

**Title: EMPOWERING WOMEN: THE INVINCIBLE FORCE**

Student's name: Pavitra Dholakia

School: Zydus School for Excellence, Godhavi

Grade: 11

Category- Senior

## **Title: EMPOWERING WOMEN: THE INVINCIBLE FORCE**

### **Abstract**

It is known that the government of India has taken several affirmative measures to empower women. Yet, women in our country are still fighting to co-exist with equality in every sector amongst the patriarchal society like ours. The roots of this social evil are so deep that it can be felt how vital it is for women to know about their rights and, for the others, to empower them. This thesis investigates women empowerment through ancient, medieval and modern India.

Consolidating evidence from Indian history studies, personal scrutiny relating to the subject matter and research, this study demonstrates the pre-nation conditions in India, the need, results, effects and current situation of empowering women in our nation. Arguments on how women are being perceived through the ages – from '*janani*' to '*material of less worth*' and how it has changed the ideas of the society is integrated in this paper. Women being humans as well have been defended and taken steps for which have led to concurring culmination towards the modern India. Empowering women since their childhood is what makes their thoughts induce independently. Gunjan Saxena's life experiences are discussed in this paper which empowers the girls of our country to thrive for and achieve their dreams, be it against the patriarchal society.

**Keywords** – patriarchal society, empowerment, pre-nation, defended, independently, achieve

### **Introduction**

In India, empowering women has been the theme of various government events to promote the same and thus, has taken the limelight. Empowering women is important for achieving gender equality and to create a peaceful, progressive and healthy society where both men and women can actually feel equality in authentic terms. This idea needs to be taken into account as the latter have been dominated by the male counterparts in every aspect since ages. Education is the most important aspect to enhance women's lives as quoted by India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru – "*If you educate a man, you educate an individual.*"

*However, if you educate a woman, you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered.”*

Having said that, Indian women in ancient history did not face discourtesy by the other gender. Instead, they were given equal respect and were honoured by the society by getting considered as '*janani*' which means 'the birth giver'. According to the Hindu scriptures and India's rich cultural history, females were considered 'Devi', literally meaning 'goddesses.' This can be seen in the history of Bharatnatyam, Tamil Nadu's classical dance. Here, women were considered sacred and thus, qualified to dance for the god. Husbands considered their wives as their '*ardhangini*' or the better halves. The wives of the rishis could also take part in spiritual activities like their husbands and females were free to get educated as well. However, in the later Vedic ages, women gradually deprived of their rights. These included rights like reading the Vedas, following Vedic rituals and practices and reciting Vedic slokas and mantra. In the decades that followed, women were forced to get married and have a devotion towards their husbands. Birth of a girl child was considered shameful and this idea has continued to be in the roots of the patriarchal society that we see today, though its effects have been declining greatly through education.

## **Discussion**

In the times of emperors and Indian colonization under the British, the ideas of women empowerment grew strong to a great extent. Indian women leaders who sought to change the system exerted their powers heroically as seen in history and they still continue to inspire the world. Some of them are Nur Jahan, Razia Sultan, Rani Lakshmi bai, Ahilya bai Holkar, Sarojini Naidu and Indira Gandhi. During the British rule over India, practices like Sati, Jauhar, child marriage were closed and right to education, access to widow re-marriage, and right to property were granted with the help of social reformers. This access to the rights was limited in a way but it was a result of a long battle fought by courageous females. Females also did not have the right to political enfranchisement which they fought for in the '*women's suffrage movement in India*' under the East India Company rule. Begum Hazrat Mahal played a leading lady's role in the Indian rebellion of 1857. She felt that religion was being interfered by the non-Indian ideas of British rule such as food habits, wine-drinking habits, greased cartridges' practices and destruction of Hindu temples and Muslim mosques to make roads. Despite the fights, equality for women was achieved only after India got independent, through the Indian Constitution.

These discussions from historic ages show how invincible women have been till date. However, in this paper, the investigation's limelight would be on Gunjan Saxena.

As per the data of the year 2018-2020, the infant mortality rate of girl child has dropped to 28, which is the same as that of the male IMR. This is a good sign that people want girls to live. Their capacity building programmes and training can be looked upon through the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* scheme of the government of India. Talking about the birth of a girl child, far back in the year 1974, Captain Anup Kumar Saxena wanted the birth of his daughter, a girl child (Saxena and Nirvan, 11). He and Mrs. Kirti Saxena have raised such an empowered woman – Gunjan Saxena. She was always taught to fight her own fight and make herself heard, though she has an elder brother, (Saxena and Nirvan, 65) which could be seen during her SSB selection and also when she was flying the Cheetah helicopter in the Kargil War. From this, it can be inferred that good parenting leads to an empowered woman. Parents are their children's biggest support; the girl child must get this support to get uplifted in a place where maximum male heads are seen. Her example empowers women to follow their dreams and their undying passions and to never give up, be it the society's interruptions or the male domination as a barrier. In the midst of a chaotic war-like situation back in 1999, Flight Lieutenant Saxena was the only woman pilot among the fighter pilots and other male pilots in Srinagar air base (Saxena and Nirvan, 187). Her concerned brother who was also there in Srinagar, told her that it was not safe to fly in this area. As a reply, Gunjan asked, 'Then why are you here?' to which, his brother who was also in the army, had no reply (Saxena and Nirvan, 189). When being posted to the Indian Air Force station at Udhampur, she expected a warm greeting. Instead, a male officer from her unit had come to receive her from the convoy grounds. He did not say anything more than welcoming her to the unit. Upon reaching the station, she and her course mate were getting awkward converses from the other officers. This was because of them being the first women pilots being posted there. The infrastructure required for women was also missing in the station (Saxena and Nirvan, 182). They were made a makeshift changing room using steel cupboards as partitions for separate changing rooms were not available for women. Dealing with all this, Gunjan Saxena still was totally focused upon her work and her dream. This ignites in other women across the globe a sense of single-mindedness. During the war, a sortie had to be planned for casualty evacuation in the Uri sector, and the helipad was close to the LoC. No pilots or co-pilots were allowed if they hadn't been there before as navigating was a challenging task there. Only Gunjan had been there before, so she had to go for the evacuation. The courageous lady was successful in pulling off a difficult sortie (Saxena and Nirvan, 209) with

enemies around during the Kargil war. She had set this in mind, “Whatever happens, I will not let them capture me alive.”

## **Conclusion**

With her as an inspiration and motivation in their minds, hundreds of girls have a willingness and empowerment to conquer the blue skies. Other than this bold woman, the three first women fighter pilots have played a major role as empowered women to look up to. The three women are – Avani Chaturvedi, Bhavana Kanth and Mohana Singh. Other than the military sector, women nowadays have been in the lead in every single sector in India. The theme of the 75<sup>th</sup> Republic Day were ‘Viksit Bharat’ and ‘Bharat – Loktantra ki Matrukta’, celebrating the endless contribution from the females of the country. 26 tableaux were spotlighting ‘women empowerment’ and the parades were women-centric. From science and technology to art and culture, from military to sports, women have been spectacular and have proved themselves equal as male co-workers. Though cases like eve-teasing, female foeticide and infanticide, rape and harassment have still not stopped, but women are emerging above against these issue with a greater force (these topics being sensitive and vast are not discussed in this thesis).

In conclusion, women in the pre-Vedic ages were enjoying their lives with utmost respect which later rolled down into the disempowerment and deprivation of their rights in the later Vedic ages. The battle started from the emperor period and the British rule’s period and the necessity of their upliftment was taken care of by fearless females. They featured as the inspiring leaders to many women. Social reformers heard their voices and certain customs were outlawed during that period. Nevertheless, equality was truly granted to women only through the Constitution of India. Central and state governments, civil society of modern independent India, women’s rights groups and awareness have led to improvement in women’s education. More educated women have led to their empowerment and to them walking side by side with men in all aspects of life. Flt Lt Gunjan Saxena (retd) has played an immense role by achieving excellence in the fields where only men were expected. However, the fact remains that empowering women for their participation in economic life in all sectors is essential for building a strong economy and for achieving globally agreed goals for sustainability and development. This would lead to improved quality of life for all. *‘People used to say that boxing is for men and not for women and I thought I will show them some*

*day. I promised myself and proved myself.'* (Mary Kom) Women should be empowered and given platforms in order to achieve gender equality in longer terms and all of us have a responsibility in this regard.

## References

- Shibulal, Kumari, *Empowerment of Women Through Education: A Critical Examination*, Times of India, 2021
- Roy, Baydahi, *Women's empowerment in India, from ancient period to modern time period.*, Times of India, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/scatteredthoughts/womens-empowerment-in-india-from-ancient-period-to-modern-time-period-46689/>, accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024
- *Begum Hazrat Mahal*, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Begum\\_Hazrat\\_Mahal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Begum_Hazrat_Mahal), accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2024
- Nagarajan, Rema, India's female IMR drops to same level as males', Times of India, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/indias-female-imr-drops-to-same-level-as-males/articleshow/94629223.cms>, accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024
- बेटी बचाओ बेटी पढ़ाओ – बालिका शिशु की देखभाल, pmindia, [https://www.pmindia.gov.in/hi/government\\_tr\\_rec/%E0%A4%AC%E0%A5%87%E0%A4%9F%E0%A5%80-%E0%A4%AC%E0%A4%9A%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%93-%E0%A4%AC%E0%A5%87%E0%A4%9F%E0%A5%80-%E0%A4%AA%E0%A4%A2%E0%A4%BC%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%93-%E0%A4%AC%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%B2/#:~:text=%E0%A4%AC%E0%A5%87%E0%A4%9F%E0%A5%80%20%E0%A4%AC%E0%A4%9A%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%93%20%E0%A4%AC%E0%A5%87%E0%A4%9F%E0%A5%80%20%E0%A4%AA%E0%A4%A2%E0%A4%BC%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%93%20%E0%A4%95%E0%A5%80,%E0%A4%AE%E0%A5%81%E0%A4%A6%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%A6%E0%A5%8B%E0%A4%82%20%E0%A4%95%E0%A4%BE%20%E0%A4%B8%E0%A4%AE%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%A7%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%A8%20%E0%A4%B9%E0%A5%8B%E0%A4%A4%E0%A4%BE%20%E0%A4%B9%E0%A5%88%E0%A5%A4](https://www.pmindia.gov.in/hi/government_tr_rec/%E0%A4%AC%E0%A5%87%E0%A4%9F%E0%A5%80-%E0%A4%AC%E0%A4%9A%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%93-%E0%A4%AC%E0%A5%87%E0%A4%9F%E0%A5%80-%E0%A4%AA%E0%A4%A2%E0%A4%BC%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%93-%E0%A4%AC%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%B2/#:~:text=%E0%A4%AC%E0%A5%87%E0%A4%9F%E0%A5%80%20%E0%A4%AC%E0%A4%9A%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%93%20%E0%A4%AC%E0%A5%87%E0%A4%9F%E0%A5%80%20%E0%A4%AA%E0%A4%A2%E0%A4%BC%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%93%20%E0%A4%95%E0%A5%80,%E0%A4%AE%E0%A5%81%E0%A4%A6%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%A6%E0%A5%8B%E0%A4%82%20%E0%A4%95%E0%A4%BE%20%E0%A4%B8%E0%A4%AE%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%A7%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%A8%20%E0%A4%B9%E0%A5%8B%E0%A4%A4%E0%A4%BE%20%E0%A4%B9%E0%A5%88%E0%A5%A4), accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024
- Lavania, Sudeep, 26 tableaux to highlight women empowerment on 75th Republic Day, India Today, 2024, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/republic-day-2024-26-tableaux-to-highlight-women-empowerment-2493784-2024-01-26>, accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2024