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## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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### ABSTRACT

Women comprise almost half of the world's population. Almost same in number with men yet they are discriminated socially politically, economically in many ways. The word empowerment means 'to give authority or power to someone' or 'to give strength and confidence to someone'. Women empowerment aim at reducing the seclusion, segregation and alienation of women in various fields and want to assure them a quality life and living. Socio-political and economic constraints to women empowerment exists in most of the societies of the world. Women are denied the access to resource and opportunities. The paper makes an attempt to examine the issues and challenges of women empowerment from a gender perspective.

The number of men and women in the world is roughly equal, though men hold a slight lead. But males have a higher risk of dying than females, both in childhood and at adult ages. So at certain ages the numbers of men and women even out. The status of women improved the most in the economically progressive areas donated by Western culture. But there is considerable ambiguity about the nature and status of woman in the developing and underdeveloped countries of the world.

The principal areas in which controls are exercised on women are sexuality; women are more easily defiled and given social attitudes that bring disgrace both to the family in which they are born and into one which they are married. Secondly there are restraints on women's movements and contact; thirdly it is thought that women's resources need regulation and control.<sup>1</sup> The manners in which these controls are exercised depend to a great extent on social structure, role allocation, value premises and the rigidity or flexibility of social control. <sup>2</sup>The subject of empowerment of women has becoming a burning issue all over the world since last few

<sup>1</sup> S.C. Dube, *Indian Society*, P. 107, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2005

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

decades, women's quest for equality with men is a universal phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> However there are many constraints in the process of women's quest for equality.

The present paper is a descriptive and analytical study from gender perspectives. It is based on historical method using gender as a tool for analysis. The work is prepared with the aid of secondary sources like books, journals and news papers.

The world we live in, because of the air and space we share, is a borderless one where sustainability, the economy of life and goods open governance should provide the benchmarks for gross transnational happiness on an inter-connected, integrated planet.<sup>4</sup> Women are a sex. Women are separate group due to then biological distinctiveness. The merit of using the term is that it clearly defines women as half of the whole. Men are the only other sex, but in spite of the fact women are oppressed and exploited decades after decades. Not one of women especially in the developing and under developed countries, regardless of economic or social status can walk the streets safely after sundown. They retreat silently into the shadows, the white flag of surrender over their heads, giving themselves up to the helplessness of not being able to win protection from a male dominated environment, and the hands that grope, violate and destroy their physical and mental sanity.<sup>5</sup> Women have to face immense constrains whether it may be social, political economic, technological or psychological while working hard for strengthening their positions or while craving for equal rights and opportunities.

Most of the societies in the world never place women on an equal footing with men; this is because most of the societies with a few exceptions are characterized by patriarchy. Authority within the family is vested in the males who are the principal decision makers. Women's presence in the decision making process is no; conspicuously visible, though strong willed and mature women do assert themselves; but they often remain in the background. Women are often treated as commodities. Situations improved a bit in the urban societies where women are educated and have access to basic necessities required to lead a quality life. But the scenario as a whole is quite pathetic. Crime and violence are rampant against the women in the society both rural and urban. So far as our country India is concerned, more than 9,700 cases were filed regarding violence against women from the month of April 2015 to the month of July 2015. The state of Uttar Pradesh leads the list with 6,110 cases filed Most of the cases are related to rape, domestic violence, molestation and dowry or other property related issues. This information is furnished in the parliament by Menaka Gandhi the Indian Union Cabinet Minister for women and Child Development. This index is a mere example. The situation deteriorates in an alarming rate day by day. Social constraints are one of the most important

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<sup>3</sup> Web sources ([www.yourarticlelibrary.com](http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com)) accessed on 6/10/2017.

<sup>4</sup> Nirupama Rao, Challenges to Democracy in a Globalized World: A Woman's Perspective in Manorama Yearbook, pp.803-809, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

hindrances of women empowerment. Today's society even deny the women of their human rights, there is struggle by women to seek their human rights, to seek, freedom from fear and for their security, physical and psychological. Example may be cited of Malala Yousufzai, the youngest ever Nobel Prize Laureate, Pakistani activist for female education. Society established certain rules and customs that severely hindered the all round development of women, forcing them to be dependent upon and subservient to men for their very survival. This is even true in the cases of well educated and economically dependent women leading a copy life.

A woman is never completely safe and secure even at her own place. Her character and virginity is always put into question. Social customs and mores are rigorous enough so far as women are concerned as compared to men. The conditions of women without education and economic security are much more deplorable. They even lack the adequate amount of nutritious food for consumption and basic health care facilities. Many of them die during child birth. Women in the society are questioned about how do they live how do they behave, how do they react or how do they dressed themselves. Even society imposes limitations on the extent of enjoyment of the women. But ridiculously there are no such social terms and conditions for men.

These social constraints eventually lead to economic constraints of women empowerment. Economic empowerment combines the concept of empowerment and economic advancement. In respect of role allocation, distinction is made between men's work and women's work. The domestic chores are to be maintained by the women including the rearing of children and men's duty is to earn the livelihood through some jobs or business this is the traditional way of life in a society. However in the modern society we find a large number of working women engaging themselves in some kind of jobs or business pursuits but maintaining the household and looking after the children still continues to be the prime responsibility of a woman.

Economic constraints of Women Empowerment also reflects the male-female dichotomy the concepts which identifies women with nature and men with culture. Women are denied the access to resources and opportunities. The most qualified women are debarred from holding the high posts in the establishments just because of her female sex. This trend has undergone a sea change in the recent years however. Women boss are preferred all over the world now. But there is no change in the situation for the women manual workers living below the poverty line; they are paid lesser wages compared to their male counter parts. Women belonging to any state of the society often face sexual harassments or another kind of mental harassments either from their male boss or male colleagues which hampers the growth in their career. Working hours are also strictly limited for women as they do not feel safe working in the offices during night hours. Developed countries like United States of America ensures the safety of the women employees in the offices and establishments but there are no such provisions in developing and under developed countries. The women workers in these countries have a hard time balancing their work, career and a safer place of work.

Achieving sustainable economic growth requires the talent, creativity and entrepreneurial vigour of an entire population. Women comprise more

than forty percent of the global work force make up one third of formal business owners and are responsible for or influence as much as eighty percent of consumer spending. But when women cannot participate equally, economies pay a cost in terms of growth and development.

Less involvement of women in the politics is another constraint of women empowerment. International experiences reveal that industrial development, economic prosperity and scientific progress do not automatically lead to women empowerment in the most developed nation of the world United States of America; women constitute only seventeen percent of the legislature. The scientifically advanced nation like Japan cannot at least claim to be at the top in providing women due share in political power. The situation in our country India the world's largest democracy is still more humiliating, the women representation being around a scanty ten percent (according to data prepared in 2002). The Women's Reservation Bill providing thirty three percent reservations to women in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies has been passed after a long delay of twelve years. Lack of education can be considered as one of the prime factor for less political empowerment of the women, moreover the traditional concept of women to be fragile and weak to hold any serious governing responsibilities add fuel to the fire.

It is believed she does not possess the power both physical and mental to rule a country or community. After sixty eight years of independence the most second populated country in the world India has got only one woman Prime Minister Indian Gandhi (1966-84) and one woman President Pratibha Devi Sing Patil (2007-12) till date. When women constitute half of the total population of world there indexes seem very awkward. The women in political Map 2014 launched by the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women has ranked India seventy third in participation of women in politics with just nine percent of parliamentary of ministerial posts being occupied by women.

More active participation of women in governance can help bring issues that affect then well being onto the highest political agenda of government. The growing presence of women in the Panchayati Raj and local government in India after the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution has been a positive development. More women in India are also voluntarily exercising their constitutional right of adult suffrage which is a positive and encouraging trend in Indian Politics."

The ruling government in most of the countries despite tall claims and rhetoric has failed to empower women, women are not involved in the decision making process. Inadequate budget allocation resources, lack of political will for addressing women issues and ineffective implementation of laws meant for women protection and welfare are major factors that contribute to the sorry plight of women folk.

Women also have lesser access to technological knowhow compared to men which is another constraint of Women Empowerment in this period of globalization. Citing statistics from the ITU World Telecommunications/ICT Indicators Database, the report save forty one percent of men worldwide are connected to the internet compared to thirty seven percent of women in the developing world the report claims the sixteen percent fewer women use the internet than men, whereas just two

percent fewer women are online in the developed world<sup>6</sup> In the developing and under developed countries the rural women and the women belonging to the backward areas are mostly unaware about the latest technological advancement.

The women who have the access to these facilities are also prone to cyber crimes all over the world. Cyber crimes affect the women most women are often humiliated in the social networking sites and other applicants of the internet which create a fear psychosis among the women in general to avail these opportunines in free and fair. On a social networking site Facebook, sexism and became such a pervasive issue that earlier this year the company announced new efforts to crack down specifically on contents that target women with images and content that threatens or incites gender based violence or hate.<sup>7</sup>

These constraints of Women Empowerment are growing in size with every passing day making the situation even more critical. Radical notions like feminisms advocating equal rights and opportunities for women came to the fore in the nineteenth and early twentieth century but nothing substantial is happening. The exploitations of women are continuing all over the world unabatedly.

Mere slogans won't there is the need of complete change of attitude in the society as a whole. All the global citizens bear equal responsibility for this change. On the part of the women, wearing exposing attires for the eye pleasure and satisfaction of men may be on the screen or in the reality, and expecting men not to treat them as commodities, meant for enjoyment is quite ridiculous. Similarly a man considering the women to be tool that can equally provide nutritious food to satisfy his hunger and can make a good companion in the bed is very unfortunate. Women can be really empowered when men understand the real worth and value of every single women who shows him the night of the world as a mother, who makes his better half as a wife and the one who makes him the hero of the world as a daughter.

A woman's life can be exceedingly versatile and enriching for society if she is empowered. On the other hand, if disempowered, she becomes a liability for herself and her family at times without realizing it. During her growing years over single passing day strengthens or weakens her as the case may be before she enters adulthood in life, but no teaches them how to fly, they remain on grounded. The social processes the political economic and technological factors hinder the women empowerment. Education may be one of the greatest tools in reducing these disparities. Nations should pay due heed to increase the female literacy rate, for instance in India the hurdle of complete literacy is yet to be crossed. A sixty five percent female literacy is sixteen percent lower than male literacy rate.

This global suffocation on the part of the women which has a greater intensity in developing and under developed countries requires a hasty solution preparing our women and skilling equipping them in the art of

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<sup>6</sup> Kiran Bedi, Women educated but still disempowered in Manorama Year Book, pp.813-820, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Rao, op.cit, p.208.

negotiation and empowering them to build peace is key. It is only through the discovery and acknowledgement of their roots their past their history that women like other group, became enabled to project an alternate future. The new vision of women demand that women be placed at the centre not only of events, where they have a ways been, but of the thinking work of the world. We are demanding as men did during the Renaissance, the right to define the right to decide.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, p.243, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987.