

Title: ‘Her Power, Our Future: A Call to Empower Women Everywhere’

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ABSTRACT:

This paper delves into women empowerment in India over the years; how far we have come and how long we still have to go.

Women's Empowerment is one of the most relevant and important topics to talk about in India. With the completion of 75 years of independence recently, it is crucial to look back and recognize how much we have progressed while paving a better future for the coming generations. My research will talk about the major milestones we have accomplished in order to capacitate women with changing times. It will also focus on the current status of women and what still needs to be done to uplift women and ensure equality amongst the citizens.

Women empowerment doesn't just mean making laws to protect and encourage women, what matters most is making sure these laws are being followed and seeking justice whenever required. It means standing up against discriminatory actions or comments and supporting each other. It means recognizing when wrongs are being committed and speaking up against it. It means accepting that there are gender gaps that still pertain in the 21st century and working to eradicate them. It means providing equal and fair opportunities to everyone regardless of their caste, religion, economic background, etc.

Discussing the past paves a path for making a better future. That is what my paper will discuss in detail.

Keywords: progress, milestones, changing times, uplift, equality, eradicate, better future.

INTRODUCTION:

Women Empowerment as defined by UNESCWA, *is the process by which women become aware of gender-based unequal power relationships and acquire a greater voice in which to speak out against the inequality found in the home, workplace, and community. It involves women taking control of their lives: setting their agendas, gaining skills, solving problems, and developing self-reliance.*

Women's empowerment has been a recurring theme in Indian history, characterized by both progress and challenges. From the egalitarian ethos of ancient civilizations to the patriarchal structures of medieval times and the evolving landscape of modern India, the journey of women's empowerment reflects the broader socio-cultural and political developments in the country.

To be a woman in the modern world is an experience one can never describe in words, it is something which can only be understood properly by living it. Yes, there have been significant changes and progress in women's status and role in society. Yes, there are laws to protect us and ensure justice. No, it is not enough. No, gender equality still doesn't exist. Yes, we still face discrimination, exploitation, mockery, and injustice daily. No, we certainly will not accept any more disrespect disguised as a "joke".

DISCUSSION:

Women through the ages: We will be looking at the status of women during the three main periods of Indian history.

➤ Ancient India:

- Women played a significant role in society. They enjoyed high status in society and their condition was good during the Rig Vedic period.
- They held high positions in education, politics, and other spheres of life.

- They were considered “*Shakti*” meaning power. (Selvi 3)
- In the later days of the Vedic period, women’s status began changing. They were deprived of social and religious rights. (Selvi 3)
- Patriarchy was established and female foeticide along with gender disparities was being practiced. The birth of a girl child was now seen as a misfortune.

➤ **Medieval India** (700 AD to 1857):

- This period is considered a “Dark Age” for women as their status declined considerably with foreign invasions.
- The society was patriarchal and gave autonomy to male dominance.
- Sati Pratha, child marriage, and restrictions on widow remarriage were some of the oppressive practices that became prevalent during the period.
- Women were denied the study of Vedas and higher education. According to a philosopher, Vatsyayana, women were to stay at home, cook, perform all household tasks, and take care of the children.
- The quality of life of women regardless of their economic, religious, and cultural background was extremely poor.

➤ **Modern India** (1857 to present):

- The colonial era brought about further challenges for women, as British colonial policies often reinforced existing gender hierarchies and discriminations.
- Indian social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy first enacted the Prohibition of Sati Act in 1829 with the help of Lord Betting. (Patil 7)
- Recognizing that the main reason for the backwardness of Indians was the confinement of women, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule started the first school for girls in Pune in 1848. This highly revolutionary decision began to change the lives of Indian women. (Patil 7)
- Mahatma Phule and Savitribai Phule were of the view that widows, abandoned, destitute women in a society victimized by male injustice should not end their

lives, and they should give birth to their children in a child prevention home and take the child home if they want or with child murder prevention. (Patil 7)

- The participation of women in the political, social, economic, and educational spheres began to increase. However, in the male-dominated system, the status of women did not change much. (Patil 7)
- The 20th and 21st centuries are very important for Indian society. This period has brought about many radical changes in the lives of Indian women. During this period, the personality of the woman changed, and the social, cultural, and familial existence of the woman became meaningful. (Patil 8)
- The post-independence period in India saw the enactment of progressive legislation aimed at empowering women, such as the Hindu Succession Act (1956) and the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961). (Patil 8)
- The Constitution of India guarantees equal rights and opportunities to women, with provisions for affirmative action and reservations in education and employment.
- From the British era, the status of Indian women began to improve. In the post-independence period, conscious efforts were made through various progressive laws, various projects, and opportunities for women in various fields, etc. Women also tried to raise their status by developing their abilities.
- Today, women have made their debut in various fields like literature, music, art, politics, administration, drama-film, education, etc. (Patil 9)

➤ **Challenges in Modern Times:** This does not mean women do not face any challenges in the modern world, new problems have arisen and the patriarchal society still thrives.

- **Gender Pay Gap-** In the modern era, when there is finally certain acceptance of working women, a new challenge of gender-biased pay gap has become prevalent. Women who are working in the same position and hours as men, and are doing the same work, are paid less than their male counterparts. There is no reason for this other than gender-based discrimination.

- Women are subjected to verbal, emotional, and physical abuse inside their homes, offices, etc. The mentality that women are inferior to men is still widespread.
- Majority of the people refuse to accept the fact that women are still discriminated against and treated as less than beings. They refuse to believe we face inequalities even in the simplest of daily events.
- Why is the school head boy always given the school flag? Why is it always the head BOY and head GIRL? Why do I have to work so much more than my male classmates to prove my worth? Why do they get the recognition so easily when all they've done is the bare minimum? Why is a male voice powerful, more respected, and heard than a woman's, even if they don't hold as much authority?
- A woman has to work twice as hard and achieve much more than any man to establish herself and prove she is capable. She has to always stay fresh and change her style to stay relevant. She has to face twice the backlash, the doubts, the disapproval, the judgment, and the comments. In matter what a woman might achieve, no matter her capabilities, a woman cannot win in this society.
- In the golden words of Taylor Swift, "*A man does something, it's **strategic**. A woman does the same thing it's **calculated**. A man is allowed to **react**, a woman can only **overreact**.*"

CONCLUSION:

The journey of women's empowerment in India is marked by a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-political factors. While significant progress has been made, there is a need for continued efforts to address the challenges and barriers that hinder women's full participation in society. By fostering a conducive environment that promotes gender equality and inclusivity, India can realize its vision of a truly empowered and equitable society. Gender equality is what will take us further, it is through gender equality that we can establish mutual respect, admiration, and tolerance for each other. This plays a huge role in the concept of coexistence.

Constantly being belittled, bullied, disrespected, and taken for granted, being a woman is difficult. Most importantly, being a woman means being strong, supporting one another, and always, always working to make this world, *our* world a better society for our future generations to live in. We need to recognize, acknowledge, and take action to make sure the world becomes a safe and equal place for women. We need to work in order to ensure women never ever have to face the misogyny faced by our ancestors and even us.

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