

# Sashakt Nari : A Draconian Truth or Utopia

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## Abstract

*Nari sashaktikaran literally meaning woman power. Today this term is reflected as largely perceived notions of women empowerment which viewed empowerment as from narrow definitions, often as only rhetoric. This paper showcase an approach of addressing issues related to empowerment of women from a holistic and macro point of view acknowledging the cross cutting linkages between economic, social and political identity of woman. This article maps the major attributes that contribute to women empowerment, which are education, social equity and status, improved health, economic or financial stability and political participation. The empowerment process encompasses several mutually reinforcing components but begins with and is supported by economic independence, which implies access to and control over production. Women are often considered as better economic stewards of capital than man. Research has shown that women are more likely to reinvest profits back into human capital than are men. Various legislative measures are taken by the country to complete legal equality for women, still certain archaic laws are to be amended to empower women. To reign in the spurt in incidences of crimes against women, the government and the political class should come on board to amend the existing legislations dealing with such crimes and give it more teeth. The political class will have to display more pragmatism and sensitivity in dealing with such issues. Fortunately the story of 'stree' in India, like that of their sisters elsewhere, has been one of unvarnished courage and sheer grit. Each women's day that passes, despite the dingy statistics, there is enough anecdotal evidence of women who have grabbed their destiny into their own hands, expanding the envelope of their achievement.*

## Introduction

*"Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;*

*Where the knowledge is free;*

*Where the world is not broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls"*

These golden words of Rabindranath Tagore marks its relevance today. Here the 'world' is read as society and 'narrow domestic walls' as mental attitude of protagonists as khap panchayats and some senior political leaders towards women. Our Dharmasastras proclaim that "where women are respected, there gods

reside" the reverence is accorded to Mahalaxmi, Mahakali (Durga) and Mahasaraswati goddesses primarily of shakti, prosperity and education, respectively, which is well known for hindu society. During ancient times especially during vedic times women enjoys highly respectable position. But gradually the patriarchy tightened its grip over the society and women were subjugated by men which continues even today. It is this subjugation or subordinate position of women which necessitates women empowerment consequentially bringing the change in their socio economic condition. Women represents half the global population

and one-third of the work force but they receive only one tenth of the global income and less than one percent of worlds property and does two third of all working houses. Still in day out, our conscience is shocked by news of the violation of human rights for women. Even in India despite their vast numerical strength, women occupy a marginalized position in society due to several socio-economic constraints, social evils like dowry deaths, polygamy, child marriage, female infanticide, forced prostitution and crime against women have not been uprooted in our country. This has inhibited the effective participation of women in the political processes and institutional structures of democracy. A broad based political participation of women has been severely limited due to various traditional factors such as caste, religion, feudal attitudes and family status. As a result women is left on the periphery of political life.

Empowerment of women is a major social phenomenon which is understandable by multi dimensional influence, including family and various units of society. The major challenge is to gain balanced population and if these prejudices are to be overcome the rights of women need to be protected. The 2011 census contains an important message because it is far from a balanced gender ratio against girl. It is an eye opener especially in child sex ratio in the 0-6 age group as it reflects the continuous bias against girls. Greater access to education, health, skill development, credit facilities and opportunities for decision making and legal rights should be made available to women to empower them. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the constitution which guarantees equality to women and empowers the state to adopt measures of positive determination in favor of women for removing the cumulative socio-economic, educational disadvantages faced by them. Within a framework of democratic polity, our laws, development policies, plans and programs have aimed at advancement in different spheres. Government of India's policy on women development has undergone various shift of emphasis since independence. The most

significant change occurred during the fifth five year plan with the shift from welfare to development. During the eighth plan, there was a renewed emphasis on development of women as equal partners in the development process. Today, with focus on inclusive growth, there is a heightened awareness about inclusiveness and empowerment. Today the empowerment should not just be welfare oriented but equity oriented.

### Meaning

“ You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of women”

—*Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru*

Empowerment in the literature refers to the act of bestowing power and authority on someone. Thus, women empowerment refers to the conferring of leverage to women who are deprived. This includes granting to women effectual decision making power and the power to influence others decisions along with economic, social and civil freedom. Empowerment of women means to develop them as more mature individuals, who are socially active, economically productive and independent blended with self confidence. Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International Women's conference at Nairobi in 1985 which defined it as a redistribution of social power and control of resources in favor of women. The United Nations Fund For Women includes the following factors to define the women empowerment.

### Characteristics of Empowered women

- They are more autonomous in claiming their freedom from male dominating hierarchies
- Empowered women define their attitudes, values and behavior vested on their real interest
- They maintain their equal mindedness and respond as equals and cooperate towards attainment of common good.
- Empowered women not only survive the harshness of their of their subjugation but also transcend their subjugation.
- Empowered women contribute in empowerment of the other women.

**The parameters of women empowerment are**

- Promoting self esteem and self confidence in women
- Complete elimination of violence against women especially the girl child
- No discrimination on any ground
- Safeguarding women's right and enforcement of constitutional and legal provisions
- Recognition of women's work in social, political and economic spheres
- Citing positive image of women
- Providing women with choices and voices both
- Strengthening their decision making power
- Promoting women's participation in all spheres
- Providing them with knowledge and avenues of skill development
- Elimination of discrimination in Access to health, Access to food, Property rights, Equal wages, Family resources, Freedom to expression and travel, Access to credit, Control over earnings and savings, Guardianship and custody of children and charge of their maintenance

Empowerment provides strength to women to swim against any odd. Women empowerment can be done by providing them education, health and nutritional facilities.

**Objectives of Women Empowerment**

- Create an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- Create a national network of public, private and NGO centre's for delivering reproductive and child health services free to any client;
- The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres- political, economic, social, cultural and civil.

- Equal access of participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.
- Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office etc
- To improve access to sanitation, drinking water, fuel, wood and fodder for women;
- To strength legal system aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women;
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child;
- To organize educational and empowerment programmes for girls and women;
- To increase awareness in women, for their development to use their talent optimally not only for themselves, but also for the society as a whole;
- Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

**Women Empowerment In India**

India has been working towards empowerment of women since independence, and especially since 1990's. Both government and non-government sectors put head toe efforts to push programmes ahead aimed at imparting education to women, giving them health care, providing them with means of livelihood and opportunities to participate in decision making process both at home and society. However, special attention is being paid to improve the lot of the girl child giving her better chances of survival and opportunities for living a life of fulfillment.

**Constitutional Guarantee**

The constitution of India guarantees to all women, equality (Article14); no discrimination by the state (Article15(1)); equality of opportunity (Article16); equal pay for equal

work (article 39(d)); renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (article 51(a)(c)). The constitution also allowed the state to make special provision in favour of women and children (article 15(3)); securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (article 42). The government of India declared year 2001 as the "Year of Women empowerment" and the National policy for the Empowerment of women came into force from 2001.

### Development Policies For Women

Since the 1950s, when development planning first came on the international spotlight, number of approaches, having different effects on women, have been tried. They are as follows:

- **Welfare** – this was the earliest approach and its main purpose was to enable women to better mothers influencing their role in society.

- **Equity**- this was the original approach of women in development and was utilized during the decade for women .

- **Anti Poverty**- it aimed at increasing the productivity of poor women and saw their poverty as problem of under development, not of subordination

- **Efficiency**- this is the most relevant approach which aims to ensure that development is efficient and effective

- **Empowerment**- an approach articulated by third world feminists since the mid-1980s. It aims at empowering women through greater self reliance and sees women oppression as stemming not only from male patriarchal attitudes but also from colonial and neo- colonial oppression.

### Initiatives taken for Empowerment of Vulnerable and Marginalised Groups and Women

- Domestic Violence Act, 2005- it has given more effective protection to women who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within a family and provided them a civil remedy to deal with such violence
- Antyodaya Anna Yojna, 2000- it was launched for one crore poorest of the family

- National Rural Health Mission, 2005- it was launched with a strong commitment to reduce maternal and infant mortality, provide universal access to public health services, prevent and control communicable and non communicable diseases, ensure population stabilization, maintain gender balance and revitalize local health traditions
- Janani Suraksha Yojna-2005 is a safe motherhood intervention being between 0-6 years of age. It is implemented with the objective of reducing maternal and neonatal mortality by promoting institutional delivery among the poor pregnant women.
- Women Reseervation Bill 2010- this bill proposes to provide 33% of all seats in the lower house of Parliament of India and state legislative assemblies reserved for women
- Financial Focus- gender budgeting is introduced in the XI plan. As the nodal Ministry for women, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has been undertaking several initiatives for the empowerment of women. In this context, Gender Budgeting (GB) has been introduced.
- Girls Education- Kasturba Gandhi balika vidyalayas are opened. Gaun ki beti, kishori balika divas yojna, ladli lakshmi yojna are few of the programs run by the government
- National Commission of Women – it was established as an statutory body in 1992, for safeguarding the rights and interests of the women
- Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao–girl child is an important asset for a nation and synchronized and convergent efforts are needed to ensure their survival, protection and decline in the child sex ratio(CSR), defined as number of girls per 1000 of boys. It reflects both pre birth discrimination apparent through gender biased sex selection, and post birth discrimination against girls. It is a scheme which will help in generating awareness and improving the

efficiency of delivery of services meant for women with an initial amount of Rs 100 crore. Its main objective is to prevent gender biased sex selection

### **Economic Empowerment of Women**

Women are considered as better economic trustee and manager than man in terms of capital. Researches reveal that women reinvest profit back into human capital as compare to men. Demand of women equality in terms of money are no longer the question of today.

### **Entrepreneurship Development**

Entrepreneurship development among women could prove a suitable approach for economic empowerment. Women entrepreneur could be a woman or a group of women who initiate, organize and operate a business enterprise that facilitate her access to resources an markets actual ownership and active control. Thus a woman entrepreneur is economically more powerful than as a mere worker. Government of India has defined woman entrepreneur to those who owned at least 51% share in the capital of the enterprises, and at least 51% employment generation by the enterprises should be for women only.

### **Problems Faced by Women Entrepreneurs**

In India women are still less likely to start a new business than men, although the gap seems to be declining etc. The problems can be categorized in to two parts: first, problems faced as an entrepreneur (Preparation of viable project proposal, Getting suitable Land/ shed/ workplace, Non availability of financial services, Procedural complexities, Marketing of products etc.) and second, Problems faced as a woman (Illiteracy, Lack of assets in their names, Lack of time due to family responsibilities, Lack of exposures to business practices, Poor self image due to social and cultural barriers, Management skill problemsetc.)

### **Women Empowerment : A Critical Analysis**

Multiple studies have shown that healthy and educated women are more likely to have

healthier and more educated children, creating a positive, virtuous cycle for the broader population. But it is the show in philosophy, in reality still empowerment is non achievable.

- **Elected women representatives-**the development economies of USA and EUROPE have already demonstrated strict compliance with laws concerning women's rights and status through most effective Law and Order enforcing machinery and efficient judicial system. Since India is expected to emerge as a super economic power and the women has political reservation at all the levels but still the enforcing machinery is not grossly effective.
- **Weak enforcement-** although child marriage is banned since 1860 and the child marriage restraint act was passed in 1929, but still it is the common practice.
- **Immoral trafficking-** The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) act was passed in 1956, yet cases of trafficking of young girls and women are increasing
- **Gender injustice-** still women need a protectionists wall to walk safely on roads or even residing in their own home. Sexual harassment is common at work place. The National Crime Research Bureau in 198 reported that crimes against women would be higher than population growth rate by 2010. Social stigma is either the cases are not registered or complaint is not heard. Delay in justice is one of the major reason in increase in such crime.
- **Education-** studies reveal that female literacy has a significant influence in improving social and economic status of women. Still female literacy rate is woefully lower than that of male .
- **Health and family planning-** the average female life expectancy in India is slow compared to many countries. In many families particularly in rural areas the girls and women face nutritional discrimination within family and anemic and malnourished.

The maternal mortality in India is still second highest in the world. The average woman in rural areas has little or no control over her potential for reproductivity.

- **Work participation-** though the country has a large percentage of women workers, there is a serious underestimation of women's contribution as workers to nations economy
- **Land and property rights-** in most Indian families, women do not own any property in their own names and don't get a share parental property.

#### Suggestions

Women's empowerment acronymed "WE" depicts a unified force. The necessary thought difficult task of building a just and fairer nation is possible only with meaningful partnerships between men and women.

- The concept of corporate social responsibility should be promoted
- Communication campaigns should be facilitated
- Behaviour change campaigns should be organised
- Excellence awards should be introduced for women in divergent fields to give recognition to their work
- Participatory approach towards rural women.

- Change in patriarchal attitude
- Men itself should be involved in empowerment of women

#### Conclusion

There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of the woman is improved. "It is not possible for a bird to fly with one wing" said Swami Vivekanand. Lord Shiva himself is depicted as ARADHANARISHEWAR SWAROOP to give the above message to the world. Lord himself is incomplete without Shakti. Then why she has been humiliated and denigrated on the front and behind since ages. Feudocracy can only be translated into democracy by empowering the women not theoretically but practically

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