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ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is the process of treating the women with same status with that of men in all the fields of the society. Women Empowerment has become a movement now but in our country it only seems a distant dream. We have restricted our perceptions to only upliftment of women from the value of an object to the value of a living being. But what is required in the present period is a little beyond it. We make a great show off whenever a woman makes towering achievements but instead of showing off why not recognize it to be natural and normal like we do with men doing the same. Contrary to today's scenario, even during Vedic era women had enjoyed equal status with men. Various modes were also adopted to make sure that this stature continues. But now the basic problem a woman faces is that of education, poverty, safety, health and lots more. In order to tackle it, various schemes and policies have been drafted and implemented. So is its consequence that even the UN has dedicated one of its Millennium Development Goals to empowerment of Indian woman. The paper describes the need for empowerment along with discussing the various challenges faced by women in India. In the end, the paper concludes with a positive note that with all the required tools in hand what is required to meet the end is right administration and different efforts to implement the various steps taken for women empowerment by following ethical practices.'

KEYWORDS: *Women empowerment, ethics, challenges faced by women, empowerment*

INTRODUCTION

'Empowerment' may be described as a process which helps people to emphasize their control over the factors which affect their lives. 'Empowerment of women' means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent decisions in matters that affect them. The principle of gender equality is preserved in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also authorizes the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women. Due recognition must be given to women and society should come frontward to ensure equal status for women in all spheres of life.

'Ethical considerations' encompass the personal and corporate standards of behavior expected by professionals and society in each sphere of life. The word professionalism originally applied to vows of a religious category. Professionals and those working in acknowledged professions put into effect specialist knowledge and skill. How the use of this awareness should be governed when providing a service to the public can be considered an ethical issue and is termed professional ethics.

When we talk about the society at large, women form the mainstream for all tasks at the home, social arena and each and every sphere of their and their family's personal lives. They are capable of making judgments, applying their skills, and reaching informed decisions in situations that the general public cannot because they have not attained the necessary

knowledge and skills which women inherently have in them. But, is the society and professionals providing all the required opportunities at the right time and in right quality to the women at large? Aren't the women being exploited at different points – be it societal requirements, professional requirements, business requirements or their own FAMILY?

The business ethics has a great impact on women empowerment. Business ethics can be visible in its functional areas of marketing, finance and human resource management. Further, business ethics can be visible in CSR and leadership of corporate. The paper is an attempt to examine how business and societal ethics impacts women empowerment in India. Businesses in India has not been very keen and careful to adopt business ethics, which is evident from the fact that women in India are less empowered than the women of developed countries. It is important that women in India must be empowered and businesses in India have to follow ethical principles in all functional areas possible to enhance women empowerment. Same is the case with the society, ethics if followed and implemented, would empower women to a large extent.

So, let's open the myths related to women empowerment being picturised at different levels by the so called owners of the society and discuss the ethics to be followed when talking and implementing WOMEN EMPOWERMENT policies.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT DEFINED

Women empowerment means their capacity to participate as equal partners in cultural, social, economic and political systems of a society. Even though the world economy has developed into universal economy, in both developed and developing countries, women have been suppressed in all walks of life for generations. Women empowerment is far easier said than completed. This in a certain respect demands a radical change in the socio cultural values of the society. In USA and western countries the education and health of a woman is much superior comparatively with developing countries. Still gender bias and beliefs are playing as chief impediment for the growth of women empowerment worldwide. In India also, in spite of various laws that protect women's rights, the gender inequalities are one of the highest in the world.

Coming back to women empowerment, in simple words, it is the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society. Women want to be treated as equals so much so that if a woman rises to the pinnacle of her field, it should be a commonplace occurrence that draws nothing more than a raised eyebrow at the sexual category. This can only happen if there is a channelized route for the empowerment of women.

According to the United Nations, women's empowerment has mainly five components:

1. Generating women's sense of self worth.
2. Women's right to have and to determine their choices.
3. Women's right to have access to equal opportunities and all kinds of resources.
4. Women's right to have the power to regulate and control their own lives, within and outside their homes.
5. Women's ability to create a more just social and economic order.

Thus, women empowerment is nothing but recognition of women's basic human rights creating an environment where they are treated as equals to men.

It is no real revelation that women empowerment in India is a hotly discussed topic with no actual solution looming in the horizon except to doubly redouble our pains and continue to aim the sources of all the violence and ill-will towards women.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the reasons why women should be empowered.
2. To find the challenges encountered by women in the society and professional life at large.
3. To find out the positive efforts to be taken for upliftment of women.

METHODOLOGY

The prepared paper is a descriptive study in nature. The secondary data and information have been analyzed for preparing the paper extensively. The secondary information have been collected from different researchers' published books, articles published in different journals, conference paper, working paper and websites.

WHAT DOES OUR CONSTITUTION SAY

India's Constitution makers and our founding fathers were very determined to provide equivalent rights to both women and men. The Constitution of India is one of the finest impartiality documents in the world. It provides provisions to secure equality in general and gender equality in particular. Various articles in the Constitution defend women's rights by putting them at par with men socially, politically and economically. The Preamble, the Fundamental Rights, DPSPs and other constitutional provisions give several general and special safeguards to secure women's human rights.

Preamble:

The Preamble to the Constitution of India assures justice, social, economic and political; equality of status and opportunity and dignity to the human being. Thus it treats both men and women equal.

Fundamental Rights:

The policy of women empowerment is well entrenched in the Fundamental Rights enshrined in our Constitution. For instance:

- Article 14 ensures to women the right to equality.
- Article 15(1) specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.
- Article 15(3) empowers the State to take affirmative actions in favor of women.
- Article 16 provides for equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office.

These rights being fundamental rights are justifiable in court and the Government is obliged to follow the same.

Directive Principles of State Policy:

Directive principles of State Policy also contains important provisions regarding women empowerment and it is the duty of the government to apply these principles while making laws or formulating any policy. Though these are not justifiable in the Court but these are essential for governance nonetheless. Some of them are:

- Article 39 (a) provides that the State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- Article 39 (d) mandates equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- Article 42 provides that the State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

Fundamental Duties:

Fundamental duties are enshrined in Part IV-A of the Constitution and are positive duties for the people of India to follow. It also contains a duty related to women's rights:

Article 51 (A) (e) expects from the citizen of the country to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Other Constitutional Provisions:

Through 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment of 1993, a very important political right has been given to women which is a landmark in the direction of women empowerment in India. With this amendment women were given 33.33 percent reservation in seats at different levels of elections in local governance i.e. at Panchayat, Block and Municipality elections.

Thus it can be seen that these Constitutional provisions are very empowering for women and the State is duty bound to apply these principles in taking policy decisions as well as in enacting laws. These laws are there which not only provide specific legal

rights to women but also gives them a sense of security and empowerment.

NEED FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The need for empowerment arose due to centuries of domination and discrimination done by men over women. Women are the suppressed lot.

Even in this 21st century, gender inequality still subsists.

There are so many women, who are silently bearing the harassment from their life partners and others because of the lack of education, lack of legal awareness and lack of empowerment.

When women are empowered, whole civilization benefits, because women constitute half of the society. Educating women about health care promotes healthier families.

Even though women work 24/7 to lift up their children and to maintain their families, they are not getting enough recognition for house chores and home maintenance. As this work is unpaid, women who choose to be home makers are not considered as working persons in Indian economy. Due to this, their self esteem tends to be low.

For that to change, the age old traditions deep rooted in the society need to be crushed out through social conditioning and sensitization programmes.

Therefore, women empowerment not only focuses on giving women power and skills to go up above from their miserable situation but at the same time, it also stresses on the need to sensitize men regarding different women issues.

CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

There are many challenges that are currently plaguing the issues of women's rights in India. A lot of issues are unneeded and quite basic which has been faced across the country; they are contributory causes to the overarching status of women in India. Targeting these issues will directly do well to the empowerment of women in India.

- ✓ Education
- ✓ Poverty in the country
- ✓ Health and Safety
- ✓ Female foeticide.
- ✓ Female infanticide.
- ✓ Neglect during childhood.
- ✓ Gender Bias.
- ✓ Eve-teasing
- ✓ Abuse of girl children
- ✓ Childhood marriages.
- ✓ Gender specific specialization at work.
- ✓ Cultural definition of appropriate gender roles.
- ✓ Belief in the inherent superiority of males. Families are considered as a confidential sphere and stays under male control.

- ✓ Honor killings – Family honor is associated with women in general, which is an extra burden on women.
- ✓ Limited access to cash and credit.
- ✓ Limited employment opportunities.
- ✓ Harassment at workplace
- ✓ Dowry
- ✓ Domestic Violence
- ✓ Still, house chores are women's duty
- ✓ Restriction on widow remarriage
- ✓ Trafficking of women
- ✓ Lack of awareness about Government Schemes
- ✓ Low representation in public affairs and politics
- ✓ Unemployed though educated
- ✓ Limited employment opportunities
- ✓ Unequal Pay

**THE NEED OF THE HOUR – THE ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS
“THERE IS NO TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT MORE EFFECTIVE THAN THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN”**

The women need to be empowered. We have discussed these umpteen times but have these ideas been implemented properly, the actions being taken properly, the steps being thought of even properly. The need of the hour is to follow ethics while deciding any policies or schemes for women. The ethics need to be followed even when the women are at home with their family or in the society at large. The different ethical considerations to be taken under scanner when we are thinking about women empowerment have been discussed below:

- There should be respect and dignity towards Women.
- Have total independences of their own life and lifestyle inside the home and also outside at their work.
- They should make their decisions, by their own choice.
- They should have a high social respect in society.
- They should have equal rights in society and other judicial works.
- They should not be discriminated while providing any type of education.
- They should select their own economic and financial choices by their own.
- There should not be any discrimination between woman and man while giving jobs and employment.
- They should have safe and secured working location with proper privacy.

- Raising self-esteem and self-confidence of women.
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girl child.
- Building and strengthening partnership with civil society particularly women's organisations.
- Enforcement of constitutional and legal provisions and safeguarding rights of women.
- Building a positive image of women in the society and recognizing their contributions in social, economic and political sphere.
- Developing ability among women to think critically.
- Ensuring women's participation in all walks of life.
- Providing information, knowledge, skills for self-employment.
- Elimination of discrimination against women's participation in the areas of:
 - Access to food
 - Equal wages
 - Property rights
 - Family resources
 - Freedom of movement and travel
 - Access to credit
 - Control over savings, earnings and resources
 - Guardianship and custody of children and their maintenance
- Gender sensitization training in schools, colleges and other professional institutions for bringing about institutional balances.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can be said that women in India, through their own unrelenting efforts and with the help of Constitutional and other legal provisions and also with the aid of Government's various welfare schemes, are trying to find their own place under the sun. And it is a heartening sign that their participation in employment- government as well as private, in socio-political activities of the nation and also their presence at the highest decision making bodies is improving day by day.

However, we are still far behind in achieving the equality and justice which the Preamble of our Constitution talks about. The real problem lies in the patriarchal and male-dominated system of our society which considers women as subordinate to men and creates different types of methods to subjugate them.

The need is to educate and sensitize male members of the society regarding women issues and try to inculcate a feeling of togetherness and equality among them so that they would stop their discriminatory practices towards the fairer sex.

For this to happen apart from Government, the efforts are needed from various NGOs and from enlightened citizens of the country. And first of all efforts should begin from our homes where we must empower female members of our family by providing them equal opportunities of education, health, nutrition and decision making without any discrimination.

Because India can become a powerful nation only if it truly empowers its women.

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