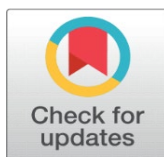


UNDERSTANDING FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: ACTIVISM & ADVOCACY OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

As India sets its sights on becoming a developed' nation by 2047, empowering women lies at the heart of this challenge. Women empowerment and socio-economic development go hand in hand, as development alone cannot address gender inequalities. Amartya Sen coined the term "missing women" to highlight ongoing gender disparities globally. With women lagging behind on several parameters of well-being, India must adopt key policies to propel the country towards gender parity in socio-economic outcomes. The term "Feminism" was first coined in the 19th century in association with the women's suffrage movement and it depicted its relevancy that women should have a right to freedom and in 20th century it believed that men and women possess equal rights. It is always a debatable statement that feminism is all about women's rights, it is about equality regardless of gender. Gender based study and its discrimination which is borne by women is different for each and every chapter varies. The experience of women who is independent depends on her caste, race, culture, religion, ethnicity and most important her physical ability.

Keywords: Women's Socio-Economic Growth in India, Gender, Feminism, Women Empowerment



1. FEMINISM AND THE ADVOCACY OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS BASED ON EQUALITY:

We have studied in our history that women have fought for her freedom of education, vote, own property, engage herself in political parties. In recent years, the charge of women and her rights has been shifted from zero to surface since many judgments have changed the various issues of healthcare, her reproductive rights, economic status, social upliftment and accepting various cultural changes.

Advocacy of women's rights based on the equality of the sexes is a long-standing and important goal. Women's rights advocates believe that women should have equal rights to men in all areas of private and public life, including education, employment, and political participation. Society also believe that women should be treated with respect and dignity and that their unique perspectives should be valued.

We know that achieving equality for women will require lasting commitment and dedication from everyone involved. It is an essential sustainability goal, not only for the advancement of women but for the advancement of humanity as a whole. Dismantling social and cultural gender-based norms and discrimination needs a lot of effort, awareness and active participation at every level of society. While we acknowledge the power of activism and advocacy, people from marginalized and underserved backgrounds, lack access and direction to effective activism mechanisms. Thus, in our view, it is our responsibility to make every effort to be the voice of those people who might never get the opportunity to make their own voices heard. Remaining silent makes us complicit; our voice can potentially change many lives. Women

empowerment is still so significant today since gender equality is far over. There is still much work to be done to achieve equality for all women, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or social class. A common misconception is feminism is an anti-men movement. Women's fight for equality and justice is not against men but against the patriarchal society and its norms. These rules and customs have harmful effects on the entire community, not only on women.

The demand for women's empowerment makes clear that every human being must need to be treated in a way where their dignity and rights are not getting violated. For a long millennium of time women are suffering from this harassment where their very existence is just nothing more than material, but as the world has evolved and women can now fight for their own rights, there are few sections of women to whom the light has not been yet ventured. To live in a civilized world it is our duty as a human to help people to enlighten and take them out of any dogmatic state of mentality where it harms society in moving forward. We must educate our women and children so that they can carry on the legacy to the upcoming generations and take a part in building a nation.

2. WOMAN'S RIGHT'S - THE PRINCIPLE OF GENDER EQUALITY IS ENSHRINED IN THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION:

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women.

Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and programs have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993.

The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.

3. WHY WE NEED CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

The constitutional provisions for women in India are established to address and rectify historical inequalities and discrimination women have faced. These measures acknowledge the essential role of women in the foundation of a just, equitable society and aim to ensure their full participation in all areas of life. By embedding rights and protections for women within the Constitution, India commits to creating a legal and social environment that promotes gender equality. This commitment is not only about fairness but also about recognizing the diverse contributions women make to society's development. The provisions seek to empower women, guarantee their rights and enable them to live with dignity and equality, thereby enhancing the nation's progress and upholding democratic values.

Article 14: Right To Equality-

Article 14 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the "right to equality" to every citizen, asserting that the State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

This provision is instrumental in ensuring that women have equal rights and opportunities as men, laying the groundwork for gender equality in the political, economic and social spheres.

Article 15(1) and Article 15(3): Prohibition of Discrimination and Special Provisions-

While Article 15(1) prohibits discrimination by the state on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, Article 15(3) empowers the state to make special provisions for women and children.

These articles collectively ensure that women are not subject to arbitrary discrimination while also allowing for affirmative actions to address historical and systemic gender imbalances.

Article 16: Equality of Opportunity in Matters of Public Employment-

Article 16 extends the right to equality to the realm of employment, guaranteeing equal employment opportunities for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.

This provision is crucial for ensuring women have access to public sector jobs on an equal footing with men.

Directive Principles of State Policy and Women's Rights

The Directive Principles of State Policy serve as guidelines to the central and state governments in India, aimed at establishing a just society. These principles, though not enforceable by courts, are fundamental in the governance of the country and direct the State to apply these principles in making laws.

Article 39(a), Article 39(d) and Article 39A: Ensuring Economic Justice and Legal Aid-

Article 39(a) demands that the State provide men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood. Article 39(d) goes a step further to ensure equal pay for equal work for both men and women, aiming to eliminate wage disparities based on gender.

Article 39A emphasizes the promotion of justice on the basis of equal opportunity, ensuring that no citizen is denied access to justice due to economic or other disabilities. These articles collectively work towards establishing economic justice and equal opportunities for women.

Article 42 and the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961-

Enacted in accordance with Article 42, The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, underscores the State's commitment to ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief for women. This provision is a testament to the Constitution's concern for the health and well-being of women in the workforce.

Fundamental Duties and Respect for Women-

Article 51A (e) of the Constitution underscores the moral obligations of every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women. This provision plays a critical role in fostering a culture of respect and dignity towards women, urging citizens to eliminate practices that demean or discriminate against women.

Constitutional Protections for Women's Participation in Local Governance-

Recognizing the importance of women's participation in the democratic process and local governance, the Constitution includes specific provisions for the reservation of seats for women in Panchayats and Municipalities.

Articles 243-D (3), 243-D (4), 243-T (3) and 243-T (4): Reservation in Local Bodies-

These articles mandate the reservation of one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat and Municipality for women. Additionally, one-third of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the Panchayat and Municipalities at each level shall be reserved for women.

These provisions ensure women's representation in local governance, empowering them to contribute to the decision-making process and address issues affecting their communities.

4. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT SCHEMES IN INDIA-

SCHEMES	YEAR	OBJECTIVES
Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To prevent gender-biased sex selective elimination To ensure survival & protection of the girl child To ensure education and participation of the girl child
One-Stop Centre Scheme	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces. To Facilitate/Assist in filing First Information Report (FIR/NCR) To provide psycho-social support and counselling to women/girl
Women Helpline Scheme	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide toll-free 24-hours telecom service to women affected by violence. To facilitate crisis and non-crisis intervention through referral to the appropriate agencies such as police/Hospitals/Ambulance services/District Legal Service Authority (DLSA)/Protection Officer (PO)/OSC. To provide information about the appropriate support services, government schemes, and programs available to the woman affected by violence, in her particular situation within the local area in which she resides or is employed.
UJJAWALA	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To prevent the trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation. To facilitate the rescue of victims from the place of their exploitation and place them in safe custody.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide rehabilitation services with both immediate and long-term to the victims by providing basic amenities/needs such as shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment including counseling, legal aid and guidance, and vocational training.
Working Women Hostel	1972-73	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To promote the availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women. To provide accommodation to children of working women, up to the age of 18 years for girls and up to the age of 5 years for boys.
Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)	1986-87	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide skills that give employability to women. To benefit women in the age group of 16 and above in the country.
Nari Shakti Puraskar	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To strengthen the place of women in society. To facilitate institutions that work towards the progress and development of women in society.
Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK)	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To create an environment for women where they have access to healthcare, quality, education, guidance, employment, etc. To facilitate these opportunities at the block and district level in the country.
NIRBHAYA	2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To facilitate safety and security for women at various levels. To ensure strict privacy and confidentiality of women's identity and information. Provision for real-time intervention as far as possible
Mahila E-Haat	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To facilitate entrepreneurship opportunities online for women. To educate women on various aspects of online selling and helping establish their venture.
Mahila Police Volunteers	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An MPV will serve as a public-police interface in order to fight crime against women. The broad mandate of MPVs is to report incidences of violence against women such as domestic violence, child marriage, dowry harassment and violence faced by women in public spaces.
Sukanya Samridhi Yojana	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launched as a part of the most popular "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" mission, the SSY accounts can be opened by the parents of a newborn girl child. The mission aims to improve the Sex Ratio by ensuring education for girls.

▪ **INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS/AGREEMENTS:**

- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):** Adopted by the UN in 1979, calls for ending discrimination and ensuring equal rights for women.
 - It was signed by India in 1980 and was ratified in 1993.
- **BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION:** Adopted at the **1995 UN World Conference on Women**, it laid out agenda areas for women's empowerment including economic participation (India is a part of it).

- **UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS):** Goal 5 aims to **achieve gender equality** and empower all women and girls, including through economic empowerment measures by 2030.

5. CONCLUSION

Feminism is a social and political movement that advocates for the rights of women on the grounds of equality of sexes. It does not deny the biological differences between the sexes but demands equality in opportunities. It covers everything from social and political to economic arenas. In fact, feminist campaigns have been a crucial part of history in women empowerment. The feminist campaigns of the twentieth century made the right to vote, public property, work and education possible. Similarly, it also helps the LGBTQ community greatly as it advocates for their right too. Feminism gives a place for everyone and it is best to practice intersectional feminism to understand everyone's struggle.

Women make a huge contribution to the political, economical, and social lives of countries, generations and many more. So economic development can show a positive impact on women's control over resources and their participation in the decision-making process, but the reality is that women are subject to economic pressure.

However, despite progress in some areas, women still face numerous challenges in achieving empowerment. Gender-based discrimination, violence, and unequal access to resources remain major obstacles. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that involves legal and policy reforms, community engagement, and education. Women empowerment is essential for creating a more just and equitable world. By enabling women to achieve their full potential, we can improve the lives of individuals, communities, and societies as a whole.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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