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**Women in India: Their Role and Status in the Developing India.**

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**Abstract**

The empowerment of women is one of the critical issues in developing countries like India. The fact that women have been playing a major role in every society remains hidden and unexplored. The involvement of women despite their immense active contribution to our society remains shallow in every field. Whether it is economic or any political matter women are left behind in any decision making. The empowerment of women is a major step which further leads to the development of the country on a wider level. The present paper explores the role and status of women in a developing country like India and the how empowerment of women leads to the better development of a nation. The study is related to the position and status of women in India since ancient times till today. The paper also focuses on how the education of women leads to a better development of a nation and how women take a major role in every field of their life despite being neglected and ignored. The empowerment of women and their role and status in India remains a debatable topic. It is one of the hottest topics that are being discussed fervently throughout the world. The best scale to judge the growth of any nation is by the condition of their women, and the treatment they get from their society. Welfare of any nation is not possible without women.

**Key words:** Empowerment, Discrimination, Violence, Women, Status.

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**Introduction**

“The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is the treatment of its women. There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. Woman has suffered for aeons, and that has given her infinite patience and infinite perseverance. The idea of perfect womanhood is perfect independence. There is no hope of rise for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness.” (Swami Vivekananda)

A nation in order to progress needs to make education its basic ground. Education is the most important factor that can lead any nation towards success and prosperity. In a patriarchal society like India, education may have several meanings. In a country where the role and status of a family is judged by the educational level of men, the education of women becomes a topic of concern. The true meaning of education lies in providing knowledge to everyone on equal terms. Various factors affect the amount of role that women play in the development of India. The educational level of women

becomes a major factor which has played a major role in their empowerment and has further helped our economy at large. Education is a major factor that helps women to become great volunteers in their upcoming life, to fulfill their duties responsibly and lead the nation proudly. Educated women stand in every field and carve a niche for themselves amongst others in the society. It thus leads a woman to become more empowered, to become more capable to become good volunteers in every field. The more empowered our women are the more they play a major role in the development of our country. In our country the rights of women remain behind and are not accepted universally. The rights and laws still remain unaccepted. Women in Indian society are considered as a responsibility and a liability upon their parents. They are brought up in such a way that they become timid and shy thus becoming dependent upon their parents and later on their partners for their livelihood and sustenance. For families where there are not enough sources they are treated partially and not given proper nutrition as much as the men do, leading

ultimately to their malnourishment. They have been a victim of violence and subordination. Violence had been practiced upon them since time immemorial, and they have been a victim of sexual and mental abuse in this patriarchal world. Increasing violence serves to be one of the major factors causing a low alarm in the contribution of women in the economy. They have been victimized on the basis of their sex and gender. Their gender which is just a social construct forbids them to come forward in several fields in a patriarchal world. Despite their immense amount of contribution in every field they have been lacking behind and are not able to get the acknowledgement which men get by our society. Our society despite being so advanced in its approach towards westernization and advancement in the field of technology still lacks in its approach towards sexuality and its practices. Women in India despite being capable of being advanced in every field are left behind and are not given access to education. Our society being patriarchal follows its deeply rooted stereotypes which are limited to male education and empowerment. Women are given less opportunities and scope to step ahead and look for new approaches in their life. Women in our country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century still lack social, political and economic background where they can express themselves fully. The modern world looks for greater opportunities in every field and technology has brought a massive change in our society but the rights of women still remain unacknowledged. Women across our country are still facing discrimination in terms of their sex and biological entities. The Human Development report 2015, which was published by UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) recorded that women across the world undertake most of the unpaid housework and care giving work in their homes and communities. Lack of opportunities and unawareness makes them accept their roles as housemakers so much so that they could not even question their own mindsets. The housemaker job is easily accepted by women since this fact gets indoctrinated from their birth that they assume it to be natural. The worst is that women across the world get involved in this cycle of giving birth and looking after her family thus contributing to her family but never getting acknowledged. This ideal role of a perfect housewife and a perfect homemaker is

considered so natural by our culture that women hardly question it and keep accepting and playing their roles decided by this patriarchal world.

#### **Economic contribution**

Women across the world are hailed for the dual roles that they play in their life. Indian women play this dual role as domestic holders as well as the producers of goods and services they produce for our economy. Despite dealing with their domestic chores they are the greatest producers of the market who are neglected by our society at large. With the amount of work that they do for the entire nation their contribution is less talked about and is not considered worthy. The economic policies serve to be the biggest drawbacks of women being avoided in every field. Their position in our society deteriorated in this patriarchal world and the subordination of women remains to be one of the most important factor that has affected their life and status a lot. Our country prohibits any kind of discrimination based on sex, gender or color, but this does not sound proof in the case of women and their rights.

India is developing fast but the grounds of this development are not always based on equality and inclusiveness. The role that women play in order to give an output to our country still remains hidden. The education of women is a bigger challenge today. Only education can lead to the empowerment of women. Women across the world need to be educated because they are the grounds of our nation. Empowerment of women remains a major concern and only education could lead to a better nation. Educated women have proved themselves to be the catalyst of our nation.

#### **Women in history**

A civilization is judged by the pillars that it adheres to. The worth of any nation is valued by the grounded principles that it practices. The grounds of equality make a nation worth everything. In our country where religious myths and superstitions prevails the mindset of its citizens and where myths regulate the lives of its people the role of woman and their status in society becomes a very critical issue. A uniform approach cannot be set on the basis of which women across the nation can be analysed and accessed properly. Amongst the several factors that it declares the richness of ancient India and its culture is regarded by the place that it gives to women. The ancient era is

marked by the practices based on equality. The position of women in the ancient India was a reputed one and they were honored by our ancient world. The ancient India did not mark discrimination on the basis of sex and gender and considered both sex as equal.

The Vedic period marks a very reputed position for women and women along with men enjoyed a status until the Post Vedic period and the emergence of Buddhist period which is marked by a strong detest for female. Haripriya Mohapatra writes, in the words of Manu, "Woman is viewed solely as the mother and the wife and those roles are idealized. The ideal wife is faithful and service to husband and his family members without any complain is virtuous". The contribution of the greatest brahmavadini Gargi Vachnavi and the philosopher Maitreya in the ancient times is worth mentioning. Gargi who is mentioned in Yogayajurveda Samhita which is a dialogue between Yajurveda and Gargi proves the fact that women have always been the major contributors in every field. They have had the skills to excel in every trade. Sita, Maitreya, Draupadi, Gargi they all turn out to be the most significant faces of the ancient world which have been hailed world widely for their peculiar qualities.

Such was the definition of woman given by our sages. The society never accepted women as the normal human who deserves equal rights and comforts like men. Instead certain roles were ascribed to them by our society just to remain behind the closets throughout their life. Despite the role they played as mothers and workers of the economy equally like men, the equal amount of respect and claim was not given to them by the society. The Buddhist period was another start from where the downfall started only to reach pinnacle of discrimination till the British rule. The later period or the advent of Muslim rule in India led to the deteriorating condition of women. They were deprived of their basic rights. Despite giving an equal contribution to the Indian society their work was neglected and considered insignificant. A significant number of changes took place after the independence period. Women in order to develop their own status stood out of their closets and this attitude marked a real change in their status. Moving out of the four walls they remained active in every field. Today there is no arena where we do boy find

women playing a major role. They have conquered every part of this universe but still lack proper recognition and acknowledgement.

#### **Women in domestic role**

The answer to the question why despite having an exposure to technology and progression in every field why women still suffer social discrimination and marginalization lies in the fact that in our Indian society gender stereotypes are so deeply rooted and that a girl and a boy in our culture are taught different set of values since their childhood. A girl is taught to be more timid, honest, and homely whereas boys are taught to be strong and bold. Despite playing a major role in the progress of family women still gets neglected and they are subject to marginalization in every phase. The secret to a healthy family lies in its woman. They are the primary caretaker of every family in the entire world. Whether be a modern woman or a traditional one, the role of women as a housewife is a universal truth. As a matter of fact they take a lead role in the functioning of a family, who acts as an initiator. Besides the domestic role that they play they are also well accomplished in the other fields as well.

#### **Women as educators**

"Presenting to you, Sarasvatī, these oblations with reverence (may we receive from you affluence); be gratified by our praise and may we, being retained in your dearest felicity, ever recline upon you, as on a sheltering tree." (*Rigveda*, 7.95.5)

The Hindu religion worships Goddess Saraswati as an emblem of knowledge. The Vedas mention the goddess as a symbol of truth, light and knowledge. The goddess is considered to be the bearer of all knowledge and light that she showers upon every living entity. The religion worships the female Goddess as an emblem of knowledge, truth and light but does not consider its female sex worthy of giving education. This duality seems evident in the fact that we pray the female goddess as a symbol of light and knowledge and when it comes to the education of women they despite having the potential are denied their basic rights. Education is the basic right of every individual. The education of a person is marked by not only the knowledge he possess but other qualities as well. The basic seeds of education in a child are laid down by his

mother who serves to be his first educator. As a matter of fact woman (mother) is the first teacher of a child and she is the first one to instill those qualities in a child which later after getting flourished leads him towards success. Women since time immemorial have been playing a major role in the domestic life but their contribution to the education of a child from illiterate to a literate person cannot remain hidden. They have been seen as great contributors who have given their remarkable contribution in the field of education. The great 4<sup>th</sup> century character Vidyottama who was a remarkable talented figure is worth mentioning. Her remarkable character is explored by her husband Kalidasa the great Indian poet. A character like Vidyottama back in the 4<sup>th</sup> century who was called by her parents Gunamanjari which means 'a garland of virtues' was so much excelled in every field including her academics. Her name itself means someone who excels in all learning. Women like Vidyottama, Gargi, Maitreya despite being so excelled in every field still are less talked about in this male dominated culture. This is a complete result of the male oriented culture which is rooted in our country since time immemorial. In the transition of a child from an illiterate to a literate leads him to prosperity whose grounds are laid down by the Indian women themselves. Women likely play a major role in the facilitating changes in a family. They are the bearers of a good educated nation.

#### **Women in politics**

World widely women have been playing a very crucial role in the field of politics. They have been an active contributor to the country's development by playing an active role in the field of politics. They have been participating in the political decisions and in the working of government. Over these decades we have witnessed women coming towards the field of politics more than man. What was previously understood to be a male bound profession now has been replaced by women at large. They have ventured into the political market. Vidya Shah writes about a report by McKinsey Global Institute has estimated that India could add \$770 billion to its GDP by 2025, simply by giving equal opportunities to women. Yet, the contribution of women to the GDP remains at 18%. The constitution of India also provides women their laws and constitutional rights, equal rights are

provided to them by our government to lead a life of quality. With such constitutional rights and equal laws also we cannot find women being treated equally at certain levels. Their position still remains limited to a homemaker only.

#### **Conclusion**

Women are the bearers of the development of our country. They are the grounds on which we lead to a better development. They have been world widely known for their active roles in the progress of a nation. A nation in order to achieve goals has to make woman as its basic grounds since they are the one to educate those who are to make the nation run smoothly. Right from the evolution of mankind women have been playing same roles as men do. The achievements of Gargi, Maitreya, Sita and Vidyottama and many others are examples which depict women as the greatest achievers who excelled in every field. With the span of time certain changes caused a serious threat to their life and existence so much so that women could hardly come out of their closets. The empowerment of women becomes a matter of concern since not only do women get violated in every field they volunteer but also that they are victimized and neglected in their every contribution to the development of their country. Women have been playing a major role in the development of our country but their status has always been limited to their internal world. Never has any woman been hailed for the outer world responsibilities accomplished by her. In order to attain the ultimate status for women in our country we need to follow the footsteps of equality which can work towards the progression of women and the country at large because only an equal acknowledgement and recognition can lead women towards success.

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