

# Women Need Empowerment

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## POINTS TO DEVELOP

Women have for long occupied a secondary place in relation to men.

Position of woman has changed over time; from a relatively free status, she slowly came to be subordinated to man because of physical and environmental factors.

Women have been viewed in extreme ways-goddess or devil. This is typical of feudalism. Home is considered her confined existence. Patriarchy reinforces this view as universally correct.

Woman empowerment means that they should break free of the mould set by patriarchal norms.

Mere legislation and constitutional provisions are not enough; true emancipation is required at individual levels.

legislative means can, however, be a short –term remedy or facilitator.

it is only through empowerment of women that development of a society and the nation is possible.

For a very long time now, women have in general been forced to occupy a secondary place in relation to men; a position comparable in many ways with that of racial minorities. Women have been relegated to the margins in spite of the fact that they numerically constitute at least half of the human race today. This has resulted in women being unable to take a place of human dignity as free and independent entities, associated with men on plane of intellectual and professional equality.

In the pre-agricultural period, women were known to work hard and even participate in warfare. Unfortunately, however strong the woman, the bondage of reproduction was a handicap. Pregnancy, childbirth and menstruation reduced her capacity for work and made her gradually become dependent on men for protection and food. It was often men who risked their lives in hunting and collecting food. It is quite ironical that superiority is accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth life and nurtures it but to that which kills.

With time nomads settled down and community life originated. The community desired a continued existence beyond the present; it recognized itself

in its children, and institutions like property, inheritance and religion also appeared. Women now became the epitome of procreation and was very often associated with the earth. Children and crops seemed to be the gifts of god. Such powers inspired in men a respect mingled with fear which was reflected in their worship of women as goddesses. In spite of the fecund powers that pervade her, however, a woman is fated to be subjected, owned, exploited like the very Nature, whose magical fertility she embodies.

“Woman, to man, is either a goddess or a wolf.” Such an oscillation between pit and pedestal was common in a feudal society. In the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the increasing urbanization made new spaces available to women hitherto confined to feudal estates. Women’s sexual transgression is mapped out in terms of her literal movement away from the symbol of privacy: the home. In patriarchy, the possibility of mobility becomes an aspect of female disobedience. There is an increasing need felt to set a corrective to such notions of oppression.

By the time humankind reached the stage of written mythology, patriarchy was definitely established. The males were to write the codes for all times and obviously women were to write the codes for all times and obviously women were given a subordinate position. A central feature of hegemonic ideologies is the projection of the dominant viewpoints as universally true. Patriarchy, as an ideological assumption, works on the same principle. And yet, even in ages of strict dominance by males, society has thrown up women of caliber who could match, even surpass, the skills of men. The visible achievements of women-as teachers, as doctors, as pilots, as soldiers and as explorers – have demolished the patriarchal notions of confining women’s role to home and hearth. But these achievements have been made mostly at individual levels, at times at the cost of social criticism, indeed even ostracism. Or, if appreciated, such achievements have been seen as exceptions to the rule, not within the reach of every woman. And, generally, women have accepted this view of them.

If, however, we pay some thought to the situation, we can see how detrimental to progress it is to restrict women to specified roles and subordinate them to men. Even to raise children in today’s environs, to make them fit to face the challenges of a competitive future, a woman needs to be fully aware of what is going on and develop the ability to choose and decide. If she lacks the power to equip herself to do this, the future would be the loser. Incidentally, death of women while giving birth to babies is quite widespread in the South Asia region in general, and India in particular. And this mainly because timely care is not provided to women during an immediately after pregnancy.

The need for women’s empowerment is felt because of the subordinate status they have been accorded since the beginning. however, mere realization of

the error does not set things moving in the right direction. There is a need to redefine the status of women in society.

To an extent, a change in Women's position can be brought about through the Constitution and supportive legislation. The Constitution of India gives women a status equal to men. There have been attempts to reserve seats for women in political bodies. This is, no doubt, a step in the right direction; forced to contemplate a situation and decide upon it could gradually inculcate in the women the ability to judge and decide wisely. True, at least in the initial stages, they might just toe the line set by the husbands, the brothers, the fathers and the fathers-in-law; but experience brings self-confidence and at some point, in time these very women tend to show the ability to judge for themselves. Indeed, research studies of Panchayati raj with women on the panels confirms this view. However, merely allowing for reservation of women in panchayats and legislative bodies without each woman being 'liberated' individually, falls short of actual emancipation. Women have been excluded from centers of power as a result of systematic 'conspiracy' by patriarchal thought which has relegated women to an allotted and confined space. A reorientation of our attitudes towards women has to be carefully guided for their real emancipation from the patriarchal norms.

The impoverished and illiterate status of most women in the society is due to their inability to attain sufficient levels of economic power. To sustain any level of empowerment, women have to be educated to be aware of their rights and privileges in a modern society. It is only when they become aware of their status in society that they will be able to take full advantage of the concessions offered to them as a corrective measure.

Empowerment of women has to begin with women's active participation. Michel Foucault, one of the foremost French thinkers of the twentieth century, writes that woman has always been man's dependent and the two sexes have never shared the world in equality. Man –the –sovereign would provide woman-the-liege with material protection but she must accept the moral constraints of confinement. According to Foucault, women's empowerment consists in refusing theses constraints of male confinement.

Unless women throw off the shackles which ignore their talent, their skill and their spirit, women cannot be empowered. And unless they are empowered to take a decisive part in the social, political and economic life of the country, the very development of the country may be adversely affected. Thus, the need to empower women.