

Post independent Indian Society- Position of Women

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Introduction

If we trace the pages of history nowhere men and women were treated alike and assigned the same status. **Women have been always fighting for their rights and position in society.**

They have several times urged for equality so that they can lead a life exactly on par with men. If talking about the women's **status in Independent India, then it has been surely improved.** The **structural and cultural changes** in India have brought into many opportunities for women in the fields of **education, employment and politics.**

Such changes ultimately lead to a reduction in the exploitation of women as they have been **granted equal status as men.** The improvement in the status of women can be analysed in the light of major changes that have been taken place since Independence in the areas of **legislation, economic sectors, social and cultural life and so on.**

Dimension of Women Empowerment

Economic Empowerment:

- **Equal Pay:** Ensuring that women receive equal pay for equal work, addressing the gender pay gap.
- **Access to Employment:** Providing women with equal access to job opportunities and career advancement.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Encouraging and supporting women in starting and managing businesses.

Education:

- **Access to Education:** Ensuring that girls and women have equal access to quality education at all levels.
- **Literacy:** Promoting female literacy to improve women's decision-making abilities.

Healthcare:

- **Access to Healthcare:** Ensuring women have access to healthcare services, including reproductive healthcare.
- **Nutrition:** Promoting proper nutrition and healthcare during pregnancy and infancy.

Political Participation:

- **Representation:** Increasing women's representation in political offices and decision-making bodies.
- **Voting Rights:** Ensuring that women have equal voting rights and opportunities for political engagement.

Legal Rights:

- **Legal Reforms:** Advocating for legal changes that promote gender equality and protect women's rights.
- **Eliminating Discriminatory Laws:** Working to eliminate laws that discriminate against women.

Social and Cultural Empowerment:

- **Gender Norms:** Challenging and changing harmful gender norms and stereotypes.
- **Social Support:** Providing networks and support systems for women facing various challenges.

Safety and Security:

- **Preventing Violence:** Working to prevent violence against women, including domestic violence and sexual harassment.
- **Legal Protections:** Enforcing and strengthening legal protections for women's safety.

Financial Inclusion:

- **Access to Financial Services:** Ensuring that women have access to banking and financial services.
- **Financial Literacy:** Promoting financial literacy and management skills among women.

Technology and Digital Empowerment:

- **Access to Technology:** Ensuring that women have access to digital technology and the internet.
- **Digital Literacy:** Promoting digital literacy skills to bridge the digital gender divide.

Reproductive Rights:

- **Family Planning:** Ensuring access to family planning and reproductive healthcare services.
- **Maternal Health:** Reducing maternal mortality and improving maternal healthcare.

Constitution and legislation for women's upliftment

Constitution of India guarantees **equal status to all citizens** of India including women under **article 14** and **does not distinguish or discriminate between a man or a woman**. Moreover, **article 15** empowers the government to make special provisions for women. Women are **free to participate in all the religious, cultural, economic and political activities**.

Furthermore, they have been **entitled to vote** and are provided with other special benefits. The **constitution protects women against exploitation** and ensures that they are given **equal rights and opportunities** in any field.

Legislation safeguarding women's interests

- **The Hindu Marriage Act 1955** – The act provides women with equal rights to divorce and remarry. Also, the act prohibits **polygamy, polyandry and child marriage**.
- **The Hindu Succession Act, 1956** – The act provides women with the right and claim over parents property.
- **The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956** – It provides a **childless woman with the right to adopt a child** and a **divorced woman with the right to claim maintenance from her husband**.
- **Special Marriage Act, 1954** – It provides women with the **rights to inter-caste marriage, love marriage** and is **only permitted for the girls above 18 years**.
- **Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961** – It protects women **from exploitation** by declaring taking of **dowry an unlawful activity**.

Women in the field of Education

After Independence, the educational rights of women were promoted and they were made aware of the value of education. The **ratio of women pursuing higher studies** and taking education improved gradually since then.

The government provided several benefits to women such as **scholarship, loan facilities, hostel facilities etc.** who wished to go out to pursue higher education. By getting such benefits a large number of women are able to pursue higher education today.

Separate schools and colleges have been established for women alone. **Separate universities have been also established** which are among the prestigious universities today and admits the girls obtaining merit ranks.

There are **many engineering and medical universities in India specially for girls** which provides them with a great **quality of education** and help in **enhancing their careers.**

Women in the Economic and Employment fields

The number of working women has also **steadily increased**. Women have been recruited in **all posts such as teachers, doctors, nurses, advocates, police officers, bank employees** in all major cities of India. Since 1991 women have been recruited into **3 wings of armed forces** that are **military, air force and naval force**.

Awareness of Women regarding their rights

Women in Independent India have maximum rights but **many of them are not conscious about their rights. Uneducated women** have a lack of awareness of their rights. According to a study conducted by Prof. Ram Ahuja, it can be concluded that the **level of awareness of rights depends upon these 4 aspects –**

- Individual background of women
- The social environment of women
- The economic base of women
- Subjective perception of women

It can be also concluded that the **majority of women are happy in their family life and leave important decisions to their menfolk discretion.** They are **not completely free from the hold of the traditional customs practised** in society. Still many are being exploited, they are completely dependent on their spouses. Hence bringing about more and more legislation in order to ensure better opportunities to women is of no use unless there will be a big change in the Indian society and people's attitude towards women and women's role in society.

Strategies for Women development

- ▶ The national document which was prepared by the Government of India with an objective of enhancing and widening opportunities for women highlights the importance of 3 strategies-
 - i. **Obtaining greater political participation of women** – The document mentions that **33% of seats must be reserved for women** in order to obtain effective participation in the field of politics.
 - ii. **Income generating schemes for women** – A per the document, income generating schemes must be introduced.
 - iii. **Increasing Female literacy level** – The government believed that **proper coordination between governmental and non-governmental organisations** will help in **improving the literacy rate** of women which will further help in making them self-reliable.

Factors facilitating the empowerment of women

► According to **Doshi and Jain**, women are empowered by **women emancipation, education, communication, media, political parties and general awakening**. Some social, economic and political factors facilitate the empowerment of women are listed below –

- **Acknowledging women's rights** – Society should recognise that women are equally entitled to the rights and opportunities as men.
- **Freedom to take decisions and make choices** – Women must have the freedom to take important decisions of life such as when to marry, the number of children they should have and so on.
- **Access to education and employment** – Women can become stronger only with educational and economic power, mere expectations cannot help. Conditions must be created in such a way that women can easily get access to education and later on get employed. It will ultimately make women independent and self-reliable.
- **Opportunities for political participation** – Women must be granted political power and must be free to take part in the administrative process.

Rights and protection to women given under the Constitution of India

- ▶ The **Indian Constitution** attempts to provide equal opportunities to women, protect their rights and ensure justice to them through the following provisions-
 - **Right to Equality**– Constitution ensures equality to all its citizens including women (**Article 14**).
 - The Constitution ensures that **no discrimination** shall be made against any person on the basis of caste, class, creed, sex, race and place of birth [**Article 15(1)**].
 - **No discrimination** shall be made on any grounds of discrimination including sex for **providing employment opportunities**. [Article 16].
 - The State shall take the responsibility of providing **maternity benefits to women** employees [Article 42].
 - **Providing harmony and fraternity** to people doing away with all customs in respect of women.
 - **One-third reservation of women in the panchayats** – There must be separate seats reserved for women in the panchayats with separate seats for women SCs and STs [Article 243 D (3)].
 - One-third reservation for women in the presidential posts of the Panchayats – Reserving women seats for all posts at all the levels of panchayats (**Gram Panchayat, Taluk Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat**) [Article 243 D(4)].
 - **One-third reservation in Municipalities** – Separate seats for women in all the town municipalities.[Article 243(T) 3].

One-third reservation for women in the presidential posts of Town Municipalities

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