

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

The squabble continues from time immemorial about the relative importance of the genders: The Man and The Woman. This may be on the screen or behind the screen, in the mind or in the speech. It is an accepted fact that except in a few cases women have generally struggled to emerge in the limelight and enjoys the cake of their sacrifices and merit. Without demeaning the manly fraternity, this article throws light on the past scenario, the present enlightenment and the future expectations of the women. The past though was a little gloomy, the present bestows much encouragement. The future will expectantly be a soaring success. The Indian as well as the world luminaries have always preached about the urgency of the women empowerment. It's a satisfying experience that women are striding with honest belief and confident steps to ultimately adorn the society with an overall harmony of thoughts and expressions. Women are now able to harness a strong belief in self that they are no less creditable in any walks of life and can also project themselves as torch bearers as and when required.

KEYWORDS: Women Empowerment, Enlightenment, Encouragement, Harmony.

INTRODUCTION

Though the words and the thoughts of Women Empowerment are now empowering the society and the government predominantly, the noble idea actually dates back to the Vedas. As it is told in the Vedas: "Jatranaripujanteramantetatradevata", which clearly means God's abode is where women are respected.

So when will be the women respected? Very simply put, they will be respected if they are empowered. Let us search out the meaning and origin of empowerment. Empowerment can be defined as having the authority or the power to do something. The word "something" in our case refers to everything which will enrich and enlighten the community. The society cannot reach greater heights of development, harmony and peace unless both the man and woman are allowed to pace parallel and realize each other's contribution. As is rightly pointed out by one of the greatest sons of India Swami Vivekananda:

"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved; It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing."

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT- THE PAST: AN UNSTABLE GLOOM

Women did have some enlightenment in the ancient times. In the Vedic period, women cherished equal status as the men in all aspects of life. Ancient Indian grammarians such as [Patanjali](#) and [Katyayana](#), several women sages notably [Gargi Vachaknavi](#) and [Maitreyi](#) suggest that

Chandigarh as Union Territory and common capital was passed by the Parliament on 7th September, 1966 and received President's assent on 18 September, 1966. With the help of facts and figures presented elsewhere we can logically consider that on the basis of the reorganization of Punjab two new states come into existence. So in both the regions the meetings, discussion and diplomatic policies were going on to form the new Government in the states. (PBCR, 49)

This move was followed with the formation of a new state Haryana on November 1, 1966 as the seventeenth state of India comprising the districts of Karnal, Gurgaon, Mohindergarh, Rohtak, Hissar and Ambala alongwith Jagadhri and Naraingarh Tehsils and also Kalka Sub-Tehsil besides Narwana and Jind Tehsils of Sangrur.

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women were educated in the early Vedic period. [Rig Vedic](#) verses also indicate that the women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their own husbands in a practice called [swayamvar](#) or live-in relationship called [Gandharva marriage](#).

Even in the [Puranas](#), every God is shown in the companionship of their wives ([Brahma](#) with [Saraswati](#), [Vishnu](#) with [Lakshmi](#) and [Shiva](#) with [Parvati](#)) which clearly depicts the equality of importance of both genders. Separate temples were setup for goddesses, and within each temple, goddesses were worshipped with as much devotion as the gods. Even in the practice of Homa (ritual involving fire), every mantra or Shloka is addressed to Swaha, the wife of Agni, instead of Agni himself. Devi Bhagavata Purana: 9.43, says that all requests to Agni had to be dedicated through his wife only.

This glorious position of women in the Rig Vedic period gradually faded in the later Vedic Civilization and they started to enter in the phase of gloom and mental agony. They were denied the rights to education, inheritance and ownership of property. Many social evils surfaced like child marriage, dowry system, Sati Pratha, denial of widow remarriage, Pardah system etc which subsequently disturbed the women community.

During the British Raj, many social reformers namely Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Pandita Rama Bai, Guru Nanakand Jyotirao Phule like came up to fight for the cause of upliftment and relief of the depressed and insulted women. Their sincere efforts led to the abolition of Sati and formulation of the Widow Remarriage act. Many more still needed to be done and same was subsequently tried for by social leaders. After the independence of India, the condition of women improved gradually.

CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

Some of the challenges for women in India are listed as: Female foeticide, infanticide, neglect during childhood, gender bias, eve-teasing, abuse of girl children, childhood marriages, Gender specific specialization at work, inherent superiority of males, Limited access to education, Low literacy levels, Limited access to cash and credit, Limited employment opportunities, Harassment a workplace, Safety, Dowry, Domestic violence, Crimes against women, Trafficking of women, Lack of awareness about government schemes, Low representation in public affairs and politics, Unemployed though educated.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT- THE PRESENT: AN EXPLORING EXPECTATION

After independent India came into being on 15th August, 1947, concerted efforts were taken to uplift the position of women in all respects. The Government of India came up with various acts, Schemes and programs to try and provide relief to the Indian women emotionally, socially, economically and legally. The Constitution of India was also adorned with various provisions to safeguard the interests of the woman community. And thus the uprising of women could be visualized. Given below is the summary of the activities of the Government of India to reach out to the aggrieved women.

Provisions in Indian constitution for women empowerment:

Article 14 – Equality before law – Provides equal legal protection for women.

Article 15(3) – Special provisions for women.

Article 16 – Equal opportunities for all citizens in public employment irrespective of caste, sex, religion.

Article 23 – Prohibits traffic in human beings & forced labour.

Article 39 – The citizen, men & women equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.

Article 40 – 1/3 rd of seats in Panchayats shall be reserved for women.

Article 42 – State shall make provisions for just and humane working conditions & maternity relief.

Article 44 – Uniform civil code for the citizens throughout the territory of India to safeguard women from laws of religion.

Article 51 A (e) – One of the duties of every citizen is to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of woman.

Government Acts for women empowerment:

Section 14 of the Hindu Succession Act 1956 – Property of a female Hindu to be her absolute property.

Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act 2005 – Women get equal share in the ancestral property.

Dowry prohibition Act, 1961.

Contract Labor Act, 1970 & Factories Act, 1948 – Women can't be employed in the night between 9pm to 6am. – Women cannot be required to work for more than 9hrs.

Equal remuneration Act, 1976.

The indecent representation of women (prohibition) Act, 1986.

Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987.

Protection of women from domestic violence Act, 2005.

Maternity Benefits Act, 1961.

Child marriage (prohibition) Act, 1929.

Hindu marriage Act, 1955 – This act was passed to stop polygamy and bigamy.

Government Schemes and Programs to empower women:

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao: To eliminate female foeticide and to promote education for girl children.

STEP (Support to training cum Employment for women) – To increase the self-reliance and autonomy of women by enhancing their productivity & enabling them to take up income generation activity.

SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan) – For girl child education. It leads to increase in the Gender Parity Index (GPI).

The National literacy Mission or Saakshar Bharat – Literacy of women. Literacy is the critical instrument of women's empowerment.

National Rural Health Mission – Educating women on health care. It has resulted in the decline in fertility rates, Maternal mortality rates (MMR), Infant mortality rates (IMR).

SHG (Self Help Groups) – For economic development in women by giving micro finances.

GB (Gender budgeting) – Identifying the felt needs of women and re-prioritizing and increasing expenditure to meet these needs.

NMEW (National Mission for Empowerment of Women) – To ensure economic & social empowerment of women.

Swayamsidha Scheme – To ensure total development of women.

Swadhar scheme – Basic necessities to marginalized women & girls.

Kishori Shakti Yojana – Empowerment of adolescent girls.

Mahila Samridhi Yojana – For women empowerment.

Maternity Benefit Scheme – Payment of Rs.500/- to pregnant women for the first two births only if the woman belongs to BPL (Below Poverty Line) category.

Rastriya Mahila Kosh – To provide micro loans for women.

Scheme for working women hostel – To promote availability of safe & conveniently located accommodation for working women.

Development of women & children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) – Creation of groups of women for income generating activities on self sustaining basis.

SABLA – Empowerment of adolescent girls.

The short show of the vibrant and successful women of India:

The women of India have showcased themselves in all walks of life. Given below is a glimpse of the women empowerment in the present India. They have left their indelible mark in all the arenas namely sports, art, literature, science and technology. The list below is the names of few notables only:

WOMEN STARS IN SPORTS AND SOCIAL LIFE

- 1. Sunitha Krishnan:** Women's Rights Activist: A passionate social worker and chief fundraiser and co-founder of Prajwala, a non-governmental organization that rescues, rehabilitate and reintegrate sex-trafficked victims into society.
- 2. Harshini Kanhekar :** Daredevil Fire-Woman : She is India's first female firefighter. From handling and lifting heavy equipment to driving the monstrous fire truck, Harshini loves everything about her job.
- 3. Puja Thakur:** Wing Commander in the Indian Air Force: Puja Thakur is the first woman to command the Guard of Honour.
- 4. Tania Sachdev:** Master Chess Player and Grand Master:. She not only holds the title of International Master of chess but is also a globally recognized Woman Grand Master as well.
- 5. Arunima Sinha:** The National Volleyball Player Who Conquered Mount Everest: Arunima holds the proud distinction of being the first woman amputee to reach the top of Mount Everest.

6. **Bhakti Sharma:** The Girl Who Swims across Oceans: By the time Bhakti turned 25 she had become the first Asian woman and the youngest in the world to set a record in open swimming in the Antarctic Ocean. She has swum in all the five oceans of the world.
7. **Kirthiga Reddy:** Head, Facebook India: The queen of social media, Kirthiga has been heading Facebook India for the last five years. The first Indian employee of the tech giant, she has already been featured in Fortune India's "Top 50 Most Powerful Women" list.
8. **Priya Jhingan:** first woman in Indian Army: Priya Jhingan was the first woman to join the Indian Army. An aspiring police officer and later a law graduate, Jhingan's dream was to join the army.
9. **Surekha Yadav:** Asia's first female train driver: Surekha Yadav was India's and Asia's first female passenger train driver. She took the front seat in a busy Mumbai commuter train eleven years ago, and has since inspired fifty other Indian women to take control of trains in the country.
10. **Chetna Sinha:** founder, first rural bank for women in India: Chetna Sinha, a farmer by profession, set up the first rural bank for women in India in 1997. Sinha's advice to future generations is to always challenge the status quo. Her bank has also helped 6000 women gain property ownership: truly ahead of its time.
11. **Urvashi Butalia:** co-founder, India's first publishing house for women: Urvashi Butalia was one of the founders of India's first publishing house dedicated to promoting women's rights. Butalia remains an inspiration to all Indian women, and was truly ahead of her time in both the professional and personal sense.
12. **Mary Kom:** Legendary Indian Boxer: She is the only Indian woman boxer who has won six championships for India. She is also the only Indian woman to qualify for the 2012 Summer Olympics where she won a Bronze Medal and gold medal at the Asian Games.
13. **Lata Mangeskar:** Legendary singer and the nightingale of India.
14. **Mahasweta Devi:** the great Indian fiction writer and socio political Activist.
15. **Arundhati Roy:** one of the most celebrated authors of India and recipient of Sahitya Academy Award.

IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. **Asima Chatterjee:** She has made huge contribution in the field of Organic Chemistry and Phyto chemistry. She is the second woman to be conferred the Doctor of Science by an Indian University for her research on plant products and synthetic Organic Chemistry.

2. **Kamala Sohanie:** She was the first woman to have bagged a Ph. D degree in the scientific discipline and the first female student of Prof. C. V. Raman. She discovered that every cell of a plant tissue contained the enzyme 'cytochrome C' which was involved in the oxidation of all plant cells.

3. **Rajeshwari Chatterjee:** She is the first woman engineer from the state of Karnataka and she received scholarship to study abroad in 1946. She along with her husband set up a microwave research laboratory where they did pioneering work on microwave engineering.

4. **Anandibai Gopalrao Joshi:** She is the first Indian woman physician and the first woman to have graduated with a two-year degree in Western Medicine in the United States. This was the first women's medical program worldwide.

5. **Janaki Ammal:** Ammal was the first Indian scientist to have received the Padma Shri Award in 1977, who went on to occupy the reputed post of the director-general of the Botanical Survey of India. She pursued scientific research in cytogenetics.

6. **Dr. Indira Hinduja:** Dr. Indira is one of the renowned gynecologist, obstetrician and infertility specialist who introduced GIFT (Gamete Intra fallopian Transfer). She delivered India's first test tube baby.

7. **Shubha Tole:** Shubha Tole is well known for her contribution in the field of neuroscience. She discovered a master regulator gene which controls the development of the brain's cortex hippocampus and amygdala.

8. **Darshan Ranganathan:** Darshan Ranganathan is well known for her work in bio-organic chemistry.

9. **Paramjit Khurana:** Paramjit Khurana is known for inventing 'All Weather Seeds'. She developed hybrid strains of mulberry, wheat and rice that are drought resistant, can withstand heat and have a higher UV radiation capacity thus helping farmers who depend on weather condition for their crops.

10. **Dr. Aditi Pant:** Dr. Aditi is a noted oceanographer and was the first Indian woman to visit Antarctica in 1983. She participated in the third and fifth Indian expeditions to Antarctica to research about oceanography and geology.

11. **Rohini Godbole:** Rohini is an Indian physicist and a professor at the Centre for High Energy Physics of the Indian Institute of Science in Bengaluru. She has worked for over three decades on Particle Phenomenology, and is particularly interested in exploring the Standard Model of Particle Physics (SM).

12. **Nandini Harinath:** A rocket scientist at the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Satellite Centre in Bengaluru, Nandini has worked on 14 missions in her 20 years of work. She was the deputy operations director for the Mangalyaan mission.

13. **Kalpana Chawla:** Chawla is the first astronaut of Indian origin to have forayed into the space. She first flew on a Space Shuttle Columbia in 1997 as a mission specialist and primary robotic arm operator.

14. **Mangala Narlikar:** An Indian mathematician, Mangala has worked in the field of both Simple Arithmetic and Advanced Mathematics at the University of Pune and the University of Mumbai. She is one of the few women mathematics researchers in the country.

15. **Tessy Thomas:** Tessy Thomas is known as the 'Missile lady' due to the successful launch of Agni series of missiles. She was the Project Director for the Agni-IV and Agni-V missile in Defence Research and Development Organisation and is the first Indian woman scientist to have headed a missile project.

16. **Muthayya Vanitha:** The director responsible for the [Chandrayaan-2](#) will become the first space mission to make a soft landing on the South Pole of the moon. She has worked as deputy project director on the first Indian remote sensing satellite used for mapping (Cartosat 1), the second ocean application satellite (Oceansat 2), and the Indo-French satellite.

17. **Ritu Karidhal:** Ritu Karidhal is the mission director who will coordinate Chandrayaan-2 when the satellite is injected into orbit. She was deputy operations director on India's Mars mission.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: THE FUTURE: THE OPTIMISTIC UPRISING

As is clear from the above picture the women are now a confident lot and can project themselves in the spectrum of life with truly successful colours. Women need not now be hesitant as they are slowly yet steadily able to garnish their life with their own desired flavours of success. Fortunately enough women community is now able to get the support of their family, society and the government as well. Accepting the fact that it may not be a fully rosy picture throughout the length and breadth of India, let us hope that the thorns still remaining will work to strengthen the mindset of the less privileged ones. The success stories imprinted by the brave and the beautiful will inspire the deprived to gather mental strength and break free from the shackles of the biasness. The days are not far behind and the future promises to be an optimistic uprising. The days are not far behind that the Kalpanas, The Vanithas, The Ritus, The Urvashis, The Priyas, The Mangalas and the Harshinis will be the flag bearers of a comfortable, knowledgeable and a harmonious society. Let us use the quotes of Swamiji as the roadmap of optimism and hence:

The Past: "Woman has suffered for aeons, and that has given her infinite patience and infinite perseverance."

The Present: "The idea of perfect womanhood is perfect independence."

The Future: "There is no hope of rise for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness."

CONCLUSION

We, thus, are treading forward from an unstable gloom through an exploring expectation towards an optimistic uprising. Women need to be the best version of themselves through independent thoughts and everything else will follow. Education and awareness are the most important tools of optimism. Awareness is required in all respects such as legal rights, health issues, economic security and self belief towards the goal. Skill development programs will boost the potential of the women too. Women can strive to break the hurdles in groups as unity gives the courage and confidence to all. Education of the women is of prime importance as everything starts from educating the minds. The little things and the little thoughts will make a huge and significant difference to lead the women to a great future. As the Nobel Peace Prize winner Kofi Annan puts it: "There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women."

So march forward O Women....

You can definitely never forget the words of Robert Frost:

The woods are lovely dark and deep
But I have promises to keep
And miles to go before I sleep...
And miles to go before I sleep...

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