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An Assessment of Women Empowerment in Various Fields

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Abstract: ***Women contribute about half of the total population of the world. India is a country which maintains high percentage of women population. They are often regarded as the better half of the society. In traditional societies they were confined to the four walls of house. But under the waves of liberalization and privatization, the role of women as entrepreneur and economic workers are already visible. The new breed of enterprising females is developing in India. The Constitution of India has guaranteed the right of equality to all citizens irrespective of their sex, caste, creed and region. The persistent of gender inequality is most starkly brought home in the phenomenon of "missing women". For each missing women, there are many more women who fail to get an education, a job, or a political responsibility that they would have obtained if they had been men. Government after realising the situations of women and their worse position in the society took huge initiatives to bring about a change and improve the social, economic and political conditions of women. It cannot be said that the measures taken have been completely implemented in the society as still customs and traditions are given much more importance in a country like India, still, a gradual change has been experienced by the women over these years and they have become much more independent and aware in today's time.***

Keywords: Empowerment, Equality, Status, Constitutional Rights

I. INTRODUCTION

Women contribute about half of the total population of the world. India is a country which maintains high percentage of women population. They are often regarded as the better half of the society. In traditional societies they were confined to the four walls of house. But under the waves of liberalization and privatization, the role of women as entrepreneur and economic workers are already visible. The new breed of enterprising females are developing in India. The Constitution of India has guaranteed the right of equality to all citizens irrespective of their sex, caste, creed and region. Indian democracy, right from the days of independent has been thriving on these basic principles for the last five decades. The national movement under the leadership of Mathatma Gandhi was on the first attempts to draw Indian women out of the restricted circles of domestic life into equal role with men. In 'Young India' (1918) Gandhi said "women is the companion of man gifted with the equal mental capacities. She was has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man. She has the same right of freedom and liberty as he".

The persistent of gender inequality is most starkly brought home in the phenomenon of "missing women". Today it is estimated that 6 million women are missing every year (World Bank 2011) of these, 23% are never born, and 10% are missing in early childhood, 21% in the reproductive years, and 38% above the age of 60. For each missing women, there are many more women who fail to get an education, a job, or a political responsibility that they would have obtained if they had been men. Both the relative deprivation of women, and the extent to which there have been improvements over the last twenty years, are apparent in a number of spheres. In access to education in low and moderate income countries, the enrolment rate for girls in secondary school was 34% in 2010, while that for boys was 41%.

There is a bidirectional relationship between economic development and women's empowerment defined as improving the ability of women to access the constituent of development - in particular health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation. In one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women; in the other direction, continuing discrimination against women can as Sen. has forcefully argued and hinder development. Empowerment can, in other words accelerate development. This paper reviews the evidence on both sides of the empowerment–development relationship. It first shows that poverty and lack of opportunity breed inequality between men and women, so that when economic development reduces poverty, the condition of women improves on two counts: first, when poverty is reduced, the condition of everyone, including women, improves, and second, gender inequality declines as poverty declines, so the condition of women improves more than that of men with development, however, is not enough to bring about complete equality between men and women.

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Women empowerment is a debatable subject. During of Stone Age period, women had equal status and power with that of men. But then they started facing some difficulties during post-Vedic and epic ages. History shows that many a time, women were treated as that of slaves. It was observed that right from the early 20th twenty (national movement), the statuses of women had been changing gradually and this credit goes to the British people. It is only after the Independence of India, under the able leadership of Dr.Ambedkhar, the constitutional makers and national leaders started strongly demanding and also reiterating the equal social position of women with men. (Aruna, Goel. (2009). Women Empowerment: Myth or Reality) Today, it is overwhelming to see that good proportionate of women in India are in the respectable positions in all walks of the fields. But the various events and incidents that has been happening in the country for two squares reveals clearly that women are discriminated, abused, tortured and harassed both in public and in families. In spite of the agony and suffering, it is good to learn that a few number of women have been able to establish their potentialities. Therefore, this article suggests that each and every human being should be careful in taking steps to promote the statuses of women and respect their dignity (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1981) in accordance with article 27 (1) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 1, 2, 7, and 23.

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. (Aruna, Goel. (2009). Women Empowerment: Myth or Reality)

It is a fact that women constitute almost 50% of the total populations in the globe. But this is not true in India as India shows disproportionate sex ratio. Though India is marching forward to the status of developed nation, it is shocking to find that population of females has been comparatively lower than males. It is heartening to learn the social status of women in the Indian society is concerned that they are not fairly treated as equal to men in all the places. The best practice in the western societies is that women are recognized and given equal rights and status with that of men in all walks of their life. Even today, we find extensively that gender disabilities, chauvinisms and discriminations are found in India. The contradictory situation is that women were sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times treated merely as slave.

II. HISTORICAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

1) When we trace back to the historic days of Mahabharata, it is crystal clear that Draupadi was put on the dice by her husband as a commodity. This shows that the Gender inequality existed.
2) History has an evident that men folk in general liked the dance of women and enjoyed to the core. As a result, women were made to entertain and please men through her dancing both in private and public places.
3) It is obvious in the Indian society that a major chunk of the female was always dependent on male members of their family till a few years ago, just to run their family chores and also to attend to their personal and basic needs.
4) Even in the family amidst the presence of elder members of her in-laws, female were not freely allowed to express or speak with loud voice. In this kind of situation, if something good happened in the family, the male took the credit and became responsible. On the other hand, if something bad occurred in the family, every faults and liability was placed on female as the sole responsibility.
5) It is heartening to note that a woman after becoming a widow, she had to be totally dependent on a male member of the family for eking out their livelihood, managing their family affairs, upbringing the children and fulfilling their own personal needs.

Even today, it is explicitly clear that dependence of a widow on male members of the family still keeps on increasing. It is very pathetic to see the situation that in many social activities, a widow is not easily permitted to mingle with other members of the family. It is a worst practice that widow has a scanty share in political, social and economic life of the society. The rise of the National Movement was gaining a momentum in India in the early twentieth century for a remarkable change from the clutches of age old practices under the able leadership of Mahatma Gandhi who mainly advocated in removing all the disabilities of women. At the same time, the social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Rai and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar gave a thrust on women's education, banning the evil practices of child marriages, a complete withdrawal of yet another evil practice of sati, uprooting the polygamy and so on. The first credit goes to the National Movement which led to the birth of various reform movements in the nation to pave the way for liberation of women from the practices of social evils and religious taboos.

The booming of various reform and liberation movements in India brought about the Act of Sati (abolish) 1829, Hindu Widow Remarriage Act 1856, the Child Restriction Act, 1929, Women Property Right Act, 1937 etc. (Bharati, Ray. (2005). Women in India: Colonial and Post-colonial Periods)

A. 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 and 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 been given equal rights and opportunities being it any field.

Legislation safeguarding women's interests

1) *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.
2) *The Hindu Succession Act, 1956:* The act provides women with the right and claim over parents property.
3) *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.
4) *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.
5) *Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961:* It protects women from exploitation by declaring taking of dowry an unlawful activity.

B. Common Status of Women in India

In India of the total 30 percent people who are below poverty line, 70 percent among whom 30 percent people are living below the poverty line. Despite the notable efforts by the countries around the globe that have expanded for the basic education, there are approximately 960 million illiterate adults of whom two thirds are women. Educational backwardness of the girls has been the resultant cause of gender discrimination. In spirit and letter, women in India are equal chance and unique status, in special cases, of equality with men as per constitutional and legal provision. To attain or achieve this position over the year in India, Indian women have come a long way from the clutches poverty and overcoming male dominated society. In spite of having constitutional provision of equality for women as like women enjoy the status and freedom, most of the women in India are not free from social customs, beliefs and practices. It is very sad to note that the traditional patrilineal joint family system still confines the role of women by and large to the domestic sphere, assigning them to a secondary and subordinate status, authority and power when they are compared to men. (Majumdar, Maya. 2004, "Social status of Women in India") The main notion lying predominantly perceived in society is that men are the key players in women's life and they are the most important and key providers and protectors of a family, while women are expected as playing only a supportive role, usually attending to the health needs. Keeping this in mind, not only at homes but also in school, in most of the cases of activities and taking up roles and responsibilities in society and for doing adult roles, status and authority. It is still found to be true that men have, to a great extent, controlled and dominated women as a group and therefore, status of women have been very low in family as society as well. When it comes to look after the parents in the old age, it is usual to hear that having a daughter is the best in their family, but then, when it comes to preference of either son or daughter, almost every family in India are preferring to have sons and disfavor towards daughters, which is still a multifaceted phenomenon, continuing in many places. Sons especially in the business communities are considered to be economic, political and ritual assets whereas daughters are considered to be liabilities. Thus anti female social bias is the main cause of gender disparity in our society. (Bhuimali, Anil. 2004, "Education, Employment, and Empowerment Women")

C. Women and Economic Development

The Indian women have spread of their age old shackles of serfdom and male domination. She has come to her own and started scaling the ladder of social advance with proud and dignity. Women in India are now uplifted and granted equal status with the men in all of life activities including the political, social, domestic and educational. But still there is a need to motivate and encourage women to participate in the activities because women secure around of in the total population. For this, Women empowerment must need some interventions for making women to be involved in the economic development of the country.

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The development interventions which must focus on the real gender needs, including women's income and material assets which will lead to the increased women empowerment and decreased poverty. From this intervention the women empowerment will start and led to the extent. With the implementation of some new interventions the rate of increase in the women empowerment will raise to mark. Duflo's explanation was that there was a positive correlation between women's rights and the per capita GDP in terms of a cost benefit calculus. From this point of view it was clear that by increase in the women empowerment the economic development may a raise. (Bruno, Michael, Martin Revallion, and Lyn Squire.1998. "Equity and Growth in Developing Countries: Old and New Perspectives on the Policy Issues.")

D. Women and Economic Growth

Most women in the India rely more on the informal work sector for an income. If women are empowered to do more the possibility for economic growth will be at large. If the informal sector is involved into many tasks and activities then there will be more growth. It was proved that female participation in counsels, groups and businesses is seen to be an increase in efficiency. For instance how an empowered women can impact a situation monetarily this was done by fortune 500 companies, " Those with more women's in the category of board directors had significantly higher financial returns, including 53% higher returns on equity, 24% higher returns on the sales and 67% higher returns on the invested capital (OECD,2008)." This study shows that there was a impact of women in the overall economic benefits of the company. If this was implemented on the global scale then the women in the formal workforce can increase the economic output of a nation. There by the increase in the economic growth of the nation.

E. 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 especially for girls which provides them with a great quality of education and help in enhancing their careers. . (Bhuimali, Anil. 2004, "Education, Employment, and Empowerment Women")

"If you educate a man an individual is educated if you educate a woman the entire family is educated."

LITERACY RATE 1951-2011

YEAR	RURAL			URBAN			COMBINED		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
1951	4.87	19.02	12.1	22.3	45.6	34.59	8.86	27.15	18.32
1961	10.1	34.3	22.5	40.5	66	54.4	15.35	40.4	28.31
1971	15.5	48.6	27.9	48.8	69.8	60.2	21.97	45.96	34.45
1981	21.7	49.6	36	56.3	76.7	67.2	29.76	56.38	43.57
1991	30.17	56.96	36	64.05	81.09	67.2	39.29	64.13	52.21
2001	46.7	71.4	59.4	73.2	86.7	80.3	53.67	75.26	64.83
2011	58.75	78.57	67.8	79.92	89.67	84.1	65.46	82.14	74.04
%increase in 2011 over 2001	26%	10%	14%	9%	3%	5%	22%	9%	14%

Source: Census of India 2011

As per the above data since independence there is a significant growth in the enrolment of girl students in higher education in India. The participation of women in technical and professional streams has also been increased.

In comparison with the urban women, the literacy rate and participation in higher education among the rural women is still less. There are specific problems of a girl student especially from rural background mainly include gender bias at home, early marriages and she may have to take care of her younger siblings at home. These underlying factors are responsible for the dropout statistics of women education in India. (Desai, A.S. (1999) Women in higher education and national development University News, AIU)

F. 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. (Luci, Angela. 2009. "Female Labour Market Participation and Economic Growth." International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development)

Table 1: Levels and trends in sector wise composition of women by sector and region (%) for the years 2009-2010

Year (2009-2010)	Agriculture	Manufacturing	Construction	Services	Mining
North	70.1	6.4	2.4	20.9	0.2
Centre	76.9	5.5	8.8	8.7	0.2
North-East	67.9	4.0	9.6	18.3	0.2
East	59.4	18.7	4.0	17.4	0.6
West	72.3	5.9	1.8	19.9	0.2
South	61.4	14	5.6	18.5	0.6

Source: NSSO unit level data.

Notes: Definition of Region: North – Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi and Chandigarh; Centre – Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh; East - Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal; West - Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa; South – Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Kerala; North-East – Sikkim, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura. Data for states created in 2000 (Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand) were merged with the original states to maintain comparability over time periods.

From the above table it was clear that women participation in different sectors as shown above India stands fifth in agriculture, third in manufacturing, third in construction, sixth in services and third in mining. From this we can say that the women can withstand in any sector so by making some development interventions and programs make them to be more effectively involved in many fields and make economy as developed.

G. 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 –

1) Individual background of women
2) The social environment of women
3) The economic base of women
4) 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's discretion.

They are not completely free from the hold of the traditional customs practiced 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.

H. 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-

1) 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.
2) Income generating schemes for women – A per the document, income generating schemes must be introduced. Some of the schemes are – *IRDP, Jawahar Rozgar Yojana and TRYSEM.*
3) 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.

III. EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Specifically, the concept of empowerment for women flows from the power. Indeed, Empowerment of women focuses on equipping and enabling women to be economically independent and self-reliant. It speaks out loudly that by all means, women need to have positive esteem which would facilitate them to face any difficult situation. More so, they should be able to participate in development activities. Only then, the concept of women empowerment comes true. Therefore, the empowered women, without any force and compulsion from any quarters, should be able to take part in the process of decision making at every possible level. First and foremost, if women are consulted at home for taking decision by their family members in India, one would easily agree that women are empowered at home. If women get recognition from the society for their talents, skills and leadership abilities, there will not be any conflict and violation of human rights. In India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD-1985) and the National Commission for Women (NCW) have been worked to safeguard the rights and legal entitlement of women. The 73rd &74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided reservation of seats to 33%, whereas the report HRD as March 2002, shows that the legislatures with the highest percentage of women are, Sweden 42.7%, Denmark 38%, Finland 36% and Iceland 34.9%. It is good to note in India that at least at the village level, 'The New Panchayati Raj' is the one beautiful part of the effort to empower women. It is significantly important to note the point that the government of India has contemplated enough through discussion and research and finally ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights to women. These equal rights are clearly specified and mentioned in CEDAW (1993), the Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the platform for Action (1995) and other such instruments. 2001 was observed as the year of women's empowerment all over the world. In this particular year, a document that said to be a milestone has been adopted, 'the National Policy for the empowerment of women.' As a follow up of this, favouring the women, the government has been adopted different schemes and programs i.e. the National Credit Fund for Women (1993), Food and Nutrition Board (FNB), Information and Mass Education (IMF) etc. (Menon, Latika. 1998," Women Empowerment and Challenge of Change")

The most positive development last few years has been the growing involvement of women in the Panchayati Raj institutions. There are many elected women representatives at the village council level. At the central and state levels too women are progressively making a difference. Today we have seen women chief ministers, women president, advocates, bureaucrats, different political parties leader, well establish businessmen etc. Besides, it is good to note that there are 25 most successful and influencial women in India. They are namely: Nehwal for Badminton, Kareena Kapoor Khan for Acting, Reshma Shetty, the Managing Director of Matrix India Entertainment Consultants, Ekta Kapoor, Joint MD of Balaji Telefilms, Chitra Ramakrishna, Joint MD of National Stock Exchange, Zia Mody, Managing Partner of AZB & Partners, Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Chairman and MD of Biocon, Shikha Sharma, CEO of Axis Bank, Chanda Kochhar, MD, CEO of ICICI Bank, Vinita Bali MD of Britannia Industries, Nita Ambani, Chairman, Dhirubhai Ambani Foundation, Vanitha Narayanan, MD of IBM India, Kumud Srinivasan, President of Intel India, Naina Lal Kidwai, President, FICCI & Country Head for HSBC, Roshni Nadar Malhotra, CEO for HCL Corporation, Rakhee Kapoor, Business Manager for Yes Bank, Nisaba Godrej, President, Human Capital and Innovation for Godrej Industries, Jayanti Chauhan, Director for Bisleri Group, Aruna Jayanthi, CEO for Capgemini India, Zahabiya Khorakiwala, MD for Wockhardt Hospitals, Aisha De Sequeira, MD for Morgan Stanley India Investment Banking, Mallika Srinivasan, CEO of TAFE, Kirthiga Reddy, Head for Facebook India, Neelam Dhawan, MD for Hewlett Packard India, Abanti Sankaranarayanan, Managing Director of Diageo. In the political arena too, we could find that some women excelled in the past and still some of them are in their peak of glory and success because of their boldness and leadership qualities. The most notable amongst these are: Mrs.Protiva Devi Singh Patil, the Ex-president of India, Shila Dexit, the Ex-Chief Minister of Delhi, Ms.Jayalalitha, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu,

Mayawati, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Sonia Gandhi, President of the Indian National Congress party since 1998, Binda karat, the general secretary of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) from 1993 to 2004, and thereafter its Vice-President till date, Susma Swaraj, former lawyer and the current Minister of External Affairs of India, in office since 26 May 2014, Momta Benarji, the founder the party All India Trinamool Congress (AITMC) and at present Chief Minister of West Bengal since 2011, Indira Gandhi, India's third prime minister from 1966 until 1984. Ex-prime minister etc. Women are also involving in human development issues of child rearing, education, health, and gender parity. Many of them have gone into the making and marketing of a range of cottage products-pickles, tailoring, embroidery etc. The economic empowerment of women is being regarded these days as a sine-quo-none of progress for a country; hence, the issue of economic empowerment of women is of paramount importance to political thinkers, social thinkers and reformers. Moreover, there are 5 successful Indian women who deserve to be known for their achievements. They are namely Indra Nooyi – Chairperson & CEO of PepsiCo, Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw– Managing Director of Biocon Ltd., Chanda Kochhar - CEO and MD, of ICICI Bank, Shikha Sharma– Managing director and CEO of Axis Bank, Ekta Kapoor – Founder, Joint Managing Director & Creative Director Balaji Telefilms.

A. Empowerment of Women and 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, 1993

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993 was undertaken especially to give constitutional status to Panchayati Raj system and introduce it on a uniform basis. But apart from this it also plays a specific role in women empowerment. The framers of the 73rd constitutional amendment believed that the social and economic conditions of women could not be improved without granting them political power. The new Panchayati Raj was an effort to empower women at least at the village level. (Mitra, Jyoti. 1997, "Women and Society, Equality and Empowerment") One-third reservation of seats for women

The 73rd amendment has made an effort to provide women with some special powers in all the 3 tiers of Panchayati Raj. As per the act, ⅓ of seats are reserved for women in addition to the seats reserved for SCs and STs. It was indeed a bold step. The rural women will also be now able to exercise some political power and play a role in decision making for village affairs.

B. A brief Assessment of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act

The act has not brought about miraculous changes as expected. Though it has brought awareness on the part of women but to an extent only. Following drawbacks have been found after analyzing the impact of the Act's implementation-

1) *Illiteracy:* Due to illiteracy in rural areas women are unable to assert themselves at different tiers of Panchayati Raj. On the contrary, they are forced to work according to the wishes of male members.
2) *Corrupt Bureaucracy:* As our bureaucracy is highly corrupt, it becomes very difficult for women to progress and achieve something in such circumstances.
3) *Non-availability of Women:* It is very difficult to find out an adequate number of women who are qualified and are aware of the rights as most of the women are illiterate and ignorant about their rights in the rural areas. (Rajib Lochan, Panigrahy, Dasarathi Bhuyam. 2006. "Women Empowerment")

C. 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 –

1) *Acknowledging Women's Rights:* Society should recognize that women are equally entitled to the rights and opportunities as men.
2) *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.
3) *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.
4) *Opportunities for Political Participation:* Women must be granted political power and must be free to take part in the administrative process. (Waghamate, Shivaji, Shivashankar. S. 2014. "Women Empowerment in India", A Panoramic View)

D. Reasons Behind the Need for Empowerment

In a developing country like India where women are treated as a second-grade citizen and inferior to men, women empowerment is justified. Following are the main causes on account of which government decided to take such an initiative for women.

1) *Education or Literacy:* Among the other counties in the world, India is counted as one of the countries having a maximum number of illiterate people. Women are more illiterate as compared to men. Earlier they were denied going to schools and have education but now conditions are much more stable. Still, illiteracy is the biggest weakness of women. Providing them with educational facilities means empowering them so that they can enjoy their rights and contribute to the progress of the nation.
2) *Health Problem of Women:* Poor health conditions of women is also a hindrance in their progress. The main reason for such health conditions is the traditional importance given to a male child neglecting the presence of a female child which leads to less care given to her. Another reason is that women are always taught to be shy and submissive. This often makes women tolerating thus, they prefer to avoid complaining about something and rather suffer silently.
3) *Economic Exigencies of Women:* Indian women are economically weak since education was not given to them for years and property laws were also not in favour of them. They were dependent on men financially as all economic power used to be in the hands of men. Thus women require economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men.
4) *Atrocities Against Women:* Women on all walks of life have been discriminated against men. They become victims of atrocities in a number of ways as there are cases of sexual harassment, molestation, kidnapping, dowry harassment and so on.

Thus women require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves from all such atrocities and to preserve their purity and dignity. (Reuters, 2015. Indian Women face worst discrimination among G20 nations, The National Sunday)

E. 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-

1) Right to Equality– Constitution ensures equality to all its citizens including women (Article 14).
2) 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)].
3) No discrimination shall be made on any grounds of discrimination including sex for providing employment opportunities. [Article 16].
4) The State shall take the responsibility of providing maternity benefits to women employees [Article 42].
5) Providing harmony and fraternity to people doing away with all customs in respect of women.
6) 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)].
7) 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, Thaluk Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat) [Article 243 D(4)].
8) One-third reservation in Municipalities – Separate seats for women in all the town municipalities. [Article 243(T) 3].
9) One-third reservation for women in the presidential posts of Town Municipalities. (Siddhartha Sarkar, International Journal of Human Development and Sustainability)

It can be concluded from the above discussion that women's status in Indian society has radically changed since Independence. Government after realising the situations of women and their worse position in the society took huge initiatives to bring about a change and improve the social, economic and political conditions of women. It cannot be said that the measures taken have been completely implemented in the society as still customs and traditions are given much more importance in a country like India, still, a gradual change has been experienced by the women over these years and they have become much more independent and aware in today's time.

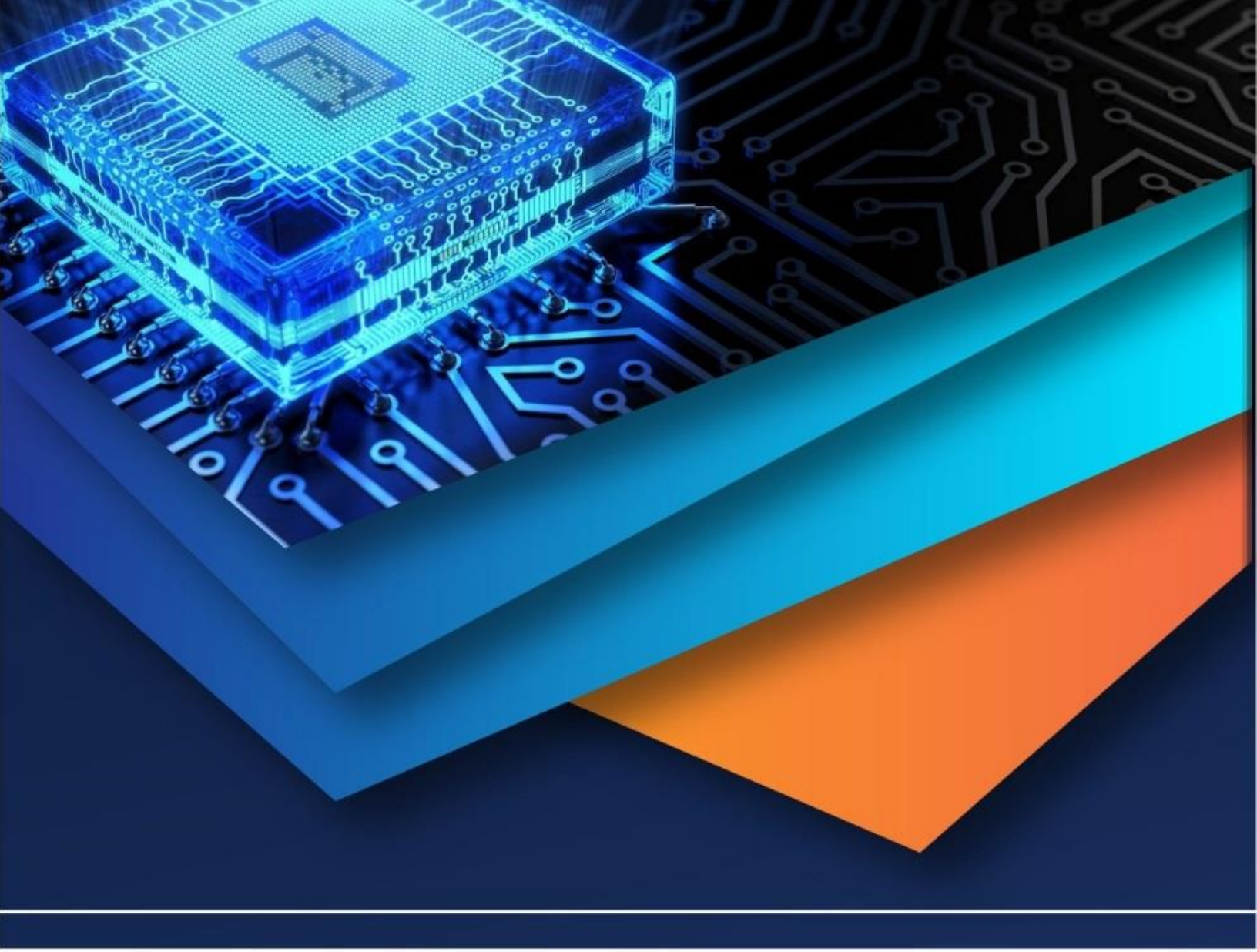
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