

# Women Empowerment: Theory and Practice

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**Abstract:** *Women's empowerment in 21<sup>st</sup> century is not something absolutely a very new topic. What could be considered as new is its huge gap that is noticed in its theory and practice. The increasing realization and recognition that empowering women is absolutely essential rather imperative for familial, societal, national and international development and progress, the real picture in between theory and practice is quite dismal. While theoretical advantages for women and girl child are hugely discussed in papers, seminars, programmes on Medias by citing fiery speeches, sensational news, the reversed pictures are seen on practical field. Though it is a fact that lot of work towards empowering the women had started by the social reformers and women movement right from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Now it is being done by various movements—Women's, NGO's and activists movements, women's study centers of universities, research centers and individual research scholars and intellectuals apart from the genuine work being done by the Government at various levels. To give specific importance, the Government of India has declared 2001 as the year of women's empowerment that also crossed 23 years as we have stepped into 2024. Still the visible line between theory and practice is markedly deep and raw particularly for the women from lower strata though today's world is brazing the gap between different classes of the society. Yet women in general are prone to victimize to crimes, abuses, tortures and sufferings. My effort will be to expose the different stages of women development leading the path towards empowerment on two ways particularly citing stress on social and economic ground. The gradual empowerment of women society begins through Gandhiji's movements in India and in Bengal the tireless effort of Raja Rammohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda and after independence though industrialization, the social pattern tends to change much faster. With women education and women's participation in different consumption linked services women empowerment takes gradual shape towards its dignified journey. Though much has been done in theory, in practice it is a far cry.*

**Keywords:** environment, values, development, changes, policies.

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the review of the status of the women on national as well as state level have been started on a very slow rhythm but after independence, it catches fast speed. Seventy four years have gone after independence; still it is found that women are the most neglected, under privileged and downtrodden section almost in all fields. The women societies in almost all countries are like a lamp burns itself to lit the whole world yet its own down part is ever sunk in darkness. The history of the world shows that women almost half of the total population got victim of deprivation in almost all field just on their gender base.

The fact that the women were locked down upon as something sub - human and sometimes even evil is born out by many scriptural texts written by men for their own benefits. In Vedic period, Manusmrti was a moral code of law on Hindu marriage, divorce, inheritance, sale, debts etc. in which women were described as false, a misfortune and passion like wine or chess. For killing a blackbird, mongoose, rat, dog, sudra and a women, the same rite is prescribed. Thus time and again, the woman, even if she is endowed with every quality, is inferior to a worless man.

So, it is not very easy to make men respect women's work and talent as they are quite disdainful about these qualities in women. Thus in a male dominated world women accepted and rationalized their plight with compromise on every aspect of life. The most enigmatic fact about our oriental culture is that the general conception regarding women is completely paradoxical on the one hand. She is hardly considered a human beings, violence against her being a commence torture and on the other hand, she is worshiped as 'Devi' the goddess of strength is Durga, Kali, the goddess of wealth is Laxmi, the goddess of learning is Saraswati, the most pious river of the Hindu's is Ganga and numerous other examples are there about women God.

May be the fact is that these women Gods are made of clays and are worshipping for one, two or three days. But women of flesh and blood at homes, communities and societies are alive with all desires and requirements equally necessary and enjoyed by men and is a fact that this equality on all levels from birth to death to a women's life is sometimes denied partially, sometimes completely. This gender quality almost all societies of all classes even don't allow the girl child to be born that leads a continuous fall in the numbers of women at par with men whereas, biologically female infants are sturdier than male offspring. It is only because gender inequality works as a network of beliefs, personality traits, attitudes feelings, values, behaviors and activities that differentiate men from women in society. It has a historical dimension and takes place within different micro and macro spheres such as the state, labor market, schools, media, law and above all the family. All social relations are 'gendered' that are perpetuated across generations.

As proverb goes "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness", the notion of gender inequality is that darkness, and to get rid of this darkness, the light of a candle is needed that can lit up thousands of other candles and thousands to lakhs an to crores and so on. It is like giving voice to voiceless which means equal opportunities, freedom and status for women as they are the most oppressed for centuries.

Herein lies the importance of empowerment of women as it is an established fact and tradition for women to live for and by the approval of men. Thus to empower women in the real sense is to enable them to flower their talents, faculties, abilities and capacities and to realize their full potentialities and real identity as also freedom of thought, expression and action and strength to handle every sphere of their lives. It is not only to make them aware of their capacities but also to

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provide them with the opportunities, facilities and external and internal environment to utilize their inherent qualities to develop their self confidence, self esteem and socio - psycho - economic self reliance and self dignity and the ability to raise voice to fight against injustice, exploitation and violence done to her.

The empowered women should be able to participate in the process of decision making, to share the control over resources like money and access to money and to gain power against social injustice and inequality. When the interests and voices of half of humanity are not reflected in decision making processes, the very legitimacy of the institutions, legislative and executive becomes questionable. Women's qualitative as well as quantitative participation at all levels of governance structure starting from her home to outside world is absolutely essential for their so called desired empowerment.

This empowering attempt for women gets its germinating from in India actually by the call of M. K. Gandhi for emancipation of India from the clutches of the British. It is something like to kill two birds with one stone as it also brings women on street from the restricted four walls to demand the country's freedom breaking the shackle of their own feet. Of course, the work of the Missionaries and some Englishmen like Lord Dalhousie, then the Governor General of India is mention worthy in this regard. Bethune school for girls and later on Bethune College for women by the missionary during the period of 1800 - 1854AD are remarkable step as a foundation. Besides, several great Indians like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar played a very important role in supporting the opening of girl's schools and breaking down the popular resistance against women education.

The post independence period had tremendous improvement in providing facilities for education of women as education is the most powerful instrument of changing women's position in the society. A number of voluntary organizations made considerable efforts for empowerment of women. The late 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the social, political, economic improvement, gender of justice, gender equality, women's rights, human rights, voluntary action, social legalization, custodian justice which are very important issues regarding empowering women. The economic field also gives huge changes in women's world which are most visible in the modern and organized sectors where women now appear in every field aviation to medicine, to information technology to armed combat. In many fields which were earlier male preserves such as medicine women outnumber men and in universities and top educational levels, both numbers and performances of women students outshine that of men.

So, the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have given a big boost to the empowerment of women. A joint committee of the parliament on empowerment of women has already been constituted to keep women's issues under constant review and monitoring and to watch progress in pursuance of plans of action evolved at international and national levels.

Now, the recently published sex ratio chart in the statistical year book, 2013, Ministry of Statistical and Programme Implementation, Government of India, New Delhi will show that women have come up very slowly increasing their ratio in birth, education, working status and so on. In all India level, for the last three decades will show that women's birth rate in 1991 was 927 against 1000 male, in 2001, it comes up 933 and in 2011, it is 940. That means last twenty years the recovery has been made a little bit, firstly 927 to 933 and then 933 to 940 per thousand men girl child are allowed to come to the world. In Tripura the picture is little better - - - 945 girls per 1000 boys and 948 in 2001 and 961 per 1000 boys in 2011. We can say at least that the trend is encouraging which indicates that the awareness among people is rising. Now the comparative study of the literacy rate will show somehow the same picture of the last two or three decades will be taken into consideration.

In 2001 the all India picture of literacy rate shows 54.16% women against 75.83% male literacy. In Tripura, the literacy rate in 2001 was 65.41% of women against 81.47% male. The recent survey in 2011 shows that all India level, the ratio for both men and women have increases. The women literacy rate is 65.46% against 82.14% male in 2011. It means in all India level the trend of literacy rate is rising up gradually. Almost 11% increased has been done on women literacy rate comparing 7% increase of men. In Tripura, this picture is much more sparkling. The literacy rate for women in 2011 is 83.15% against 92.18% male literacy and a comparable study between 2001 to 2011 proves that almost 18% increase in women literacy rate is done against 11% hike for male literacy rate which is not only huge but extremely encouraging steps for everyone because survival of girls will then actually lead to empowerment of women.

This trend is witnessed in two or three particular states of India like West Bengal, Manipur, Kerala whereas the opposite picture of decline in girl's birth rate and literacy rate is seen. In Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Chandigarh and Delhi (the capital of India) the decline is drastic. In Punjab it is 793 (2001) and now 875 (2011), in Haryana 879 to 820, in Himachal Pradesh it is 951 to 897, in Gujarat it is 928 to 878, in Chandigarh from 845 to 899 and in our national capital Delhi it is 915 to 865 - - - an unmistakable decline in the sex ratio in the last 2001. Yet one thing is clear everywhere the gap is fading in a snarl's pace.

It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women, whereas the Vedānta declares that one and the same conscious Self is present in all beings. The Upaniṣad also teaches the same. Sometimes we criticize the women, but say what have we done for their uplift?

Is there any sex distinction in Ātman or Self? The answer is no, because all is Ātman or Self. Thus everywhere the theory acts and shows, the practice sadly speaks the other story. The female infanticide was banned in 1870 through Registration of All Births and Deaths Act. The worrying fact is that it came back in 1980 and some states where it is shamelessly declared openly in some private nursing home

on its hoarding “spend 30, 000/- to save 5, 00000/- of future” to encourage infanticide. If the girl child is unwanted in an era advancement of science and technology despite laws to protect her and the Government’s will to ensure her survival what is one to do! More than the empowerment of women, we have now to take up the survival of the girl child it is not only the responsibilities of the Government, it is the responsibilities of each and every informed citizen of our country to start a mass campaign to save the girl child—she must be allowed to be born, survive, to be protected, given care, to be allowed to enjoy every opportunity to become a responsible human being.

The realities of the women’s condition still to this new century thus are far from equality, equity and justice. Politics proved to be a very inhospitable terrain for women and continues to be the male bastion into which the entry of women is severely restricted. The issue of violence against women is far reaching in its impact. The forms of violence against women are changing these days. The attacks are more brutal, cruel and direct. The sexual torture against women is not only physical killing but it murders the soul of society and morality.

The rate of reported crimes against women is increasing in such a way that proves girls and women belong to every class of society become victims by various adverse socio - psycho - emotional, familial and societal circumstances.

Thus if we analysis theory and practice, two fold picture will emerge. The laws, funds, articles for women development and empowerment are there in papers of Government, non - Government, private sector, NGO’s in theoretical forms but practically women and girl children seem to be at the bottom of the list when it comes to health facilities as well as the distribution of wealth. In terms of leadership and decision making position within policy making arenas, a very few women in position of influence with regard to the direction of the future.

In summary, although many steps have been taken and countless words spoken at conference on women’s issues within the last few decades, if we were truthfully to answer the question whether women worldwide are in a better position today than they were in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the answer would have to be “not much”.

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