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“Women Empowerment: The Dual Faces Of Visibility And Subjugation.”

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Abstract:

Women empowerment is a fundamental right. Over the years, efforts have been taken to empower women by providing equal access to education, health care, employment opportunities and resources. Gender equity is one sure way to empower women. Women must be made aware of their right to make their own choices and engaging themselves in the political, social, economic and health related decisions.

On the contrary, ground reality is that many women still face violence, discrimination, oppression within their own homes. This article aims to throw light on the dual realities of celebrating women's success in the public while ignoring her existence and contribution at home. It aims to highlight the challenging life of women by not giving her chance to participate in economic decisions even when they are contributing to the household's income. This article is an attempt to present the two-faced reality of women empowerment- the visible remarkable achievements in the public domain and the subjugation in domestic life.

Keywords: Women empowerment, challenges, reforms, women's safety, valuable contribution

Introduction:

Women Empowerment in India: Past and Present

Samidha: A Spark Within

Dual realities of strength & struggle,
Samidha, A serene flame, a storm in the soul.
Riding passionately through life's toil & turmoil,
Struggling to keep herself whole.

Graceful strength in public dome,
Carrying the whole world in her mighty soul.
Silent, hidden shadow at home.
Always keeping the spark alive, is her goal.

Reforms of various nature like educational, legal, social, cultural, administrative and financial have resulted in women empowerment in India. While celebrating women empowerment, we should always give due recognition and credit to all the great contributions of women in every field in the past, women have faced many challenges in public and private spheres to provide us with all that is needed for the women empowerment. Women in India face challenges due to patriarchal society norms which has transited from generation to generation are seen as an obstacle in the path of progress and success of woman and the nation.

The Past Scenario

Truly quoted in Manusmriti- 'Yatra Naryastu pujiyante ramante tatra Devata.'

Women's scholarly contributions have been prominently documented in the ancient holy books, Vedas, Upanishads and all religious books. The historical writing and sculptures also depict the reforms initiated by Raja Ram Mohan Rao, Ishwarchand Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati, Jyotirao Phule, and other social reformers to save women from the ill-practices like child marriage, dowry, purdah and sati system and abolish them. Savitri Bai Phule, Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekanand, Mother Teresa and many other leaders have contributed to empower women by promoting their education.

The Present Scenario:

The combined efforts from all spheres resulted in women empowerment in the modern era. Now, we are witnessing empowered women in all the domains.

Late Smt. Indira Gandhi, Smt. Pratibha Patil, President Smt. Droupadi Murmu of today speaks about the political capabilities and leadership traits of women. PM JANDHAN yojana and MUDRA yojana for financial empowerment have contributed in women's economic decision-making and resulted in social empowerment. Women's valuable contribution to varied sectors and their multi-tasking ability have made them the epitome of success in every sphere. Laadki Bahan yojana, Mahtaari Vandan yojana are a step towards giving recognition to the self-worth of women.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (2013) and the Prevention of sexual harassment at work place Act 2013 guarantees legal protection and ensure women's safety.

The Visible Face of Women Empowerment

It is true that women can do anything that man can perform nowadays thus breaking the gender stereotyping.

- **Educational Achievements**

Women's literacy rates have significantly improved globally. According to UNESCO, the global literacy rate for young women (aged 15–24) stands at 82.7% in 2013 which improved to 90% as of 2020. But the global literacy rate for women in 2022 was 84% which is low as compared to the rate for men at 90% indicating literacy gender gap world-wide. As per UNESCO, the Indian literacy rate was 77.7 % in 2022. Female literacy rate in India was 70.3% which is less than male literacy rate at 84.7% in India.

- **Economic Participation**

As per the International Labour Organization (ILO), the number of women-workforce has increased but their representation in the key decision-making positions is still quite low. Breaking the glass ceiling, women hold 28.2% of managerial positions across the globe. Many countries are promoting gender diversity in the board as apart of good corporate governance.

Major business support initiatives taken by the ILO are the Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WED) Programme and the Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) Programme. This has resulted in increasing number of women entrepreneurs. 35% of the firms in U.S. are owned by the women employers.

As per the ILO's 2023 data, India has employability gender gap of 50.9% with only 19.2% of women in the labour force as compared to nearly 70% of men. In India, women own 20% of all enterprises and most of these are micro enterprises in informal sector.

Women addressed the challenges of lack of equal access to resources, inadequate social protection coverage, unfavourable environment for growth and care responsibilities and gained key managerial positions in India.

The Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, Smt. Arundhati Bhattacharya, former SBI Chairperson from banking to startups Falguni Nayar, founder of Nykaa etc. are some of the leading examples of successful

women leaders and entrepreneurs. Initiatives like “Mudra Yojana” have provided financial help to nearly 68% female entrepreneurs.

- **Political Representation**

From the then Prime Minister late Smt Indira Gandhi to the present President Smt Draupadi Murmu, the current Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, women have shown their exceptional qualities of governing and leading the country's affairs. There has been a phenomenal growth in the percentage of women's political representation both in the Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha. The government of India has passed the Women's Reservation Bill in the parliament in the year 2023 known as the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam which will further increase the count of women in the governance.

The Hidden Face: Challenges at Home

Beneath the smiling face of women's victory, there lies a hidden mystery which must be given due attention and solved to unlock the potential of all women who are facing various challenges like oppression, domestic violence, societal taboos, private struggles etc. in their home.

- **Domestic Violence**

Women irrespective of the economical class/society they belong have complained about physical or sexual abuse, domestic violence at home. As per the data of the World Health Organization (WHO), one third of the world's women have experienced this oppression. During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, a surge in such cases have been reported in India. National Crime Records Bureau recorded number of crimes against women rose to 4% in 2023 which includes domestic violence, rape, abduction, assault etc. Woman's safety and restoration of her dignity at home is highly essential for increasing the women's engagement in public life.

- **Non-participation in Economic Decisions**

In many households, women are excluded from financial decision-making, even when they contribute to the family's income. It is being shown in many surveys that men are the decision maker in 80 nearly percent of the households across the country (the OECD Gender data). There are many women contributing to every household work and helping in earning the family's income but when it comes to ownership of land, real estate, flat/house/ shops or any physical land their share is quite meagre and skewed which itself reflects gender based economic disparities at home. Same picture is present in rural areas where 73% women are engaged in farming and other allied activities but only 12.8% of women own land as per Agriculture Census 2022.

- **The unrecognised contribution of homemaking and family caretaking**

It is an established societal norm that women are held responsible for home making and care taking of their families which is both undervalued or unpaid. Nurturing families and upbringing of child are the prime responsibilities of women for which they have to sacrifice their career advancement and growth, if they are working. Gender equity and women empowerment must begin from the home itself and all must be having equal share in fulfilling the obligations of family. The International Labour Organization states that almost 80 percent of the burden of unpaid care work is carried by women of 16.4 billion hours of unpaid care work daily worldwide. Substantial contributions to society amount to \$10.8 trillion annually across the globe as estimated by Oxfam.

- **Cultural and social norms**

The silenced women voices at home are the result of presenting men as the prime decision-makers in the patriarchal society. deeply rooted cultural and social norms create obstacle in the women empowerment by disregarding the women's access to the equal opportunities for growth. Women prioritize family, sacrificing their personal and professional growth due to vilification by the society.

- **Internalized gender roles**

The traditional stereotyped gender roles percolates from generation to generation. Children internalize their father's ruling and their mother's struggle or silence confined within the four walls as the norm.

A Dual Reality

India's women empowerment narrative is a paradox. While India boasts women who are scientists at ISRO, CEOs of global companies, and grassroots leaders driving social change, millions of women remain confined to traditional roles, silenced by cultural taboos and systemic discrimination. Bridging this gap requires sustained efforts in education, legal reforms, economic inclusion, and shifts in societal attitudes.

In order to achieve women empowerment in true sense, it is necessary to tackle the hidden challenges which women face. Women should be given enough safety and legal protection for reporting the cases of violence, abuse and assault of any sort which will help in reducing domestic violence cases. Women should be made aware of their equal right in inherited property and men at home should support this legislative move. Financial inclusion schemes for women just as PMJAN-DHAN scheme should be promoted in the remote areas to provide economic empowerment to them. Laadki Bahan yojana, Mahtari Vandan yojana etc. may be seen as recognition of unpaid household work, PM Swasthya Bima yojana is a national health care and insurance system. These schemes aim at providing social security for empowerment. Gender sensitization of all and awareness programmes help in empowerment of women by promoting gender equality and gender equity. Strengthening education system is a way to support women empowerment.

India's future progress depends on empowering every woman—not just in public but within the home, where empowerment truly begins.

Conclusion

Women empowerment truly means empowering women in both public and private spheres and respecting her dignity in all the capacities as a home-maker, successful leader, educator, decision maker etc. aiming at gender-equality. Gender sensitization is very essential for eliminating the gender gap from the Indian society and man's significant contribution is the most crucial element for the empowerment of women in true sense. A 360-degree approach of recognising the women's self-worth, giving them right to have choices and freedom to determine choices, providing them equitable access to opportunities and resources, their right to control their own lives both at home and outside the four walls and to be a social change agent for creation of just and equitable society is the most important aspect for achieving women empowerment.

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