

## EMPOWERING BHARATH: ILLUMINATING WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN THE ODESSEY TOWARDS 2047

Dr. Shaila K.N., Associate Professor  
Department of History, Government Arts College  
Ambedkar Veedhi, Bangalore

### ***ABSTRACT:***

Women in Bharat were constrained within traditional spheres with limited accessibility to education and economic opportunities. However, with the advent of social reform movements and independence, women began to assert their rights and participate in various spheres of life. The introduction of policies promoting gender equality and women's empowerment laid the foundation for their increased participation in the workforce.

The pursuit of gender equality has long been recognized as a fundamental Human Rights issue. In recent years it has increasingly been acknowledged as a key driver of economic growth. The fact that women are still fighting for equal rights and opportunities is a Testament to the deep rooted prejudice and discrimination that still exist in our society. It is a reminder of the long road that we have yet to travel before we can truly achieve a world where everyone live with dignity and respect, regardless of their gender.

This paper explores the transformative journey of women leadership in Bharat from its initial conditions to the present, and envisions the path forward to 2047. It delves into the historical condition of women in Bharat, their gradual involvement in various economic activities, and the evolution of their roles across different sectors. Despite significant progress, women still face challenges such as domestic violence, public harassment and workplace discrimination and so on. The paper concludes by emphasizing the urgency of addressing the issues, which can empower women and foster their leadership potential.

**Key words:** Women, gender, empowerment, equality, evolution, challenges, domestic violence

## **Introduction:**

Women in Indian society have come a long way from the days of worshipped as goddess to being molested and harassed - gruesome domestic violence case, acid attacks and rapes. Bharat has witnessed a remarkable transformation in the status of women over the decades. From traditional roles confined to households, women have emerged as key contributors to the socio-economic fabric of the nation. However, despite progress, systemic barriers persist, hindering the full realization of women's potential.

The culture of silence of Indian women has prohibited even the female members of society from extending their assistance to other women to cope with difficult situations. Realising the need for the inclusion of women in the development process, it has been strongly felt that unless women are involved effectively in the development process, the goal of overall socio - economic development of the country cannot be accomplished.

Importance of training and continuous exposure to the realities of a fast c hanging world cannot be undermined in the process of empowering women. Illiteracy, ignorance and economic deprivation have long prevented them from taking an active part in the decision making process.

## **Economic Empowerment:**

Over the years, women in Bharat have made significant strides in the economic domain. From agricultural labourers to entrepreneurs and corporate leaders, women have diversified their roles and shattered glass ceilings. Initiatives such as microfinance, skill development programs, and entrepreneurship schemes have played a crucial role in enabling women to harness their potential and contribute to economic growth.

Education radically changes the counters of the lives of Indian women. Women are entering the portals of Higher Education in rapidly increasing numbers. The survey conducted by the union education ministry covers higher educational institutions across the country, collecting detailed information on multiple parameters such as student enrolment, teachers' data, infrastructural and financial information among others. A latest survey conducted by All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) reports that women constitute 48% of the total overall enrolment in higher education in India.

The Indian government has already introduced schemes such as the support to Training and

Employment program (STEP), among others to facilitate equal employment opportunities for women. Gender equality can help improve family wellbeing. When women have more economic opportunities they are better able to support their families and invest in their children's education and health. This can lead to better product activity and healthier work force in the future. It can also help in promoting peace and stability. That are more equal or less likely to experience conflict and violence.

Initiatives such as "Beti Bachao beti padhao Yojana" (save girl child, educate girl child) strive towards generating awareness and improving welfare services for women in India. Non-governmental organisations (NGO) are consistently towards enabling economic as well as social empowerment of women through various initiatives. Many firms under their corporate social responsibility initiatives, have also been started running women empowerment programs in rural and urban areas.

Political participation of women is an important determinant of their modernization. It enables women to come out of the shackles of tradition and secluded life. It also leads to social and political awareness among them. Women in politics could effectively represent opinions of other women, understand and deal effectively with the problems of society in general and women in particular. Political participation of women equips them with political competence, organizational abilities and belief in egalitarianism and democratic planning. Accordingly, the policy of reservation of seats for women was adopted in respect of institutions of local self-government both in the rural and urban areas. The newly implemented Women Reservation Act 2023 reserves one third of all seats for women in the state legislative assemblies, the , the lower house of Parliament.

However the importance of political participation for women can hardly be overemphasized, this alone is not the Panacea of all the ills and wrongs plaguing the women's community. Proper primary education, increased higher education and economic independence through creating more job avenues would go a long way in preparing the base and springboard for educated and conscious women to leapfrog in the political arena.

Women are a valuable source of labour and entrepreneurship. When women have equal opportunities to participate in the work force, they can contribute their skills talents and knowledge to the economy. This can lead to increased productivity, innovation and overall

economic output. For instance, a study by the World Bank found that countries with the most gender equal economies experience an average annual GDP growth rate of 0.8 percentage points higher than those with the most unequal economies. This difference in growth rate is equivalent to an additional 20% of GDP over 15 year. There are several reasons why gender equality can boost economic growth.

There are many examples of countries that have achieved significant economic growth because of their efforts to promote gender equality. For example Rwanda has made substantial progress in closing the gender gap in education and employment. As a result the country has one of the highest rates of female labour force participation in Africa. This has contributed to Rwanda's Rapid economic growth, averaging over 7% per year for the past decade. The concept of women empowerment appears to be the outcome of several important critics and debates generated by women's movement throughout the world particularly by third world feminists.

### **Hidden Scars:**

It is disheartening that, in the 21st century we are still having to discuss gender equality, which should have been resolved long ago. In general the women of India feels a lot of problems to get a suitable match because of the dowry system. Women may be subjected to psychological violence like verbal abuse nagging taunting, confinement and deprivation of financial or personal resources at one end while men may physically assault, rape or even burn women the other extreme. Once she is caught in this vicious circle of violence (psychological and physical), she lives in constant state of fear, anxiety and insecurity.

The Prohibition of child marriage act, 2006, provides for the prohibition of solemnization of child marriages. Whoever performs conducts or abets any child marriage shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment which may extend to 2 years and shall be liable to fine which may extend to Rs 1 lakh rupees unless he proves it. Between January 2020 and June 2023 Karnataka reported 45, 557 teenage pregnancies. A frequency of reports about sexual crimes against children and child marriages has increased. There may be many more cases than those reported as is clear from the data. Recently a major female foeticide ring has been busted in. This has unraveled a prenatal sex determination and female foeticide racket rampant across Bengaluru, Mandya and Mysuru districts. (Nov 23, 2023, The Hindu)

NCRB report 2023 highlighted a significant proportion of crimes against women. It has registered 13479 cases under the dowry prohibition act. Uttar Pradesh registered the highest number of 65743 cases of crimes against women under IPC and special and local laws (SLL). The report's revelations underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address the alarming increase in crimes against vulnerable demographics across the nation.

NCRB reports about 46% surge in crimes against children in Karnataka in 2022, but due to insufficient and untraceable evidences cases gets disposed of. Indian Express reports the recent statement of the chairman of child welfare committee of Dakshina Kannada who said that there is an increase in the number of underage pregnancies especially in the rural areas of Dakshina Kannada due to various reasons. In 2022 and 2023, 19 cases of teenage pregnancies (in the age group of 13 to 17) were reported and among them 16 are from rural areas. Meanwhile in 2023 the number of cases rose to 10 with highest cases of teenage pregnancies from Puttur Taluk in the district. Puttur recorded four cases (aged 15, 16 and 17) followed by three cases from Bantwal where a 13 year old girl conceived and delivered a baby in October 2023. But many cases go unreported due to fear and societal stigma exacerbating the issue. Whoever performs conducts or abets any child marriage shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment which may extend to 2 years and shall be liable to fine which may extend to Rs 1 lakh rupees unless he proves it.

Deccan Herald 19, 2024, English daily reports about a rape survivor has alleged that she has been sexually abused by a magistrate inside his chamber in a court in Tripura. A three member panel headed by the Dhalai District and Sessions Judge Gautam Sarkar has initiated a probe into the allegation. The woman alleged that the incident of sexual abuse took place on February 16th when she went to the chamber of first class judicial magistrate, Kamalpur to get her statement recorded in connection with her rape. In her complaint to the additional district and sessions judge, Kamalpur, the woman stated "I went to the chamber of the first class Judicial magistrate to get my statement recorded on February 16. When I was about to give my statement, the judge groped me. I rushed out of his chamber and informed the lawyers and my husband about the incident"

Economic dependence on male family members due to poverty increases women's vulnerability to various forms of gender biased violence including domestic abuse, trafficking and exploitation. Domestic violence remains a pervasive issue, with many women enduring physical,

emotional, and financial abuse within their own homes.

In public spaces, harassment and discrimination pose constant threats to women's safety and well-being. Moreover, workplace biases and barriers impede women's career advancement, perpetuating gender gaps in leadership positions. Conditions women experience in the labour force cannot be understood in economic terms alone. Studies of the work organisations indicate that men and women's opportunities are also shaped by the culture of the workplace and social relations between men and women. The organisational structure and work environment creates possibilities and restraints that determine the mobility of employed men and women

Women workers also face another type of gender specific discrimination and oppression at their place of work. A severe problem is of sexual harassment which is perpetuated not just by the employer but also by workmates. Majority of respondents suffer this silent humiliation and are unable to draw enough courage to denounce it. Over 90% of women employed in the Technology Sector feel organisations are not taking concrete steps to fulfil their commitment to gender diversity. Around 70% of women employees believe the Tech sector currently uses diversity, equity and inclusion as a marketing tool. This data is based on the observations by women employees from India participating in a survey on 'women in Tech' commissioned by talent 500 along with ANSR, an organisation that establishes Global capability centres (GCCs). Over 3000 women in Tech in India were part of the survey that aimed to provide crucial insights into the experiences and viewpoints of women in the industry. About 45% of the respondents reported encountering gender stereotypes during their interview experiences. Other forms of discrimination include pay representation recognition and opportunities. Specifically 42% of the respondents perceive inequity in pay, while 60% feel marginalised in decision making processes. Additionally, 30% of the participants believe their technical abilities are undervalued compared to their male peers. Despite 75% expressing ambitions for leadership roles, only a meagre 20% see sufficient representation of women in senior positions says the report. (The Hindu February 14, 2024)

No doubt gender targeting through deprivation, discrimination atrocities varies across social settings, nature of development and cultural and environmental contexts with certain forms more visible than others.

### **Challenges and Barriers:**

Despite progress, women in Bharat continue to face myriad challenges. Women have to shoulder multifarious responsibilities. This of all the challenges poverty is the most important one, as majority population of India live under poverty. Consequently girls are more likely to drop out in their opportunities for personal and professional growth.

In a society characterized by inequalities, what is required is a change in the social order that results in the redistribution of resources and fruits of development. In this sense development means more employment opportunities, more education, political participation, social and economic equality, new institutions and attitudinal change, social discipline and the like. Development as a process, necessitates changes in fundamental attitudes of life and work, in social political and cultural institutions. Breaking a barrier to gender equality, Hekani Jakalu and Salhoutuonuo Kruse became the first women to be elected to the 60 member Nagaland Assembly since the state came into being in 1963. Soon after her victory from Dimapur. While speaking to the media she said " I want to tell all Naga women this is our win... I know that things will get better for our women, and when things get better for women, things will get better for the state."

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, while women in Bharat have made remarkable strides in leadership and empowerment, significant challenges persist. Addressing issues such as domestic violence, public harassment, and workplace discrimination is essential to ensure the full inclusion and advancement of women in society. Additionally, combating practices like child marriage is imperative to safeguard the rights and futures of young girls. By empowering women and fostering a supportive environment, Bharat can unlock the full potential of its female population and pave the way for a brighter, more inclusive future by 2047.

The advent of globalisation has an increasing information of employment, including home based contract and casual labour. In recent years, labour force participation among women has increased significantly. Considering the different roles and actions of men and women in the development process, different measures are taken to bring them on an equitable platform. Since the past decade onwards there has been growing acceptance of the gender focused approach to development. It is imperative for all Indians to tackle these problems and improve initiatives and legislation that empower women and girls. It is crucial to sensitize men and boys at a young age,

so they become an integral part in bringing about a transformation on women empowerment in Indian society. When men start respecting women and accepting them as equals, a lot of gender biased inequalities will reduce considerably. A gradual change is now visible in modern day India and this can be seen in large cities. Women now have diverse professions as doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs, pilots, taxi drivers and police officers. They have found employment in fields that have been traditionally considered as male dominated.

Though women have outshined in every field, they still face discrimination at almost free level of employment. Yet gender differentiation continues to permeate human beings globally; it's dynamics within social processes, stratification and exchange ally with the broader social relations and material conditions of wealth generation to shape the form and victimise the male or the female gender.

So what can be done.....where is the solution?

We need a systematic change, which can only happen through a multifaceted approach. Gender transformative approaches can be implemented via childhood education and household and community level interventions. Other methods include changing cultural attitudes, reforming policy and law, increasing support services for survivors, conducting more information campaigns, workshops and training programs and designing intervention programmes based on data.

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