



Naree Shakti: Movement on Socio-Political and Entrepreneurship in India

Ashima Das*

Abstract

The study was carried out with the aim of the socio-political economic status of women in India and to protect their dignity. The study also discusses the role of government related to empowerment of women. Women are in the midst of a confluence caught between the two storms of patriarchal conservatism and freedom of self-acceptance. Gender inequality remains widely prevalent within Indian society. The development and harmonious growth of a nation would be possible only when women are considered as equal partner in the progress which leads to women empowerment. Women's participation in India's freedom struggle began as early as in 1817. Liberalisation took new shape of changes. It had given birth of women entrepreneurs whose position was in back foot once upon a time. International as well as national schemes were also included for the process of empowerment of women. According to the study the rise of women empowerment and chronological progress of their status in contemporary period led to development of family, society, nation and overall global.

Keywords: *Patriarchal, Inequality, Empowerment, Participation, Development.*

Introduction

“There is no chance of the welfare of the world, unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing”

- Swami Vivekanand

Women are in the midst of a confluence, caught between the two storms of patriarchal conservatism and freedom of self-acceptance. In the past decades women were standing up and standing out like beacons to others, to embrace themselves. Gender inequality remains widely prevalent within Indian society. The traditional practice was the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality which resonated women as inferior status in our society. The

*Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Charuchandra College, Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Email: ashimadas@hotmail.com

conservative Indian cultural evaluation has provided women a secondary role and position in Indian society. Women participation in public life, particularly in social, political and economic sphere were much restricted in orthodox Indian patriarchal society. So, the prevailing customs, belief and values are not fully prepared to accept the new role of women as social and political activists as well as entrepreneurs in our society.

Indian society is always 'gender bias' against women. As a result, women are always oppressed by the patriarchal social system. It is pertinent that women are an integral part of the society. The development and harmonious growth of a nation will be possible only when women are considered as equal partner in the progress which is leading to women empowerment – a subject of growing importance around the world in contemporary times. Thus, collective action and shared ownership for driving gender parity make empowerment complete. "Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economic, political, caste and gender-based discrimination. Women empowerment itself elaborates that social right, political right, economic stability, judicial strength and all other rights should also be equal to women" (Kulkarni, 2007, p.1).

Objectives of Study

- To study the socio-political economic status of women living in India.
- To know the roles played by women during the pre- and post-independence movement to preserve and protect their dignity.
- To discuss the roles of government related to empowerment and upliftment of Indian women in Indian society.

Origin of Women Empowerment

The concept of women empowerment sowed its seeds in humanism in the eighteenth century and in the industrial revolution. At the time of French Revolution in 1789 the demand raised by women republican clubs that Liberty, Equality and Fraternity be treated irrespective of gender. The women empowerment movement across the globe got acceleration in the twentieth century. (Lefebvre, 1947) But the concept of women empowerment gained momentum in the last half of twentieth century. The equal right of men and women was guaranteed in the Fundamental Human Rights which enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) (Bhingardive, 2015, p.138). The first great feminist document was found in the writing of Mary Wollstonecraft named "Vindication of Rights of Women" (Wollstonecraft, 1792).

Focus on Socio - Political and Entrepreneurship Movement

Women as Socio-Political Activists

In India Brahma Samaj became a strong progressive force to remove social evils and to drive social reform in Bengal especially in women education. Raja Ram Mohon Roy was well known for his pioneering thought and action on the emancipation of women specially the abolition of Sati Practice. He attacked child marriage, illiteracy and polygamy and demanded the right of inheritance of property for women. Eventually Raja Ram Mohon Roy

spearheaded a movement against women subjugation to men. With the influence of British on Indian culture and civilisation the status of women had once again undergone a change” (Singh, 1998). Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, another giant figure of Bengal was a staunch supporter of widow remarriage and tried to impart education to the ‘Naree (women) for the upliftment of the society as well as eradication of the evil elements of the society. He was also supporter of mass education both for boys and girls and played a great role in establishing forty vernacular schools only for girls (Khanday, 2015, pp.14498-14499).

The participation of women in India’s freedom movement began as early as in 1817. Bai Bhimabai Holkar fought bravely against the British colonel Malcolm and defeated him in guerrilla warfare (Raju, 1994). In the post 1857 revolt the first Indian woman Madam Bhikaji Cama engaged herself in fighting for the freedom of her motherland. Swadeshi movement in 1906 was the movement when women actively participated (Gangotri, 2014). Sarala Devi Choudhurani organised Bhratstree Mahamandal in Allahabad in 1910 which is known as first women’s organisation. The priority of this organisation was to promote female education in this country. It is believed that advancement of the women in the society is only possible when all sections of the society irrespective of class, race etc join unitedly. Bharat Stree Shiksha Sadan, an educational institution, was founded by Sarala Devi for girls in Calcutta in 1930 (Shinwari, 2017). She also participated in the Swadeshi Movement and made rules that swadeshi product be used in the movement (Shinwari, 2017). She started a swadeshi shop called ‘Lakkhir Bhandar’. The Indian National Congress conferred a gold medal for her dedication in promoting swadeshi trade. Mahatma Gandhi had realised the power of Indian women and instigated them to involve in the activities like boycott and picketing during the Non-Cooperation movement of 1920s (Gangotri, 2014). It was only under the enlightened leadership of Mahatma Gandhi that they upheld their equality with men. “In response to the call of Gandhi they discarded their veil and came out of their four walls of their houses to fight the battle of freedom shoulder to shoulder with their brothers” (Singh, 1998). Mahatma Gandhi was the pioneer to inspire all sections of women in the participation of mass movement in the freedom struggle of India (Parihar, 2011). Women’s association was formed with the support of men who allowed few women to join the workplace and impart education. At that time the expansion of traditional gender role was very much restricted in the society. In 1927, All India Women Conference (AIWC) was set up to propagate for women’s education and was helpful in passing the Hindu Code of Bills between 1952 and 1960.

Another social activist Aruna Ganguli Asaf Ali became the active member of non-cooperation movement to fight against British Raj. She also published a newspaper ‘Patriot’. She engaged herself to work for other social activities such as women empowerment and workers’ movements. “Between 1950 and 1970 Aruna along with Kamaladevi Chattopadhyya, represented the lineage and linkage of women’s rights movement with the freedom struggle” (Pal, 2020).

In this perspective it will be unjustified not to mention the name of another female freedom fighter, Pritilata Waddedar who rendered relentless service for her motherland. She joined revolutionary movement picking up arms and ammunition against British Raj. She was

very active in the women-centric secret revolutionary group known as 'Stree Sangha' under the banner of 'Dipali Sangha'. According to Waddedar, "I earnestly hope that my sisters will no more think themselves weaker and will get themselves ready to face all dangers and difficulties and join the revolutionary movement in their thousands" (Bhattacharya, 2019).

However, Independence gave birth to gender equality in the form of constitutional rights but participation in politics remain marginal. Indian women also started various activism from the grassroot level of the society. Since Indian independence women organisations had endeavoured to gather momentum on the issue of violence against them. Women movements vehemently protested on the issues of rape, female morality rate, female foeticide, dowry, death, sati and domestic abuse. Some social activists like Shahin Mistry who joined to fight for educational equity, Manju Patra struggled against child marriage and spurting awareness on violation against women (VAW) and Kamala Bhasin engaged in the various social related problem of gender equality, poverty alleviation and human rights. It is important to highlight that women's inferiority to men is inflicted from their childhood. Hence initiative should be taken to combat deprivation which starts from childhood.

Women as Entrepreneurs

The high level of illiteracy, lack of decision-making power, over childbearing, early marriage of women and gender inequality in India stand on the way of starting their career. (Shah, 2013, p.16) But society is dynamic, and it is changing with great speed. Changes occurred in all spheres in human activity including in their profession and vocation. Liberalisation further took new shape of changes. The result of change is tangible and apparent. It had given birth of various classes of entrepreneurs including women whose position was in back foot once upon a time. This is a boon for sustained economic development and social progress. The social transformation, spread of higher education, pro-women legislation, spurting awareness, urbanisation, family support etc are the key factors in the emergence of women entrepreneurs in large numbers (Sumana, n.d.).

Indian Society stands on cultural harmony and individual resistance. Women are often victimised to the abuse of male power, physical violence, sexual encounter, and domestic violence. Now- a - days women are vehemently willing to find out the solutions of oppression and decided to modify the method of empowerment of women. We are habituated to think that women would remain safe and secure within four walls of a house but in the modern society this idea is incompatible. A country will develop only when both male and female work together, eat together, sit together, perform their duties and be progressive together. Since mythological time women are treated as the symbol of power or shakti. It is noteworthy that Bankim Chandra Chattapadhay projected the image of Bharatmata as the supreme Goddess and Mother for all to motivate the Indian women to fight British colonists (The Statesman, 2015). In India 46.5% of total population are female and only 28.9% of total female population play a vital role in agriculture, allied sectors and artisanal activities. Fifty years have already been elapsed after independence, but the development of women entrepreneurship is dismal. The population of women entrepreneurship requires to remove social, economic and educational constraints (Ranvanshi, 2017, p.2). This paper explores that

there is the beginning of under current movement in the minds of independent minded women to boost up the society aiming the establishment of self-sufficient, self-respect and self-reliance among the women.

According to Adam Smith the term 'entrepreneur' (Intellectual Empowerment) was used in the mid eighteenth century in his famous book 'Wealth of Nation' to identify a person 'who organised a business' (Roy, 2012, p.6). It should be mentioned that the increase of labour force in the western countries gained momentum in the late nineteenth century. This paper also shows that more than ever before, business leaders are stepping forward to advance women's economic empowerment. Their efforts position them as a very powerful in the broader perspective to ensure that all women can fully participate and reap benefit from rising global prosperity. Basically, women were involved to their family-oriented activities and were engaged with three Ks- 'kitchen, kid and knitting'. Apart from the household activities their focus was on mostly in agriculture or at the family trade activities (Rao, 2016, p.208). However, with the flourish of small scale industries in the post-independence period the kitchen activities of women shifted from 3Ks to 3Ps viz 'Pickles, Powder and Pappad' (Kangal, 2019).

One of the most famous female success stories is that seven women from the rural sector in Mumbai launched 'Shri Mahila Griha Udyog Lizzat Papad' which started in 1959 with a capital of only Rs.80/- . 43000 women were employed (in 2018) across the country and its turnover was more than 800 crores. This organisation symbolised the strength of a Naree. The largest Dairy Cooperative in the world, Amul, flagged-off their business by mobilising rural women in Anand, Gujarat (Poddar & Moorjani, 2013). After getting education the women become more aware of their career. Eventually the women entrepreneurs have further moved from the 3Ps to the higher level of activities of 3Es i.e., 'Engineering, Electronics and Energy'. Although the number of such units is limited yet the system of society is progressing slowly (Kangal, 2019).

Women entrepreneurs are contributing to their families, societies and business development. They started their career centric life with high ambition for the purpose of establishing financial stability and independence. Government and non-government agencies also have become elated to recognize their contributions and have paid increasing attention towards the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. Interestingly it is seen that various women successfully running their businesses both in domestic as well as international markets. Kiran Mujumdaar Shaw, Shehnaaz Hussain, Ekta Kapoor, Jyoti Naik (Lizzat Papad), Rajni Bector (Cremica) etc are the prominent entrepreneurs in the modern society (Chavan & Murkute, 2016, p.610). In spite of this, today we find that a section of women is less interested to continue their career as entrepreneurs.

The following integrated approaches need to be adapted for women empowerment:

- Access to equitable and safe employment
- Education to be spread at the grassroot level
- Access to and control by opportunities

- Voice in society and influencing policy
- Freedom from the risk of violence
- Social protection and childcare
- Healthy and hygienic atmosphere
- Setting up of crèche

Steps related to Women Entrepreneurs by Government of India in the following Five-Year Plan

Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-90)	Beneficiary oriented programme: Extension of benefits directly to women- to enhance the economic and social status of women so as to bring them in the mainstream of national development.
Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97)	Transformation from development to women empowerment- Many programs were implemented for the purpose of bringing perfection in the general development of women. Vigilant monitoring process was continued to increase the flow of benefits to women in the core sector of education, health and employment. In this plan it is seen that women are allowed to work as equal partners and participants in the process of development.
Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002)	Composition of Ninth Five Year Plan: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Women empowerment and Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes who are socially marginalised groups and minorities are agents of socio-economic change and development. 2. Promotion and Development of People's participatory institutions-Panchayati Raj institutions, co-operatives and self-help groups 3. Efforts to build up self-reliance. 4. Creation of centralised service from different sectors. 5. A women's component plan at the central and the state levels.
Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007)	Tenth Five Year Plan was formulated to allow required entry of women to information, resources and services, and advance gender equality goals.
Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012)	In this Plan special measures for gender empowerment and equity have been proposed. The ministry of women and child development would ensure synergic use of gender budget and gender mainstreaming process.
Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017)	Priority was given in this plan to abolish gender base inequities, discrimination, and violence. In this Plan it has been envisaged to provide women friendly environment so that they can access in public spaces safely.

Source: (Chaudhary, 2017)

The Government of India has been giving attention to women entrepreneurs to improve their performance so that they can play a significant role in the economic development of the country through self-employment and industrial ventures. In the words of former President APJ Abdul Kalam, "Empowering women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their thoughts and their value systems lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation" (Chavan & Murkute, 2016, p.607).

Some Steps towards Women Empowerment

a) International Laws for Women's Workers Rights

- Equal Remuneration Convention came into effect in 1953
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention in 1960
- United Nation General Assembly adopted the international covenant on economic, social and cultural Rights came into force in 1976
- Convention against discrimination in education adopted by UNESCO in 1960 and which came into being in 1962 (Kinnear, 2011, pp178-180)

b) United Nations Declaration

"Women representation in politics all over the world began to assume importance from mid 1970s when United Nations (UN) declared 1975 as the 'International Women's Year'. This was followed by the UN's decade for women from 1976 -1985 and the theme was Equality, Development and Peace" (Bhatt, 2015, p 190).

c) Recommendation of 2nd South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC)

The leaders of South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) recommended that 2nd SAARC ministerial meeting of women development held in June 1990 should be marked as the "SAARC Decade of Girl Child". Various recommendations were undertaken for the purpose of development of female child (Dorji, 2007, p.12).

d) The Vienna Declaration and Platform of Action

The World Conference on Human Rights adopted the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action on 25 June 1993. It stressed that "The human rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights. The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community" (Goonesekere & Alwis, 2005, p.1).

e) World Conference on Women

Four World Conferences on women which took place in Mexico in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and lastly in Beijing in 1995 were conducted by the United Nations. The main content of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action was the issue of Women Empowerment and recommended the main global policy document on gender equality. The

areas of this declaration in terms of strategic goal, action of advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality were as follows:

- 1) Women and Poverty
- 2) Education and Training of Women
- 3) Women and Health
- 4) Violence against Women
- 5) Women and armed conflict
- 6) Women and Economy
- 7) Women in Power and Decision- making
- 8) Institutional Mechanism for the advancement of women
- 9) Human Rights and Women
- 10) Women and the media
- 11) Women and the Environment
- 12) The girl-child (Ngcuka, 1995)

Steps taken in India for Women Empowerment

Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of India guaranteed right to equality to women by incorporating Article 14, equivalent privilege of women, prohibition for discrimination on grounds of religion, sex, caste or place of birth (Article 15 (1)), equal opportunity for residents concerning with employment (Article 16) etc. The Constitution of India provided at least one-third seat for reservation in municipalities and panchayats for women by 73rd and 74th amendment. (1993). 33% seats are reserved in Parliament and State Legislatures (Legislature) by 84th Constitutional Amendment Act in 1998 (Zaveri & Shah, 2016, p.4).

2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment

The year 2001 was marked as the year of women's empowerment. During the year a landmark document was adopted, 'The National Policy for the empowerment of women'. Different schemes such as Credit Fund for Women (1993), Food and Nutrition Board (FNB), Information and Mass Education (IME) etc. had been adopted by the government for the benefit of women (Hazarika, 2011, p.201).

At present, the Government of India has some schemes for women operated by different departments and ministries. These are:

a) Women Empowerment Schemes

- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme
- One Stop Centre Scheme
- Women Helpline Scheme
- Ujjawala: A Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation
- Working Women Hostel

- Ministry approves new projects under Ujjawala Scheme and continues existing projects
- SWADHAR Greh (A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances)
- Nari Shakti Puraskar
- Awardees of Stree Shakti Puruskar, 2014 & Awardees of Nari Shakti Puruskar
- Awardees of Rajya Mahila Samman & Zila Mahila Samman
- Mahila Police Volunteers
- Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK)
- NIRBHAYA (Ministry of Women & Child Development)

b) Women's related Legislation

- Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- Dowry Prohibition Act and Rules, 1985
- Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1887
- Child Marriage Restrain Act, 1929
- National Commission for Women Act, 1990
- Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- Criminal Law (amendment) Act, 2013 (Nirbhaya Act)
- The sexual harassment of women at workplace, Prevention, Provision and Redressal Act, 2013 (Ministry of Women and Child Development)

This paper has also identified some major challenges to uphold the status of women for the upliftment of the society:

- a) Promoting gender equality and empowering women for the purpose of poverty alleviation and malnutrition in the family so that good mental health administers female children to think freely, develop socially and learn new skills.
- b) To create awareness among the Naree community regarding laws and policies which are implemented by the government from time to time.
- c) Spread of education for enhancement the knowledge of women's right so that women can overcome all the crisis and constraint sustained in their family life.

However, some problems create hindrances in the upliftment of the women in the society:

- a) Violence and violence phobia restrict women's lives and opportunities. It causes fear-psychois and limits in the participation of social, political and economic sphere.
- b) Due to significant gender pay gap in our superstition ridden society women are unable to explore their full potential.

Major Findings

The present research discusses the socio-political and economic status of women who played an energetic role for the enhancement of the Shakti of Naree. Regarding their existing socio political and economic position, it can be observed that women are extremely cautious for their wellbeing and safety of their family. Vigorous hardship forced them to come

forward to claim their equal rights at par with their male counterparts. It is also observed that full participation of women in the political, social and entrepreneurship movement was possible only because of spread of education among women and enactment of different laws and schemes by the government for upliftment of the status of women.

Conclusion

It is realized that traditionally women were considered as marginalized group. Women still have less access than men to social, political and economic opportunities. But in the present era, situation has been changing through the process i.e., 'can do factor', going from 'I cannot' to 'I can'.

This paper studies at the historical background of the rise of women empowerment movement and chronological progress of the status of Naree in the contemporary period. The national movement and various reforms movements paved the way for their emancipation from the social evils and religious bigotry. Women were able to involve themselves in the force of nationalism and scaled the ladder high in creation of opportunity by way of participation in political field. It appears that post-independence period marked a significant change in shaping the direction of women's role in the society through women-centric reforms. This article attributes mainly to the women empowerment and gender equality related matters. The constitution makers and both national and international organisations recognised the equal status of women in association with men in socio-political and economic aspect. This study suggests that quality in education is instrumental in developing a balanced set of capabilities of women. They require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihood, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies, and enhance individual well-being.

In the era of globalisation, the women started responding to the changes in the environment and their entry in the entrepreneurial activities was noticed. The most positive development for the last few years has been the growing involvement of women in the Panchayati Raj Institute. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) Constitution of India have provided some special power to women. The New Panchayati Raj is the part of the effort to empower women at the village level. It appears that the inclusiveness, development, and empowerment of women were implemented upto grassroot level in India.

Women's empowerment and economic development are closely inter-related. While development itself will bring about women's empowerment, empowering women will bring about changes in decision making and establish freedom of choices. The self-identity, self-reliance and self-confidence of women exhibit in the society as they may be known by their own names rather than those of their husbands. Women organisations, women associations and women's empowerment policies can generate momentum in education, healthcare, prevention of child marriage and above all economic activities and the social security.

Furthermore, empowerment is not just a question of power of social, political, and economic but it is also a matter of change of values. Basically, men need gender sensitisation

as much as women do. In fact, men need it even more, for they are still in a position of domination on account of the perpetuation of patriarchy. But in recent times it is noticed that to some extent positive development in strata of the women have taken good shape and they are getting accustomed to free themselves from the subjugation of the men dominated society.

So, we may conclude that the general understanding is that women need to be “Empowered” and “Educated” to narrow the gender gap and to create an equal playing field. The attainment of equal status of women in power sharing and active participation in decision making at all levels address the ‘Naree Shakti’ (Women Empowerment).

So, are girls and women empowered?

Mission for empowering women leads to development of family, society, nation and overall global.

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