

# **Historical Facts about the Development of Women's Empowerment in India nay the World**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Women play an important role in Social, Political, Cultural, Academic and Economic development of a Nation. Half of India's population is female, but their role is negligible in the National development. If a country wishes to sustain or develop its growth, it should utilize properly its women as a productive resource. Despite greater awareness of the Role of women, most Indian society treats women at par with men. Consequently women continue to suffer exploitation in different ways. The representation of women in politics and administration is found low. So we have a long way to go to improving the status of women as a whole and share their leadership.

Women empowerment means an individual woman able to think and act freely, and treated as an equal member of the Society. Therefore, increasing women's capabilities and empowering them in the right way to achieve overall development is necessary. For that, good governance is very necessary to protect women's empowerment and their rights in our Country nay the World. If we wish to implement the decision of the Government policies and follow the rules & regulations regarding women's empowerment, the basic need is good governance in all levels of administration. The Concept of women's empowerment is very ancient and has assumed vital proportions in the current International scenario. This is an important Human Right for women.

When we talk of International Human Rights we should always remember the Vedic doctrines and also the philosophy of India which tells us that the whole of the World is just like one family. The vexed problem of women's empowerment and women rights has assumed top priority these days in view of the fact that the cases of their violation are multiplying fast almost all over the World. The problem, if tackled with a right approach is sure to be eliminated to a considerable extent in due course of time. Looking in to the depth of the growing problem of women's rights and women's empowerment all over the World the Prime Minister has done a timely and fitting job by establishing a Department of Women's Empowerment in the Country. The protection of women's empowerment should be the prime concern of all. Despite the advancement of Human Civilization, threats to women's Rights still persist. India is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights under the auspices of United Nations Organization, stands committed to the protection of Human rights and women's right. Their plight is reflected both in the Gender Related Development Index (GDI) which takes into account life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate, combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratios, sharing in earned income and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). We often see the widespread discrimination against women in the Parliament, Administration, Professional, at Technical work place and share in the earned income.

### **NEED AND DEVELOPMENT**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 by the United Nations made the point clear that women have the right to participate in public sphere without fear and shame. Every year our Country celebrate International Women's day on 8<sup>th</sup> March with a firm determination to upgrade and commemorate the achievements of women and to acknowledge the special status they deserve in our Society. The important question is what difference has it made to the Position of women? Have women become really strong and brave and have their long term struggles ended? According to the report of the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), "There can be no sustainable development without development for women; because it is the women who contribute more to the development of children. Empowerment of women has multiple benefits not only for the environment but for humanity as well. Ensuring sustainable

development requires women's empowerment and their equal involvement in the decision-making process. Their participation as planners, managers, scientists and technical advisors is also required in all fields." Though women have progressed in different fields, Women today have been holding decision making positions in education, polity and economic and are fighting for command over matrimonial house and land. But if we look from a wider perspective, the situation remains not good. According to the statistics by CARE, out of 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty around the Globe, seventy percent are women. Reflecting on UNESCO's medium term strategy 2008-13, gender equality has been assigned as organization's Global priority.

If women are empowered they empower Society. They play a very important role in the development of the whole Country regarding their families and the entire community. If women are given chances, they will spend on the welfare of the family, neighborhood or the Country. An empowered woman is one who has the freedom to make choices and take decision in matters relating to her life as well as Society at large.

The developments in the Third World Countries are worse regarding the Position of women. Here women are still subject to 'honor killings', they are still denied their basic rights to education and freedom and face violence, abuse and hatred in every place. It was observed in a CARE project working with adolescent girls in India, that these girls were considered as temporary workers who would cease to exist, at least for their fathers, once they are married. In many places in India, domestic violence is acceptable to women and cultural and ethical implications are imposed on their freedom. What does it mean? It would be wrong to state that nothing has changed as a number of Local, National and International Organizations are working together to mitigate the problems, yet there is a long way to go. Between 1829 and 1947 many laws were enacted, which aimed at emancipating women from the clutches of oppressive social customs. Sati was legally banned in 1829. Widow re-marriage act was passed in 1856. One of the greatest obstacles to woman's emancipation was child marriage.

## CONCLUSION

The child marriage restraint act was enacted in 1929 which prescribed the minimum age of marriage for a girl as 14 and a male as 18 years. Most of the social references of the 19<sup>th</sup> century strongly advocated women's education. When they saw education as the single most important tool for liberating women. A main step for upliftment of women was the opening of schools, mainly for girls. The social reform movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the efforts made in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and 19<sup>th</sup> century women's movement in Europe and North America laid the foundation for the emergence of a strong women's movement in India. Between 1870 and 1940 a number of women's organizations emerged all over the Country nay the World.

The new women especially since the women liberation movement has swung to another extreme. She is trying to settle old scores with man, is letting down her hair as it were. In this context, it is interesting to note that in the Miss Universe contest 1994, the last question asked to Shushmita Sen was, "What is the essence of a women?" And her contest winning answer was that, "A woman is one who tells the world what love care and sharing is all about." On the other hand, the old woman used to walk behind man. The new woman is trying to walk ahead of man. However, an ideal woman needs to walk along with man! As M. K. Gandhi rightly said, "It is not possible for the bird to fly on one wing! And both male and female are the two wings of the bird called life. Thus both man and woman are complimentary- myth logically symbolized in the concept of '**ardhanareshwar**'- the union of the 'Shiva' and Shakti'. Empowerment of one should not be at the cost of another.

After Independence women's upliftment and empowerment in India received National and International recognition during the rule of Indian Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi when she launched the Indira Mahila Yojana and when the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) incorporated the issue of women upliftment as one of its primary objectives. Since then a chain of social programmes and yojanas have been under taken to empower the rural women like the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh and Mahila Samridhi Yojana.

The Govt. of India look after the rights of women and instituted All India Women's Conference,

National Women's Commission and State Women's Commission. The Govt. approved special grants and allowances to different NGO's working for the development and upliftment of women.

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