who do not. By reading others' experiences, patients can better educate themselves and apply strategies that their fellow bloggers suggest.

With the easy accessibility and affordability of e-learning (electronic learning), women can now study from the comfort of their homes. By empowering themselves educationally through new technologies like e-learning, women are also learning new skills that will come in handy in today's advancing globalized world.

### **Gender Equality: Time has Changed Now**

Gender equality is something that we have strived for, for a long time. Be it in terms of gender roles, right to education. The times have changed tremendously, but much more needs to be done. Gender inequality acknowledges the fact that being of a different gender leads to difference in lived experiences. Key milestones in improving Gender Equality are:

### **Education: Literacy Rate Goes up**

While at one time, girls were just supposed to do household work and not go to school, the times have changed tremendously and now women and men work hand in hand in all kinds of jobs and have an equal right to a proper education. The world literacy rate of adult females (ages 15 and above) has gone up from 77.7% in 2005 to 82.6% in 2016 according to World Bank Data. In India too, the female literacy rate has seen a drastic increase from 50.82% in 2006 to 62.98% in 2015. Though the Indian statistics are much lower than the world's, the direction seems to be right.

### **Social Reforms Empowering Women**

While India has long illegalised derogatory practices like Sati, child marriage and female foeticide, the recent reforms taken to further uplift the status of females in society are applause-worthy. On 22 August 2017, the Indian Supreme Court passed a judgement which made the practice of instant Triple Talaq (Talaq-e-Biddat) unconstitutional. This judgement was further followed by the the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill passed by Lok Sabha on 28 December 2017.

Also, the ancient Sabarimala Temple in Kerala that had barred women aged 10-50 from entering. On 28 September 2018, the Supreme Court allowed women of all ages to enter the temple and follow their devotion and religion calling the practice of exclusion based on menstruation to be a form of 'untouchability' which was in violation of the Constitution.



### **Middle Eastern Country Reforms: More Freedom to Women**

The Middle Eastern Countries which are widely known for their oppressive laws for females and the parda system which bars women from showing their faces, have also come a long way. Though the progress is uneven in different countries, it is progress. On 24 June 2018, Saudi Arabia lifted its ban and allowed women to drive. Though women are now getting political recognition, there is still much to be done in relation to laws for crimes against women.

### **Female Representation in Different Professions**

As opposed to earlier times when women participation in professions was limited to a few fields like medicine and teaching, today, women are a part of almost all industries. Though not the optimal number of females are seen on the panels but they are being given a chance nonetheless. In October 2018, Gita Gopinath was appointed as the first woman IMF Chief Economist. Apart from this, women can now be seen at top positions in several fields like Mary Barra (CEO of General Motors), Janet Yellen (Chair of Federal Reserve of US), Indra Nooyi (CEO of PepsiCo), Hillary Clinton (Presidential Candidate of US) and many more.

### **Problems in Gender Bias: Still Need Addressing**

Though women have come a long way, they still face discrimination in the society, there are still people who do not like a woman having voice, and there are still heinous crimes against them.

### **Violence against Women**

The news is lined up with events of rape, molestation, harassment, acid attacks, trafficking and many more heinous crimes all over the world. According to UN Crime Trend Statistics 2013 the rape incidences (number of rapes per 1,00,000 population) is highest in UK followed by USA and Brazil. However, the number of reported rape cases are highest in USA followed by Brazil and India. This fares so say that the situation is somewhat the same regarding women in developing as well as developed countries. Though countries where women do not face direct violence at such staggering levels, they are generally oppressed and restricted by law to behave in a certain manner.

### **Crimes against women in India**

There is a big list of crimes against women in India such as acid attack, child marriages, domestic violence, forceful domestic work, child abuse, dowry deaths, female infanticide and



sex-selective abortions, child labour, honor killings, rape, sexual harassment, trafficking, forced for prostitution, and many more.

### **Women's Emotional Abuse**

Constant eve teasing, stalking incidents and the general comment about how a woman shouldn't do something following a common notion of what the roles are acceptable for women in society constitute emotional abuse. The continuous harassment, be it in form of nasty comments, objectification or oppression are all a cause due to which women are not able to achieve their potential in society. There is constant scrutiny on how they should dress, walk, talk and behave. Middle Eastern countries recognise only male guardianship, have laws on a dress code for women. Even polygyny is common in some nations however, the same rights are not given to women.

### **Wage Disparity at Work Place**

Though women are now seen as a part of professions and seen working in all kinds of professions, they do face differences in pay compared to their male counterparts who do the same work and put in the same hours. According to the World Economic Forum's analysis of 144 countries, the global gender pay gap is 23% with even the most gender-neutral country, Iceland has a pay gap of 15-20%. In January 2018, Adobe Inc. announced absolute pay parity in India, this is just a baby step in the global battle against achieving pay parity on basis of gender.

### **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)-**

If the crimes from the external world weren't enough, some cultures require women to undergo mutilation of external genitalia for non-medical reasons. This is common in some cultures of Africa, Asia and Middle East. The practice involves partial or total removal of external genitalia in females. The simple reason for FGM being done is that it is part of the culture and is believed to help the female in some way, however all it causes is immense pain due to no anaesthetics being used by the practitioners who carry out the deed without any professional training. Long term problems may include problem in child birth, pain and mental health issues.

### **Empowering Women: Need is More**

Women empowerment is a sensitive issue which has opinionated views from everyone. it has a lot of support globally, but also quite many hindrances. The past year has seen quite a lot of



commotion on this front with women coming out and demanding their rights and seeking justice for the wrong done to them.

### **Metoo**

This is movement against all kinds of sexual harassment and assault. The term was originally coined in 2006 by Tarana Burke, American social activist but the term gained global popularity in 2017 after sexual abuse allegations against Harvey Weinstein. The movement initially started off in the US and a second wave of ignition was seen in India in October 2018. The movement mainly aims at bringing out the seriousness and globality of sexual abuse across the world and in all strata of the society. This movement has helped women come forward and share their stories.

### **HeForShe**

This is a campaign started by the UN in 2014, with the goal of raising individuals to stand up and take action against negative stereotypes and behaviours in any form. The campaign has reached out to men to stand up for their female counterparts as the motto of the campaign is "Gender equality is not just a women's issue; it's a human rights issue that benefits everyone."

### **Time's Up**

This is movement against sexual harassment founded on January 1, 2018 by Hollywood celebrities in response to #MeToo Movement. This is an action-based approach to achieve safety for women and equality in workplace. The movement has raised around \$22 million for legal defence funds and 800 volunteer lawyers. The movement not only promotes gender equality but all forms of equality at the workplace. To show their support for actors of colour, many celebrities arrived with activists of colour at the Golden Globes Awards in January 2018.

### **Feminism**

The term feminism has been around for a long time, however is commonly taken synonymous to man-hating whereas feminism actually asks women to be treated equal to men in all respects. On describing feminism, Priyanka Chopra said, "Feminism is women standing up for themselves and saying 'Give me the freedom to make my own choices without judging me.' It is not superiority. It is not hating or berating men. It is just saying, 'Let me make my decisions without shaming me or trolling me. Give me those opportunities that men have enjoyed for such a long time.'"

What the world needs is everyone, irrespective of their gender, to stand for gender equality. The former First Lady of US said, "Let's be very clear: Strong men - men who are truly role models - don't need to put down women to make themselves feel powerful. People who are truly strong lift others up. People who are truly powerful bring others together." That is exactly how equality should be viewed and unless we all stand together it might never be achieved.

### **Safety Laws for Women in India**

There is a list of safety laws for women in India working in the field to provide safety to the women from all type of crimes against women. Some safety laws are Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, Special Marriage Act 1954, Hindu Marriage Act 1955, Hindu Widows Remarriage Act 1856, Indian Penal Code 1860, Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, Maternity Benefit Act 1861, Foreign Marriage Act 1969, Indian Divorce Act 1969, Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971, Christian Marriage Act 1872, Code of Criminal Procedure 1973, Equal Remuneration Act 1976, Married Women's Property Act 1874, Births, Deaths & Marriages Registration Act 1886, Indecent Representation of Women (Prevention) Act 1986, Muslim women (protection of rights on divorce) Act 1986, Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act 1987, National Commission for Women Act 1990, Prohibition of Sex Selection Act 1994, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012, Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place Act 2013, etc.

### **Some Tips Regarding Women Safety**

- Self defence techniques are the first and foremost thing to which each and every woman must be aware of and get proper self-defense training for their safety. They must be aware of some effective defence techniques such as kicks to groin, blocking punches, etc.
- Generally most of the women are gifted with sixth sense which they must use whenever they become in some problem. They should at once avoid any situation which they feel bad for them.
- Escape and run is also a good way to reduce some risks of women whenever they become in problem. They should never go with any unknown person alone at some unknown places.
- Women must understand and feel their physical power and use accordingly. They never feel themselves weak than men and take some self defence training.
- They should be careful while communicating with someone on internet in the cyberspace.



- Pepper spray can also be proved as a useful self-defence tool however it has a drawback that some people cannot be harmed through it even after full-face spray. It may not stop the attacker so women should not depend on it completely and use other techniques also.
- They must have all the emergency numbers with them and whatsapp also if possible so that they can immediately tell to their family members and police.
- Women should be very conscious while driving the car and going to any trip. They must lock all the doors of car while travelling with own or private car.

Women safety is a big social issue which needs to be solved urgently by the effort of all. It is inhibiting the growth and development of the country and most importantly hurting the half population of the country in all aspects (physically, mentally, and socially).

## CONCLUSION

Hearing the independent women's voice and helping the women to ensure that their voices are heard has given rise to #MeToo Campaign, NGOs coming forward to safeguard against the women's emotion abuse. Government of India has also enacted various rules and regulations within the constitutional framework to improve female representation in different professions. As such not only IIMs but also many other B-schools, other professional institutions, as well as job opportunities in almost all types of male dominated professions including Indian Air Force, Navy and Army have started awarding higher weightage to female candidates for gender diversity.

Despite of formation of various effective rules and regulations by the Indian government to handle and control the crimes against women, the number and frequency of crimes against women are increasing day by day. Women status in the country has been more offensive and dreadful in the last few years. It has decreased the confidence level of women for safety in their own country. Women are in doubtful condition for their safety and have fear while going anywhere else outside their home (office, market, etc). We should not blame the government because women safety is not only the responsibility of government only, it is the responsibility of each and every Indian citizen especially men who need to change their mind set for women.

The significant improvements in recent decades, education is not universally available and gender inequalities persist. A major concern in many countries is not only the limited numbers of girls going to school but also the limited educational pathways for those that step into the classroom. More specifically, there should be more efforts to address the lower participation and learning achievement of girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education.

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