

Women Empowerment- The Leading Lady's Sketch

Abstract

In this research paper, we tried to explain and analyse the condition of women in different eras in India. Starting from the ancient India and role of women in Vedic and Post-Vedic period to the present condition of women. Along with, the different schemes provided by the Constitution and the Government of India. The condition of women has improved a lot by far, but it is still not fully achieved.

Keywords: Feminism, Feminists, Sati System, East India Company, #Meetoo Movement, Female Chauvinists.

Introduction

Today the word empowerment is used in almost all diverse aspects of life, be it economically, politically, and socially. It is apparently the most used word in giving context, when it comes to explaining the concept of Human Resources.

By our English dictionary, this is explained as "The process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights."

According to Tim O'Reilly, "Empowerment of individuals is a key part of what makes an open source work. Since in the end, innovations tend to come from small groups, not from large, structured efforts."

If we look at the more socialistic approach, rather than the individualistic one, Rhonda Hendrick once said, "Empowered people aren't concerned about competing with each other. They are busy empowering others."

Aims of The Study

1. Analysing different stages of women empowerment in India since Vedic and Post Vedic period.
2. To inform about various Constitutional and provisional laws and rights of women in India
3. To understand the meaning of Gender Equality and female chauvinism

Review of Literature

1. Emma Watson speaks to the United Nations on the Equality for women (2014)- Fighting for women's rights has too often become synonymous with man hating. This has to stop. For the record, Feminism by definition is: "The belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities."
2. As stated by Margaret Atwood in her 2007 book "Feminist and Fiction"- The goals of Feminists movement has not been achieved, and those who say we're living in a post-feminist era are either sadly mistaken or tired of talking about the whole subject.
3. Harnidh Kaur one of the famous Facebook and Twitter personality in 2018 published few of her poetries which won Amazon Bestseller, she states, "If you compare to her past covers, you look at them and she's definitely been bronzed into an Indian face, in a country where you're struggling with colorism and shades discrimination, to see that- it's very insulting."
4. Ray, et al (2012) have recorded the prevalence of different types of lifetime violence against women under the reproductive age in two urban wards in Siliguri Municipal Corporation. They have found that more than fifty percent of sample women had ever face physical violence.
5. Sharma Dr. Sunil Kumar(2009)published an article on "Role of women in Self Help Groups and their Economic Empowerment"
6. Sharma Dr. Sunil Kumar (2015) published a research paper on "Women Empowerment in Rajasthan and SHG's"



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Hypothesis

1. The correct usage of the tool of women empowerment can fix the Nation's system and will lead to development
2. Optimizing human resources should be the goal and the aim should be of Gender Equality as a whole.

Mythodology

Analysing the contemporary condition of Women Empowerment in India by using Secondary Sources.

Women Empowerment

The most vibrant aspect of empowerment in the contemporary world is "Women Empowerment". It is the process in which women recreate the opportunities where they can optimize the use of their capabilities to achieve equal status as the other citizens of the society.

In the famous words of Kofi Annan, "There is no tool for development, more effective than the empowerment of women"

It is the political uprisings and small movements in India which made it come up in the global scenario. The women all across demanded the freedom of practising their human rights. It started from an issue as small as 'the right to wear a particular cloth style' to as big as "The Universal Adult Franchise"

Glimpse of Women Empowerment from The Times of Manusmriti

The artefacts by Manu Smriti, his writings shows sharp contradiction in few instances. Manusmriti, translated as "The Laws of Manu" or "The Institutions of Manu," is the most important and authoritative Hindu Law Book (Dharmashastra), which served as a foundational work on Hindu law.

In his words, "Women must always be honoured and respected by the father, brother, husband and brother-in-law who desire their own welfare, and where women are honoured, there the very Gods are pleased, but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite even could yield rewards".

On the other hand there were various derogatory texts offered by the same. For ex,

1. "Swabhavvnnarinam....." – 2/213. It is the nature of women to seduce men in this world; for that reason the wise are never unguarded in the company of females.
2. "Naudwahay....." – 3/8. One should not marry women who has have reddish hair, redundant parts of the body [such as six fingers], one who is often sick, one without hair or having excessive hair and one who has red eyes.
3. "Yastonabhavet....." – 3/10. Wise men should not marry women who do not have a brother and whose parents are not socially well known.
4. "Uchayangh....." – 3/11. Wise men should marry only women who are free from bodily defects, with beautiful names, grace/gait like an elephant, moderate hair on the head and body, soft limbs and small teeth.
5. "Mrshyanti....." – 4/217. One should not accept meals from a woman who has extra marital relations; nor from a family exclusively

dominated/managed by women or a family whose 10 days of impurity because of death have not passed.

This can be marked as the beginning of the atrocities and the deep rooted outrage and cruelty which the women started facing. It all started depicting women in a very subservient position.

Although, The Bhakti movement organised by Ramanujacharya during the Medieval period introduced new trends in the social and religious life of Indian women. The saints like Chaitanya, Nanak, Kabir, Meera, Ramdas and Tulsi stood for the right of women to religious worship. Hence, this movement, atleast, provided religious freedom to women. However, this movement didn't really result in any upliftment of the economic status of women.

Women at The Time Of British Rule And The Inception Of East India Company

At the time of East India Company, many rulers came forward to bring a change in the condition of women. One such great example is of Raj Ram Mohan Roy. The immobile structure of the Indian society, with blind beliefs like Sati system, polygamy, caste excesses, untouchability and the oppression of women divided the Indian society and kept them from acting together as a united nation. Rammohan started Campaign against these wrong doings of the Hindu society.

Rammohan Roy openly said that Sati system was more than murders according to all Shastra as well as to the common science of every nation.

Another example is of Rani Laxmi Bai, When the Rajah died in 1853, the British sought to annex Jhansi, declaring that her adopted son was not a legal heir. In late 1857, Lakshmi Bai donned men's clothing and led an army. She was determined to resist the British, declaring: "*Main Jhansi nahidoongi*". One of her contemporaries was Begum Hazrat Mahal. The kingdom's annexation by the British East India Company led Hazrat Mahal to denounce the foreigners inciting the populace.

Women in 1947 and Post-Independence

Women of all ages, ethnic groups and social classes were victimized, tortured and raped -- some even were stripped naked and paraded down streets to intensify their trauma and humiliation. In many even more tragic cases, fathers, fearing that their daughters would soon be raped (and converted to another faith), pressured and coerced the girls to commit suicide lest such an event "taint" their family's "honor" and standing in the community, or they killed their own female relatives themselves.

Urvashi Butalia, a prominent feminist stated that women were sold hand to hand. Some were married by conversion and taken as wives.

But despite this, Indian women started off by being the Governor's and Cabinet Ministers and ambassadors. Constitutionally women has equal rights vis a vis other citizens and are equal before law. Leaders like Sarojini Naidu became India's first governor and Indira Gandhi becoming our first lady Prime Minister led India on the path towards development.

Schemes for Women- At Present

At present there are around 147 schemes for women in India, few of them are-

Laws relating to women

1. Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987
2. Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983
3. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
4. Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
5. Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
6. National Commission for Women Act, 1990
7. Prohibition of Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace Bill, 2010
8. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

Laws relating to working women

1. Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1976
2. Employees State Insurance Act, 1948
3. Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
4. Factories (Amendment) Act, 1948
5. Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995)
6. Plantation Labour Act, 1951

Laws relating to marriage & divorce

1. Anand Marriage Act, 1909
2. Arya Marriage Validation Act, 1937
3. Births, Deaths & Marriages Registration Act, 1886
4. Bangalore Marriages Validating Act, 1936
5. Converts' Marriage Dissolution Act, 1866
6. Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, 1939
7. Family Courts Act, 1984
8. Foreign Marriage Act, 1969
9. Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
10. Hindu Marriages (Validation of Proceedings) Act, 1960
11. Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872
12. Indian Divorce Act, 1869
13. Indian Divorce Amendment Bill, 2001
14. Indian Matrimonial Causes (War Marriages) Act, 1948
15. Marriage Laws (Amendment) Act, 2001
16. Marriages Validation Act, 1892
17. Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986
18. Parsi Marriage & Divorce Act, 1936
19. Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006
20. Special Marriages Act, 1955

Constitutional Privileges

More than 14 constitutional provisions are established and identified for women in India, few of them are,

1. Equality before law for women (Article 14)
2. The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (i))
3. The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15 (3))
4. Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Article 16)

Feminists Vs Female Chauvinists

This debate is more or less similar to the debate over EQUITY and EQUALITY. Equality is when we treat all the community members as equal, and provide them with all the rights and goodies regardless of their economic, social and financial status. Whereas Equity stands for providing the same to those who are really in need.

Feminism today is slightly turning towards proving females as the greater sex than males. Or portraying them superior, this in turn can be known as Female Chauvinism. With the fake cases of domestic violence and the misuse of the instant powers, there exists a danger of entering a vicious circle of this never ending race. With the onset of #MeToo movement, women once again showcased the beauty of strength in unity! But not so late, we also came across with cases having little or no authenticity. This topic can be said to have no proper conclusion to be reached.

We can only say, that we don't have to keep it as a competition between the two wheels of the same bicycle. Rather we have to work on an overall development of India, as a nation and the individual, in particular.

Conclusion

Women in today's world needs to recognize that this genre of empowerment is not just a means to achieve something immense, but is rather a bunch of technicalities, laws, policies, morals which we need to embed in us. Achieving Gender Equality is still a far sighted dream, if we do not understand what it means and stand for!

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