

Women Empowerment In Modern India

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Introduction

History demonstrates that out of all deprived groups in the world women have suffered the most. Their suffering knew no bounds based on culture, race, region or religion. They have been victims of abuse, molestation, violence, rape, poverty, malnutrition, ill treatment – in a word all sorts of deprivation. But until recently, scholarly attention was not focused enough on subjects related to empowerment of women. In the multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-racial and multi-religious Indian sub-continent, women face one or other kinds of problem here and there. Only the dimension differs from state to state, society to society, and place to place. Even in the 21st century women are beaten, considered witches; they are getting stoned for committing sexual activities; honor killing is in practice in many parts of India; and with petty excuses they are tortured and raped while the main perpetrators move freely without any punishment. Further, they are disallowed to use mobile phones; debarred to choose their own dress or profession; have little freedom in marriage and reproductive matters; are restrained to move freely within their locality; are discouraged to participate in political activities; and many women remain starved or half fed. In a word, they are bound in chains of societal taboos and face lots of peculiar difficulties throughout their life.

It is interesting to note that most of the dictionaries only shows a pre-twentieth century definition of the verb empower meaning 'to empower', and 'to give power to'. The word was first used in the 17th century and has meanings like 'authorize', 'delegate', or 'enable'. The term empowerment, as a result, is a complicated idea. However, it implies the transfer of power in a dynamic way over a period of time. Empowerment seems to be a modern idea that would not have been possible 200 years ago when the idea of democracy and 'government of the people, for the people, by the people' was something to fight and die for. In the 20th century we saw many examples of political empowerment in different countries in the world led by people such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela. From the perspective of the members of low-powered group, empowerment refers to efforts to expand their base of power.

The issue of 'women empowerment' is now a global phenomenon. Since the origin of the United Nations Organization, the issue of women's development has attracted the attention from the scholars worldwide, and the concept has come in the political agenda of a large number of countries. At present, the term "empowerment" has replaced the erstwhile

term "development". Though the term 'empowerment' had become a 'buzzword' in the sixties, it was not discussed so extensively in literature until the eighties. It took about twenty five years for the United Nations to proclaim the year 2001 as the 'International Year for Women's Empowerment' after declaring the 'Women's Decade' in 1975. India also declared the year 2001 as the 'Women's Empowerment Year'.

In almost every society and in every sphere of life women assume unequal position and status; thus it is necessary to empower them by providing equal opportunities. The term empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process and it helps people gain control over their own lives. Further, it can be called as a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they think as important. "Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, or economic strength of individuals and communities...."

Empowerment of women is not only imperative but also crucial for all-round development of society and the nation as a whole. The issue of 'women empowerment' has become a central point in the programs and activities of the United Nations and other Government and Non-Government Organizations. Subsequently, it has also become a major concern of the social scientists, politicians, bureaucrats and researchers. But there is a lack of unanimity among the scholars in comprehending the term empowerment. Various scholars have tried to define the term from their own perspectives. The term empowerment has different meanings in different socio-cultural, economic and political contexts. An exploration of local terms associated with empowerment around the world always encompasses a wide variety of definitions. These terms include self-strength, self-control, self-power, self-reliance, personal choice, capability of fighting for one's rights, independence, own decision making power, freedom etc. These definitions are embedded in local value systems and beliefs. Empowerment has both intrinsic as well as instrumental value. "The most common use of the term "empowerment" refers to increasing the power of the low-power group, so that it more nearly equals the power of the high power group" (Bhadra, 2001, p.61).

According to Sushama Sahay (1998), "Empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life". It implies decentralization of power and authority in the deprived, oppressed and powerless people who have not been able to participate in decision making and implementation of

policies and programs of both government organizations as well as in societal matters. Empowerment of women is not only essential but also imperative for all round development of a country. The term empowerment has been defined by Arundhati Chattopadhyaya (2005). She holds that, "Empowerment is multi-dimensional and refers to the expansion of freedom of choice and action in all spheres (social, economic, and political) to shape one's life. It also implies control over resources and decisions". Further the term empowerment is defined as "the process of gaining control over one's own life while supporting and facilitating others' control over their lives" (Aspy & Sandhu, 1999, p. 24). Goodrich describes empowerment as "a benevolent but unilateral transaction in which one person enhances another's ability to feel competent and take action, that is, enhances another's power-to" (Patricia, Darlington & Mulvaney, 2003, p.12).

Progress of our country depends on women empowerment. It is the way or a social action in which women elaborate and recreate what it is to be in a circumstance that they previously were denied.¹ Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have a positive self-esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to take part in developmental activities. Empowered women should be able to participate in the process of decision making. A man and a woman are like two wheels of a cart. The cart can move fast and safely too, when both of them pull it in the same direction and equal strength. Hence, no developing country or society can afford to ignore the role of women, if they are to progress.

Women played an important role from the ancient times onwards. From ancient to modern period women's condition – politically, socially and economically has not remained same and it kept changing with times. According to Altekar one of the best ways to understand the spirit of a civilization and to appreciate its excellences and understand its limitation is to study the history of the position and status of women in it.² In *Vedic* period, women enjoyed an enviable position. She was considered to be a goddess, something like the Greek *Athena*, the supreme source of man's inspiration. She was called *ardhangini*. Women enjoyed equal status with men in all aspects of life. They occupied a significant place in the social and religious gatherings. Women's freedom to participate in war, gymnastics, archery, horse riding, public activities, education, decision making, and in the selection of male partners has portrayed the nature of women's status in the social canvas of the *Rigvedic* period.³ During the *Rigvedic* period all genders were offered the privilege of equal educational opportunity to study the *Vedās*, and the role of women in ancient Indian literature became a great importance. Early *Vedic* texts have also revealed two types of women scholars of the period. They were the *Brahmavādinis*, women who never married and who studied the *Vedās* throughout their lives; and the *Sadyodvāhās*, who studied the *Vedās* until they married. The *Vedās* referred to female teachers as *upadhyaṃs* (unmarried female teachers) or *upadhyaṃs* (married female

teachers) within the *Vedic* society. According to Patanjali and Katyāyana, the women were educated in the early *Vedic* period. The *Rigveda* mentioned the learned women like Apala, Ghosha, Lopamudra, Nivavasi, Sikata, Gargi, and Vishwavara who composed hymns and attained the titles of *Rishis*. *Rigvedic* verses suggest that women married at a mature age and were probably free to select their own husbands in a practice called *swayamvara* or live-in relationship called *Gandharvavivah* (marriage).⁴ Marriages were never forcibly imposed on women in *Rigvedic* society. Remarrying was also socially acceptable for widows; however, divorce was not permitted in *Rigvedic* period. According to Bala, the tradition of child marriage cannot be traced to the *Vedās*. Women took an active part in agriculture and in the manufacture of arrows, bows and other war material.

The two *Epics* like *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata* mentioned that the women as the root of *dharma*, pleasure and prosperity. The prevalence of the *dēvadāsī* practice emerged during the *Epic* period. *Kshatriya* women were also taking part in wars to defend and protect their culture. The existence of persistent gender equity was observed during the period of *Jainism* and *Buddhism*. Women's freedom of education, religious and cultural activities in the society was mentioned in Buddhist literature. They led a liberal and honorable life. Women were admitted into *Jainism* and *Buddhism* as nuns and were allowed to preach. Some of them like Dhammadinna developed into remarkably articulate and successful preachers, as can be inferred from the plentiful encomium showered upon them by the Buddha.⁵ Saghamitra, the daughter of Aśoka *Chakravarti* belonged to Mauryan Empire was able to get herself inducted into the preaching of *Buddhism*. According to *Jain* texts, Jayanti, the Kaushambi princess remained a spinster in order to study Philosophy and Religion. They also refer to Jayanti who carried on discussions with Mahāvira himself and later, she became a nun. Moreover, Buddhist nuns were found to have composed hymns, while other women were, significantly, observed to have written *Sanskrit* plays and verses. They also achieved excellence in painting, music, and other fine arts. Women courtesans were not looked down by religious leaders or kings. A famous courtesan Amrapali who lived during the reign of Bimbisara (300 to 273 B.C.) was a beauty whom Buddha visited. Medical career was selected by some women. However, women's economic status deteriorated during the periods of *Jainism* and *Buddhism*. They were also forbidden from political participation. In *Arthaśāstra*, while explaining *the duty of marriage, the property of a woman, and compensations for remarriage*, Kautilya stated that *men, having given his wives the proportionate compensation and an adequate subsistence (vritti), he may marry any number of women; for women are created for the sake of sons.*⁶ The literary evidence of the Gupta period proved that girls of high families as also those living in hermitages and legend. Vatsyānana draws a picture of a good wife which may be taken as a sign of the real life during that period. He mentioned the elite women in his *Kāmasūtra*. Courtesans were trained in

poetry and music also. Sūdraka mentioned that Vasantesēna, the heroine of the *The Little Clay Cart*, a popular play in Sanskrit. Another dramatic female heroine of classical Indian literature is Shakuntala, a quiet young woman who yearned for her distant lover in Kalidasa's *Shakuntala and the Ring of Remembrance*. The famous treatise of Manu i.e. *Manusmriti* (in around 200 B.C.), the status of women was relegated to a subordinate position to men. According to *Manusmriti*, her father guards her in her childhood; her husband guards her in her youth; and her sons guard her in her old age. A woman is not fit to act on her own.

The position of women gradually deteriorated not only in the society but also in the family during the medieval period, when child marriages, *purdha* (veil) and a ban on remarriage by widows became part of social life in some communities in India. According to *Mricchakatika* (Sudraka-500 A.D.), the custom of *avagunthan*, also named *purdah*, began approximately 100 B.C; it was also practiced by married females while going about in public. Sankarāchārya belonged to eighth century A.D. engaged himself in evolving the Hindu society. He reemphasizes the dominance of *Hinduism* to face the expanding *Buddhism*. He stressed on giving equal status to women. Moreover, the act of widow's remarrying was strictly declared unlawful, while the prevalence of *sati*, or *sahagamana*, increased in society.⁸ At this time girls were forced to get married at a very tender age. The society also practiced *satisahagamana* where women were forced to jump over the burning bodies of their husbands during funerals. All the wives generally performed *satisahagamana* or self immolation on the funeral pyre of the deceased husband. *Sahagamana* or *Anumarana* as it was called *Prākṛiti* literature was practiced by all the higher as well as the lower strata of society when the village headman was about to breathe his wives prepared themselves for *Satisahaga mana*.⁹ Performer of *Satisahagamana* probably offered a release from the trials and tribulations. A fate worse that awaited the widow at the hands of her disbelieving and often pitiless mother-in-law and thoughtless society.¹⁰ In this regard A.L. Basham expressed an interesting and thought provoking comment by saying; *the ancient Indian attitude to women was in fact ambivalent. She was at once a goddess and a slave, a saint and strumpet*.¹¹ Another evil practice prevalent among the Hindus, particularly the Rajputs was *Jauhar*. Usually it was performed by the Rajput ladies when attacked by the foreigners and there was no hope of victory. According to this practice the Rajput ladies would apply *tilak* on the fore-heads of their husbands, touched their feet and burnt themselves. It was done primarily to escape dishonour at the hands of the enemy in case of defeat. It shows that the women cared more for their chastity than their life. A number of examples of *Jauhar* during the medieval period have been recorded by scholars. Ex: Hamir Dēva, the Chauhan warrior of Ranathambhor, committed *Jauhar* when he found that Sultan Ala-ud-Din Khilji was likely to win victory. In fact the code of Rajput conflict did not know of surrender, and could not reconcile them to a defeat. It guided only to

victory or eradication. In some parts of India, some of *dēvadāsīs* (girls were forced get married to trees or deity) were sexually exploited. Polygamy was practiced among Hindu rulers for some political reasons.¹² In many Muslim families, women were restricted to *Zenana* area of the house.

The Bhakti movement tried to bring back women's status and questioned certain forms of oppression. The women were attending the religious prayers like *kirtanās*. Women were entitled the education through the reading of religious books. A saint could not leave his family to become a *sanyasi* without the consent of his wife. Mirabai, a female saint and poet was one of the most important Bhakti movement figures. Other female saint-poets from this period included Akka Mahadevi, Rani Janabai and Lal Deb. Bhakti sects within *Hinduism* such as the Maganubhav, Varkari and many others were principle movements within the Hindu fold openly advocating social justice and equality between men and women. Gurunanak, the first *guru* of Sikhs, preached equality between men and women. He advocated that women be allowed to lead religious assemblies; to congregational hymn singing called *kirtan* or *bhajan*; to become members of religious management committees; to lead armies on the battlefield; to have equality in marriage; and to have equality in *Amrit* (Baptism). Devotional songs enjoyed great popularity in the religious life of the people of different social classes, the rich and poor. These songs have had an extremely beneficial effect on social relations, in countering social pride and inequalities, among the people who take part in them. Other Sikh Guru's also preached the same. But Bhakti movement could not uplift the economic status of the women. The women continued to be dependent on the males for their maintenance.

Though the women were not given a position of pride in the social structure of the nation, yet certain talented women made a mark in different spheres. Women played an important role in the administration of state. Rani Rudramadevi (Kākatiya dynasty) ruled Warangal (Telangana region) for a period of thirty years. Though, a woman she was unquestionably one of the great rulers of the Andhra country. She took an active part in the administration. Attired in male garments she daily adorned the royal seat, gave interviews to foreigners, listened to the reports of the secret service, held consultations with her ministers, generals and other high dignitaries of state and advised them how they should act to promote the best interests to take the field in person and lead her troops against the enemy. She was a heroic and courageous fighter with great abilities of a general to lead her men in wars.¹³ Sultana Razia became the only woman monarch to have ever ruled Delhi. She possessed of remarkable talents. According to Ferishta, *she read the Koran with correct pronunciations, and in her father's lifetime employed herself in the affairs of the Government*. As a queen, she tried to show her qualities more highly. The Gond queen Durgavati ruled for fifteen years before losing her life in a battle with Mughal Emperor Akbar's general Asaf Khan in 1564 A.D. Chandi Bibi protected Ahmadnagar against the powerful Mughal forces of Akbar. Jehangir's wife Nur Jehan

effectively wielded imperial powers, and was recognized as the real power behind the Mughal throne. MumtazMahal, (queen of ShahJahan who build Taj Mahal for the remembrance of Mumtaz Mahal) a princess of a rare beauty combined with superb intellectual talents and aesthetic tastes. Gulbadan Begam (Humayun-nāma), Jaharara, Mirabai, Salima Sultana, Nurjahan, Zeb-un-Nisa (daughter of Aurangazeb), Ramabhadramba, TirumalambaAkabai, Kenabai, etc. were the literary figures of medieval times who produced works of distinction. Shivaji's mother Jijiabai was queen regent because of her ability as a warrior and an administrator. Another female Maratha ruler Tarabai, widow of the Maratha king Raja Ram, also displayed great qualities of administration and became the chief source of inspiration for her son Shivaji II. In spite of these powerful women, the condition of poor women remained the same.

The traditions such as *sati*, *jauhar*, *dēvadāsi*, and child marriages have been banned and are largely non-operational in modern India. In colonial India anti-imperialist women's movement play a significant role for freedom. During the British period, many reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Jyotirao Phule fought for the betterment of women. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's efforts led to the abolition of *sati* under Governor - General William Bentick (Act of Sati, 1829) in 1829. According to Arab writer Sulaiman, wives of a king sometimes burnt themselves on the funeral pyre of their husbands, but it was for them to exercise their option in the matter. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's campaign for improvement in the situation of widows led to the widow Remarriage Act of 1856. The first widow remarriage took place in Calcutta between SrichandraVidharatna Bhattacharya and ten year oldKalimati. In Andhra Pradesh KandukuriVeesalingam arranged the first widow remarriage between widower Gogulapati Sriramulu and widow Gowramma on 11th December 1881, PydaRamakrishnaiah who was supported financially to the marriage. The Government in appreciation of his work, conferred on him the title of Rao Bahadur in 1893, and Veesalingam was acclaimed as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar of South by the famous reformer M.G. Ranade. Next education will be the only factor which would play the most crucial role in empowering women. Female education was to be encouraged. Peary Charan Sarkar, a former student of Hindu college, Calcutta and a member of Young Bengal set up the first free school for girls in India in 1847 in Barasat, a suburb of Calcutta. Later, it was named Kalikrishna Girl's Highschool.

Savitribai Phule, along with her husband Jyotirao Phule opened a school for girls in Pune at Bhide Wada in 1848. She was an Indian social reformer, educationalist and poet from Maharashtra. She became the first woman teacher in India. Along with her husband, she played an important role in improving women's rights in India. Fatima Begum Sheikh, the close friend and colleague of Savitribai Phule also was the first Muslim woman teacher in India. They opened a school in

Sheikh's home in 1849. Savitribai Phule published *Kavya Phule* in 1854 and *Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar* in 1892 and also a poem entitled *Go, Get Education* in which she encouraged those who are opposed to free themselves by obtaining an education. She also established the *MahilaSeva Mandal* to raise awareness for issues concerning women's rights. John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune established the Bethune School in 1849, which developed into the Bethune College in 1879, thus becoming the first Women's College in India. Chandramukhibasu, KadambiniGanguly and Anandi Gopal Joshi were some of the earliest Indian women to obtain a degree.

Women also led armed rebellion against the British. Abbakka Rani, queen of coastal Karnataka, led the defense against invading European armies, notably the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. KitturChennama, queen of the princely state Kittur in Karnataka, led an armed rebellion against the British in response to the Governor General Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse. Lakshmi Bai, the queen of Jhansi, also led the Indian Rebellion of 1857 against the British. In 1853, when she was just 19, her son and husband Raja Gangadhar Rao were died. During that time Dalhousie's legislation said in the absence of a natural heir, the kingdom would become a part of the British Empire. So, the Rani adopted a son Damodar Rao under the Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse. But the British Government did not recognize it and annexed Jhansi. At that time she led many wars against British. But she died in 1857 at the age of 24 years, on the battle field. She was the most popular leader of the First War of Independence. She remained a beacon throughout India's struggle for freedom and when Subhash Chandra Bose (Netaji) formed a women's regiment in the Indian National Army, it was aptly called The Rani of Jhansi Regiment. Begum Hazrat Mahal, the wife of the deposed king of Avadh, played a leading role in the struggle for independence. She was a good organizer and she appointed various officers to the judicial, revenue, police, and military departments. She refused deals with the British and later retreated to Nepal. The begun of Bhopal discarded the *purdah* and fought in the revolt of 1857.

The freedom of India was the opening up of the new horizon for womanhood in India. There was a little development in the women status. There were many reformers in India who worked for uplift and betterment of their female counterparts. Their education was elevated. The six women delegates were attended to Indian National Congress, which was held in 1889 in Bombay. Two of them were from Bengal-KadambiniGanguly and Swarnakumari Devi. It was only after that the Calcutta session of Indian National Congress under the president-ship of Anne Besant resolved that women should be granted the right of universal franchise in the elected process of our country meanwhile women's organization *Sahitisaamhitya* in 1887 under the leadership of Swarna Kumari Devi and *BhartatSreeMandal* in 1910 led by Sarada Devi were formed by the Tagore family. In 1917, the first women's delegation met the Secretary of State to demand women's political rights,

supported by the Indian National Congress which was founded in 1885. Unable to bear her husband's atrocities, Annie Besant (born in London, to the Irish parents) left for India. She was greatly influenced by the Indian culture and civilization, and philosophy and spirituality that she became an ardent Indian. In 1914, she participated in all political activities and favored for freedom from England. With the help of Lokamanya Balagangadhar Tilak, she started the Home Rule League and participated in India's freedom struggle. In 1915, Annie Besant became the first female President of the Indian National Congress held in Calcutta. She was the editor of *New India*. She established *Indian Boy Scouts Association*. India remembers her immeasurable work for freedom struggle, educational advancements, social reforms and journalism, and above all her spiritual and philosophical outlook.

Pandita Ramabai established the *Arya Mahila Samaj* (1882) which led to the *Sarada Sadan School* in 1889, called *Mukti Mission*. In 1896, during a severe famine she rescued thousands of people. In 1919, for her distinguished social service, Pandita Ramabai became the first Indian woman to be awarded the *Kaisar-i-Hind* medal by the British Raj. Sarojini Naidu was a great freedom fighter and was a great poet too and was sweetly described as *The Nightingale of India*, Gandhi respected her a lot. She was the first Indian born woman President of the Indian National Congress in 1925 at the Kanpur session. In 1931, she participated in the Round Table Conference in England. After India's Independence she was made the Governor of Uttar Pradesh (first woman governor). On the same day Amrit Kaur assumed office as the first female cabinet minister of India in the country's first cabinet. She wrote many books of poems like: *Feather of the Dawn*, *Golden Threshold*, *Bird of Time*, *The Song of India*, and *The Broken Wing*. The Banara Sena came forward under the leadership of Indira Gandhi to further the cause of Indian freedom struggle; the role of Sarala Devi. Indira Gandhi (*Iron Lady*), who served as Prime Minister of India for an aggregate period of fifteen years, is the world's longest serving woman Prime Minister. She is described as the strongest leader of the world.

Women had founded separate women's organizations as well; the All India Women's Conference, founded in 1926. All India Women's Education Conference was held in Pune in 1927, it became a major organization in the movement for social change. In 1929, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed, stipulating fourteen as the minimum age of marriage for a girl. Though Gandhi himself married at the age of thirteen, he later urged people to boycott child marriages and called upon young men to marry child widows.¹⁴ The role of Gandhi in uplifting the women was certainly commendable. He wanted to involve the women folk of India in her long march for struggle. In the Non-cooperation movement, the women came forward to take part in picketing. In the Civil Disobedience movement, several women took part in the famous Dandi March. In the Quit India movement women played a remarkable role for Indian freedom movement like Sarojini Naidu, Prabhavati Devi, Kasturba Gandhi, Kamala Nehru, Jyotirmaye Ganguli,

Latika Ghosh, Neli Sengupta, Captain Lakshmi Saigal, Aruna Asaf Ali, etc. Gandhiji's statement in the mid-thirties to Mridula Sarabhai, a valiant fighter for his causes of women and freedom, *I have brought the Indian women out of the kitchen, it is up to you (the women activists) to see that they don't go back*,¹⁵ was no empty boast and no thoughtless exhortation. During the freedom movement, almost all the leaders of the struggle were of the view that women should be given equal status in the free India and all types of discriminatory practices must stop. The National and other reform movements paved the way for their liberations from the social evils and religious taboos. Women had participated in all streams of the national movement from Gandhian to Socialist to Communist to revolutionary terrorist. They had been in peasant movements and in trade union struggles. After Independence of India, the Constitution makers and the national leaders accepted the equal position of women with men. Women got the vote, along with men, without any qualification of education or property or income.

Indian society consists of people belonging to almost all kinds of religious beliefs. In every religion women are given a special place and every religion teaches to treat women with respect and dignity. Swami Vivekananda, one of the greatest sons of India, quoted that, *there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved; it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing*. According to Jawaharlal Nehru, *You can tell the condition of a Nation by looking at the status of its women*. He also quoted that *to awaken the people, we should first awaken the women, because once a woman has been awakened then the whole nation and family gets awakened with her*.

Women also played an important role in peasant, tribal, naxalite, trade and union and environment movements. In the Tebhaga peasant movement in Bengal in 1946-47, women had organized themselves on a separate platform of the Nari Bahini and they ran shelters and maintained lines of communication. They also participated in Naxalite movement, the Jaya Prakash Narayana movement, the Chipko movement, the anti-price rise movement, Anti-liquor movement, etc.

Now, women in India participate fully in areas such as education, sports, politics, media, science and technology, art and architecture, service sectors, etc. They are playing bigger role in economic field; as workers, consumers, entrepreneurs, managers and investors. They were given freedom and right such as freedom of expression and equality as well as the right to be educated. Women are

enjoying, the *ladies first* facility in different fields. They are enjoying a unique status of equality with the men as per constitutional and legal provision. Tribal women also play a major role in the co-management of their natural, social, economic resources and agricultural development including crop production, livestock production, horticulture and post harvest operations but they remain backward due to traditional values, illiteracy, superstitions, and dominant roles in decision making, social evils and many other cultural factors. The

customs of *purdha*, female infanticide, child marriage, *Sati* system, dowry system and the state of permanent widowhood were either totally removed or checked to an appreciable extent after Independence through legislative measures. Today, we have number of empowerment Schemes. Ex: Women Helpline Scheme, Working Women Hostel, Rajiv Gandhi National

Creche Scheme for the Children of Working Mothers, BetiBachaoBetiPadhao Scheme, Nari Shakti Puraskar, etc. To sum up the main advantage of women empowerment is that there will be an overall development of the society. Women empowerment leads to decrease in domestic violence.

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