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WOMEN AND WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

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STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

In previous times, the status of women in India was inferior to men in the practical life. However, they had a higher status in scriptures. They are considered as the perfect home maker in the world. With their incomparable quality of calmness of their mind, they can easily handle even toughest situation. Indian women are completely devoted to their families. They're preached in the names of Goddess Saraswati, Goddess Durga, Parvati and Goddess Kali. Their condition remains unchanged even during the modern times with only little changes. In India, women were never given any right of liberty & equality. Their condition becomes even worse when they gave birth to girls. Men treated them in a humiliated manner. They were not only permitted not to step outside their house but also abstained from being educated. They were also supposed to eat after their husbands or even sometimes to eat their husband's leftovers. Women were prohibited from taking external matters as well as domestic matters. They were under the influence of their parents before marriage & their husband after marriage. However, their status varied a lot depending on the period which they were living as discussed below.

Women status in the ancient India

It's said during the ancient India, women enjoyed equivalent status & rights like their males counterparts. In addition they were properly educated in the early Vedic period. These references are available from the works of Grammarians such as Katyayana and Patanjali. Women also had the freedom to select their husbands. This system was known as 'Swayamvar.' In fact during this time, women had superior position than the males.

Women status in medieval India

The status of women in India deteriorated during the medieval period with the entrance of the Muslims. Several evil practices such as female infanticide, sati and child marriage were practiced during this period. 'Purdah' was introduced to the society. Women were also forced to practice 'zenana.' Polygamy was also common during this period. Women also excelled in literature, music and arts. They were also rulers during this period. Some great-women rulers were Razia Sultana who was the only women-monarch to-rule-the throne of Delhi, Nur Jahan, Gond queen Durgavati who ruled for fifteen years before she was defeated in a battle by Ali emperor Akbar's. Nur Jahan is still considered as the most effective ruler by the society. In spite of these powerful women, the condition of poor women remained the same. At this time girl were forced to get married at a very tender age. The society also practiced Sati where women were forced to jump over the burning bodies of their husbands during funerals. The southern India also practiced Devdasi tradition where girls were forced get married to trees or deity.

Women status in modern India

During this time there was a little development in the women status. There were many women reformers in India who worked for the uplift & betterment of their female counterparts. The begun of Bhopal discarded the 'purdah' & fought in the revolt of 1857. Their education was elevated and English was introduced during this period. Various female writers emerged in the society. In the modern time, women in India were given freedom & right such as freedom of expression & equality

as well as the right to be educated. Various prestigious positions at this period were held by women. They're enjoying the 'ladies first' facility in different fields. However, some problems such as dowry, domestic violence, sex selective abortion, female infanticide are still prevalent.

WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Social reformers of the 19th century had prominently raised the issue of gender discrimination which resulted in substantial improvement in the position of women. Consequently, women took part in the national movement in large numbers. However, after independence, the national movement came to an end and constitution had granted equality between sexes, no apparent cause left for the women to mobilize themselves for any collective action.

Many women's organizations such as AIWC reoriented themselves as primarily social organizations running hostels, schools, providing limited work opportunity, etc. Many of the major political parties started token women's fronts. But this state of dormancy did not last long. The expectations that independence would result in social transformation soon started giving way to dissatisfaction. The women responded to the situation in two ways. First was that the women actively took part in the struggles on the issues which were all encompassing. Their participation in environmental and ecological issues was one such example. Secondly, they also focused on the issues which were specifically women oriented including the right to property and right against violence. Protests against sexual violence, dowry and sati were some such issues.

RIGHT TO OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY: BODH GAYA MATH STRUGGLE

Traditionally women do not have any right to hold property except their stridhana which could be in form of some money, jewellery or cloths. As women was herself treated like a commodity under the control of her male relative the ancient law makers did not envisage her as holding any property much less the ownership of the land. She was supposed to remain dependent on her husband. This was a very important disability as ownership of land in a predominantly agrarian society was of prime importance. These questions were raised during the Bodhgaya movements. Apart from the fact that these questions were raised in movement, it was also important that the questions were raised by the rural and not so educated women.

The Bodhgaya movement, initiated in 1978 in the Gaya district of Bihar, was a struggle by landless labourers and sharecroppers to gain rights in land which they had cultivated for decades. The land, some 9,575 acres spread over 138 villages, was held by a Math (a monastery-cum-temple complex), much of it in violation of land ceiling laws. Math officials exploited the peasants and also sexually abused the women. The struggle emerged under the leadership of the Chatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, a Gandhian-socialist youth organization founded in 1975 by Jayaprakash Narayan (a contemporary of Mahatma Gandhi) and committed to improving the lot of the disadvantaged. Vahini membership was restricted to those under thirty, and included women in every tier of the organization. The movement lasted several years. Its primary slogan was Jo zameenkoboyejote, vohzameenkamalikhai (those who sow and plough the land are the owners of the land). Women actively participated in the movement and over time, they began participating in equal numbers with the men and also courting arrest with accompanying children. In addition, women organized shivirs (camps) to discuss their concerns within the struggle. They focused on women's exploitation, their exclusive responsibility for housework, discrimination against girl children, men's

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verbal and physical violence against them, and (most importantly) women's need for independent land rights. Resolutions were passed, including one against wifebeating and another demanding land in women's own names.

Finally in 1981, the government identified 1,000 acres of the Math's land for redistribution to the agitating farmers. The Vahini drew up a list, giving priority to landless laborers, the disabled, widows, and small peasants. Women other than widows did not figure in the list, and they protested their exclusion. After a prolonged debate on why women should have independent land rights, in 1982 it was decided that women too would receive land in their own names in future distribution. In two villages the villagers unanimously approved lists for giving land only to women and widows. In time, all the Math's illegal holdings were distributed and women received land in various ways: individual titles, joint titles with husbands, as widows, destitute and disabled persons, and in some cases as unmarried adult daughters. Although such women were few since most girls there were married before they were eighteen, the idea that unmarried daughters were eligible was an important step forward. A powerful critique of patriarchy emerged in the Bodhgaya Math struggle. Women raised a large number of questions about the power structure involving women's issues – questions about family, work distribution, and family violence and unequal access to resources enjoyed by men and women, issues of male female relationships and women's sexuality. Thus Bodhgaya Math struggle successfully raised the issue of property rights of women. However, demand for equal property rights continued. In 2005, an amendment of Hindi Succession Act was passed which gave equal rights of inheritance to daughters.

SHRAMIK SANGHATANA OF DHULIA

Beginning in the early 1970s in the Dhulia district of Maharashtra the tribal Bhil landless labourers agitated against the extortionate practices of local landlords most of whom were non-tribals and treated the tribals as sub-human. In 1972, the Shramik Sanghatana was formed, which, following the drought and famine, took up the struggles against land alienation through occupying and cultivating the fallow land. The Shramik Sanghatana argued that contemporary drought was related to unequal land relations. They, therefore, demanded a comprehensive legislation on land reforms to counter drought. They also mobilised the tribals for access to forestland, wastelands and repossession of lost lands. The local landlords were also traders, alcohol vendors, and merchants who consolidated their landholdings by taking over the tribal land by fraud and by trapping the tribals into a cycle of indebtedness. The Sangathan mobilized both the farmers as well as the tribals for the movement by adopting different strategies. Women from both these groups took part in these agitations. Tribal women faced domestic violence as a result of alcoholism of "their" men.

The Shramik Sanghatana initiated its work by organising the tribals at the drought-relief sites. Like the Parishad, the Shramik Sanghatana organised protests against the inferior conditions of work and differential wages for women and men. In these mobilisations tribal women took lead and while conducting negotiations, with the landlords and officials another source argues that they were more "adamant than the men". The urban women activists like ChhayaDatar and NirmalaSathe introduced a feminist perspective to tribal women. Tribal women could put across their concerns regarding working conditions confidently but were unable to express domestic violence that they faced within the house. The Shramik Sanghatana women activists organised women's conferences, meetings and informal group sessions to encourage women to speak about their problems and help them to understand the underlying issues. Over time the discussions, which were earlier restricted to

the issues regarding sexual division of labour, now expanded to domestic violence at home. As these discussions continued the Sanghatana activists and the tribal women started seeing the links between domestic violence and the structures of exploitation and was rather a deliberate enticement for men so that they get further indebted to the landlord. No wonder tribal women started organising an anti-alcohol stir in 1972. The Sangthan meetings discussed [women's liberation movement, feminism](#), the organised workers movement in Bombay and liberation movements in the rest of the world. It is said that forms of gender discrimination and violence in the private sphere cannot be understood without assessing economic conditions. The work of ShramikSanghatana shows the integral relationship between these two perspectives.

SELF EMPLOYED WOMEN ASSOCIATION AND ANTI PRICE RISE AGITATION

In Gujarat, in 1972, Ela Bhatt, who worked in the women wing of the Textile Labour Association found Self Employed Women Association (SEWA) which was an organization of self employed women working mostly in the informal sector. These women suffered from low income, harassment from authorities and lack of recognition of their work as socially useful labour. SEWA worked in a way like a trade union and sought to improve the conditions of these women by providing training, technical support and most importantly a collective bargaining power. However, SEWA confined its activities on the economic front and did not venture into other aspects of social discrimination as was done by other feminist movements.

As women in the rural areas are mobilized in famine agitations, the women of the urban areas organized to fight against the hike in the prices of essential commodities that was followed by the famine. In 1973 United Women's Anti Price Rise Front was formed by [Mrinal Gore](#) and some other activists to mobilize women against inflation in the cities. The movement grew rapidly becoming a mass women's movement for consumer protection, demanding that both prices and the distribution of essential commodities be fixed by the government. Thousands of working class and lower middle class women took to the streets in the so called 'latni' morchas and developed strong structures of mobilizations and communication. The movement was generalized and visible in many parts of the metro-politan cities, though centered mainly to Patna and Bombay. Women marched down the Bombay streets waving rolling pins and empty cans of oil. However, this movement like the SEWA concentrated on specific issues and did not develop a critique of patriarchy or gender discrimination.

ANTI ARRACK MOVEMENT

The women of Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh who got a chance to enter the world of literacy through the state sponsored literacy campaign, came to know through the textbooks the ill effects of alcoholism and its impact on women. Spontaneous action came from the women who experience the ill-effects in their day to day life because of the alcoholic habits of their menfolk. Thousands of women joined in picketing liquor outlets, disciplining habitual drunkards, and demanding from the administration a total ban on alcohol sales. The women from all political leanings strove their utmost to make the agitation a success. Women realized their strength and importance and the government bowed to the wishes of people. Sale of arrack was banned in the district of Nellore to begin with and later on the ban was extended to the rest of the state. The agitation of Andhra Pradesh inspired people of other states, especially Haryana, to take up similar issues. . These anti-arrack movements took up the case of physical violence against women in the family and the economic problems of the household associated with alcoholism of men, and thus brought issues which were considered to be private in nature into public discourse and requiring state intervention.

ANTI RAPE MOVEMENT

The anti rape movement begun in 1977 by the Civil Rights groups following an incidence of custodial rape. With the public outcry following the custodial rape, women's organizations initiated the anti-rape movement. Mathura, a 15-year-old girl and a member of a scheduled caste, was raped by two policemen at a police station. The policemen were acquitted on the ground that "there was no rape, because there was no proof that Mathura had resisted. Although on appeal the decision was reversed by the Bombay High Court, the Supreme Court again acquitted the policemen holding that Mathura's story of stiff resistance was false and that the intercourse was a "peaceful affair". In protest against the Supreme Court judgment, on 8th March, the Women's day in 1980 thousands of women of different quarters of life — students from major universities, the women's wing of left political parties, housewives, women's organizations — came together in the cities of Ahmadabad, Nagpur, Pune, Bombay and Delhi. They demanded a reopening of the case. In Nagpur and Bombay a series of rallies, seminars, marches, sit-ins and street plays were held. A women's organization that specifically focused on ending rape, the Forum against Rape, was founded.

The Supreme Court took heed and agreed to review its decision, but ultimately stuck to its verdict. Pressure from this campaign meanwhile affected the recommendations of the Law Commission of India, so harsher legal penalties for rape were recommended in the Criminal Law Amendment Bill of 1980, which was passed by Parliament in 1983. The issue has been prominently raised once again due to an incident of gang rape and subsequent cruelty meted out to a 23 year old girl in December, 2012 in which thousands of people participated and demanded harsher punishment for the accused.

ANTI DOWRY MOVEMENT

The Progressive Organisation of Women in Hyderabad first organized protests against dowry in 1975. The imposition of National Emergency prevented its full fledged growth. After lifting of the Emergency women in Delhi organized on a large scale against the social practice of dowry sometime around 1977. It began with the organized protest of Mahila Dakshata Samiti. They protested against the violence inflicted upon women for dowry, especially against murder and abetment of suicide. They demanded the prosecution of the accused in a dowry related murder case. The accused was a well-placed government doctor who being dissatisfied with his wife's dowry murdered her for another woman and threw the dead body in the Ganges River in Kanpur. The death remained a mystery for a long time, but the husband was nabbed and punished for his crime. Protests against dowry harassment and murder began in several parts of the country but Delhi remained the site of a sustained agitation against dowry and dowry-related crimes largely because it seems to have the highest number of murders of women for dowry in the country.

Protests in the form of demonstrations and other means by feminist groups could change the indifferent attitude of the wider public and policy makers to the issues of women's death by kerosene. They could even prove that many of the official suicides are in fact not suicides but murders that had been committed by the husband of the women and family demanding more dowry. The feminist groups devised a series of strategies to enhance the public awareness of the problems associated with dowry. They recorded the last words of the dying women, took the family testimony, and encouraged the friends and neighbours to come forward with their evidence. As a result many families began to lodge complaint with the police against the harassment of their daughters by the in-laws for more dowries. In 1980 a year after the anti dowry agitation began, the government passed a

law against dowry related crimes that recognized abetment of suicide because of dowry demands as a special crime and made mandatory a police investigation into the death of any women within five years of marriage.

AGITATION AGAINST SATI

In 1987 the death of a young widow in the funeral pyre of her husband in Rajasthan sparked off a campaign against the practice of sati or self immolation across the country. Roop Kanwar, a graduate, was married a short while before her husband died and she spent only around 6 months with him. After his death it was decided that Roop Kanwar would become sati. The impending event was announced in advance though her family was not informed. She was dragged to the funeral pyre despite her protests and put on the pyre after drugging her. Reports indicated that the local authorities knew about the planned sati and still they could not do anything effectively to stop the event. Immediately after the immolation, the site became a popular pilgrimage spot being visited by scores of devotees. Supporters of sati formed an organization called Sati Dharma Raksha Samiti. They arranged the assistance for pilgrims and made money by glorifying the act of sati and commodifying it. Even though several laws exist under which the ideologues and profiteers of sati could have been punished, still the state government did not take any action largely because the promoters and those who argued for sati belonged to the Rajput community and the issue had become an issue of Rajputs community identity. The politicians were more concerned about their vote banks than any gender issue.

The feminists and women activist protested the killing of women in the name of religion. They conducted demonstrations and other forms of protests in Delhi as well as other parts of the country. Feminists demanded state intervention. Some of their main demands were that i) Roop Kanwar's in-laws and the doctor who drugged her should be prosecuted for murder; ii) all those who profited financially or politically from her death should be punished; and iii) a new law should be promulgated banning both the committal and glorification of crimes against women in the name of religion (Radha Kumar). Soon after Roop Kanwar's death the Rajputs came out in defense of the act of sati – the self-immolation of the bride on her husband's pyre. They defended it on the ground that it is part of the Rajput tradition where men kill and are killed in the battlefields and women do their role by killing themselves at home. Rajputs began projecting sati as the true example of Rajput identity. The major argument of the pro-sati camp was that if the state represented the people, then the Rajputs were a people among whom sati was an ideal and a tradition and as such it should be recognized and legitimized. And hence, they argued, refusal to legitimize sati is a deliberate attempt to marginalize the Rajputs. The head priests of some of the major Hindu temples and some of the extreme Hindu nationalists groups joined the pro-sati activists. The pro-sati agitations could mobilize large number of women who, in fact were supporting their own oppression. They claimed that they represented the true desires of Hindu women and they accused feminists of being unrepresentative. Thus feminists were placed in an anomalous position of appearing to speak in the interests of women whom they could not claim to represent and who defined their interests differently.

CHIPKO MOVEMENT

Chipko movement was not essentially a feminist or women based movement. It was essentially a movement against the environmental and ecological degradation. However, the issue of environmental degradation in this movement was related to women's increasing toil for fuel and fodder in the face of such degradation, and from this was generated the idea that women, by virtue of their own nature related activities, have an especially nurturing attitude towards nature. The Chipko movement originated around 1970s (though the seeds of the movement were there from the British period) against indiscriminate forest felling for commercial interests. The name Chipko is derived from the Hindi word for hugging the trees, which is what the Garhwal women did en masse in order to prevent indiscriminate forest felling for commercial interests. While the men of the region conceded that the government had the prerogative in forest felling, the women protested on ecological grounds. Women argued that the forest is directly connected to the essence of life — soil, water and pure air. When Europe's forest cover was depleted, Britain looked at its colonies for fulfilling the need for wood, accordingly adopted a forest policy, which would facilitate indiscriminate felling of trees. The same was the case with India. There were popular protests during the colonial period in India against the forest policy of the colonial masters. The policy continued after independence and forest felling continued for commercial and developmental activities. People protested government policy. There were popular demonstrations against the government decision allowing contractors to fell ash trees. Peoples' demand included an end to the contractor system of forest exploitation, supply of forest produce to the villagers at concessional rates and the forest revenue settlement. They pledged not to allow cutting of trees.

Women adopted the strategy of hugging or attaching themselves to the trees when the contractors came for cutting the trees. It started in 1974 when a group of women under the leadership of Gaura Devi prevented the felling of trees which had been auctioned by the Government. All along the movement, the women actively participated in the movement and also adopted various other peaceful forms of protest. The central government acceded to the demands of women and ordered a ban of the cutting of green trees. The Chipko movement did not stop with the end of commercial forest felling. The activists later on concentrated on the educational work in the villages. The women gained enormous self-confidence through the movement and were in a position to articulate their own long-term larger needs clearly.

WOMEN RIGHTS IN INDIA

Policies relating to women's rights have had a positive trajectory in the past few decades with the central government articulating many progressive measures to advance gender equality in social, economic, and political arenas. The Government of India (GoI) has two main bodies to advance gender equality: the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the National Commission for Women, which is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Women and Child Development.⁷ Both bodies work on national- and state-level legal and social policies to advance gender equality. The Ministry has widely implemented local-level micro-finance schemes to advance economic opportunities for rural women. The National Commission for Women has been instrumental in creating legislative changes, and has set up Complaint and Investigate Cells at the state level. The Grievance Cells receive complaints of gender-based violence and are mandated to investigate, provide referrals and counselling, and ultimately report on such cases.

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With a vibrant women's rights movement in India, there are continuous demands for better laws, provisions, and accountability for implementation. Most recent examples include the change in India's rape laws, where in 2006 marital rape was recognized. Currently, women's rights activists are demanding better provisions in Sections 375 and 376 of the Indian Penal Code. Since then, there have been multiple challenges by the women's movement leading to small but significant amendments. The 2005 Domestic Violence Act provides protection from violence in the household from not only male perpetrators, but also female perpetrators like mothers-in-law and other female members in extended families. There also have been gains in women's inheritance rights, yet challenges remain in implementation. Social biases and lack of enforcement continue to hinder the full realization of Indian inheritance laws. Inheritance laws and property distribution fall under the Hindu and Muslim personal laws, both of which exempt agricultural land. For a country with a predominantly agro-based economy, women's inability to inherit agricultural land exacerbates feminization of poverty and neglects women's welfare.

Like all other spheres of social change in India, there is an undeniable gap between policy and practice. More notably, the deeply entrenched social hierarchies based on class, caste, ethnic, and communal divisions leave many communities on the margins with little knowledge of their rights and even less protection from local, state, and national governmental policies. Inequality between men and women runs across the board, including in education, economic opportunities, representation in governance, and other state and private institutions. Additionally, women in India face high rates of violence. Women in India face a lot of social inequalities ranging from gender specific abortions, mistreatment by their spouses, to eve teasing. Most women aren't aware of women rights in India and other times their legal rights are not protected as they should be. Women empowerment plays a significant role in letting them know their rights.

The following issues infringe on women rights:

Female Foeticide

This is the act of aborting female fetuses. This problem is linked to the dowry system whereby women are expected to pay dowry to the men in spite of the fact that it was prohibited in the year 1961. Unlike in western cultures, Indians have a strong inclination for sons over daughters. Pregnancies are planned using differential contraception. Foetal foeticide has led to social discrimination against women and they are treated as second-rate citizens. 80% of the districts in India have recorded a high male sex ratio with the state of Punjab recording the highest ratio. An estimated ten million female fetuses have been aborted illegitimately in India. The social impact of these abortions is an increase in human trafficking. Trafficking is rampant in areas where the numbers of women are low due to female foeticide. To curb this problem, the Indian government should take strict actions against those who practice it.

Eve teasing

Eve teasing is a euphemism for sexual harassment of females by males in public areas. This aggression differs in severity from mild brushing and taunts to the more serious groping in public areas. Some human rights organizations have been at the forefront lobbying against the use of this term. They argue that the term makes a serious infringement on women rights to appear innocuous. The challenge that faces victims of eve teasing is how to prove that a total stranger has sexually harassed them. It is becoming increasingly difficult to prove such crimes because offenders have found clever ways of harassing women. There are many tourist guide books that warn foreign

women to avoid attracting attention from perpetrators of these crimes by dressing conservatively. However, both tourists and Indian women are harassed regardless of what they are wearing. The number of women's organizations working for women rights in India has gone up. Victims of this crime can seek recourse in court. Perpetrators of these crimes are punished by imprisonment, fines or both.

Bride burning

This is a type of domestic violence whereby a bride is killed by her husband or husband's family because of dowry dissatisfaction issues. Kerosene is the fuel of choice for most perpetrators. This crime has been a problem since the year 1993. Perpetrators of this crime are punished accordingly by either giving them a death sentence or a life sentence. 2,500 deaths per year in India are attributed to bride burning. There have been several attempts by the government to combat this crime. They include:

1961 – The government passed a dowry prohibition act to cease dowry murders. The act was amended in the early 1980's to correct some inherent flaws and loopholes. After the amendment, bride burning within the first 7 years of marriage became a crime. Unfortunately, the definition of dowry is still vague and this only changed the way dowry is asked for and delivered. Another shortcoming of this act is the inclusion of a seven year clause which makes it easy for perpetrators because they wait until the period lapses.

1983 – The anti cruelty statute forbids cruelty towards wives and subjects the perpetrators of such crimes to imprisonment and/or fines. However, this law is somewhat ambiguous and this leads to insufficient enforcement of bride burning murders.

This problem can be alleviated by allowing women to have properties. This way, women would not need to marry for economic, legal or social reasons. As a result, the dowry practice would be disregarded.

Dowry

In India, the dowry prohibition act which was enacted in 1961 outlaws the giving or receiving of dowry. However, giving and receiving of dowry is still practiced to date. Women are faced with the pressure of giving dowry to the bridegroom's family. This is a violation of the women rights in India because it gives them financial burdens. The dowry is considered as a bribe to the man so that he can agree to keep the woman, especially if she is too old to be unmarried. Dowry can be anything from cash to gifts. The gifts include:

- Jewellery
- Furniture
- Motor Vehicle
- Home
- Cash

Dowry is not only given before the wedding but the husband's family expects to be given gifts and/or cash even after the wedding. This places a heavy financial strain on the bride's family. If the husband and his family are dissatisfied with the dowry, they can mistreat the wife. The dowry

system in India is the root of many problems against women such as bride burning and female foeticide. If strict measures are put in place to combat the dowry system, a lot of problems that face women can be eliminated.

Rape

This is among the most common crimes against women in India. Marital rape was made illegal in 1983 but it is still rampant. Rape is a heinous crime against humanity and it seriously undermines women rights. Rape in India is a crime that occurs every 54 minutes and it violates a woman and her privacy. The rape cases in India are constantly making headlines because of the brutality with which they are executed. In December 2012, a 23 year-old girl was gang raped in a public bus. The rapists penetrated her with a metallic rod and this destroyed her intestines which had to be removed through surgery. There have been scores of other rape incidents in India. In most of these rape cases, the law fails the victim because of vague interpretations and this is absolute disrespect of women rights in India. Delays and humiliating cross examination of victims makes them afraid to come forward. As a result, many cases of rape go unreported. To curb rape cases, awareness campaigns need to be done. Men should also learn the importance of respecting women rights. Women need to be taught self defence mechanisms so that they can protect themselves.

CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA

The crimes against women fly directly against orchestrating women empowerment in India. A report on the crimes against women by the National Crime Records Bureau comes up with some alarming statistics:-

Sl. No .	Crime Head	Year 2006	Year 2007	Year 2008	Year 2009	Year 2010	Year 2011	Year 2012	% Variation 2012-2011
1	Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)	19,348	20,737	21,467	21,397	22,172	24,206	24,923	3.0
2	Kidnapping & Abduction (Sec. 363 to 373 IPC)	17,414	20,416	22,939	25,741	29,795	35,565	38,262	7.6
3	Dowry Death (Sec. 302/304 IPC)	7,618	8,093	8,172	8,383	8,391	8,618	8,233	-4.5
4	Torture (Sec. 498-A IPC)	63,128	75,930	81,344	89,546	94,041	99,135	1,06,527	7.5
5	Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC)	36,617	38,734	40,413	38,711	40,613	42,968	45,351	5.5
6	Sexual Harassment (Sec. 509 IPC)	9,966	10,950	12,214	11,009	9,961	8,570	9,173	7.0

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Sl. No	Crime Head	Year 2006	Year 2007	Year 2008	Year 2009	Year 2010	Year 2011	Year 2012	% Variation 2012-2011
7	Importation of Girls (Sec. 366-B IPC)	67	61	67	48	36	80	59	-26.3
8	Sati Prevention Act, 1987	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	-100.0
9	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956	4,541	3,568	2,659	2,474	2,499	2,435	2,563	5.3
10	Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986	1,562	1,200	1,025	845	895	453	141	-68.9
11	Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	4,504	5,623	5,555	5,650	5,182	6,619	9,038	36.5
	Total	1,64,765	1,85,312	1,95,856	2,03,804	2,13,585	2,28,650	2,44,270	6.8

A total of 2,44,270 incidents of crime against women (both under IPC and SLL) were reported in the country during the year 2012 as compared to 2,28,650 in the year 2011 recording an increase of 6.4% during the year 2012. These crimes have continuously increased during 2008 – 2012 with 1,95,856 cases in the year 2008, 2,03,804 cases in 2009 and 2,13,585 cases in 2010 and 2,28,650 cases in 2011 and 2,44,270 cases in the year 2012. West Bengal with 7.5% share of country's female population has accounted for nearly 12.7% of total crime against women by reporting 30,942 cases during the year 2012.

Violence against women in India is on the rise. Despite the incredible social changes achieved by the country, the girl child has to remain brave and vigilant to overcome sexual defilement. A recent study by the India's Ministry of National Crime Record Bureau concluded that a woman is molested every 26 minutes and raped in every 34 in India. The report further showed that a woman is kidnapped every 43 minutes in Indian.

Our societies continue to experience crime against women in India despite the efforts of the government to toughen bills that prosecute men who attempt to rape women and also criminalize offenses like stalking and voyeurism. On 16 of December 2012, a 23 years old paramedic student in India's capital-New Delhi was brutally assaulted and gang-raped, shading a spotlight on crimes against women in the country. For the first time, there was a furious outrage, emotional outburst as the general public, both men and women demanded safety and protection of women in the country.

They were demanding changes to be made, a change in attitude towards women and a change in the demeaning gender laws that have not favored women for decades, plus they wanted a speedy justice to be executed on rapists so that they could be brought to book as soonest. Yet still, other protesters wanted offenders of this nature punished through a death penalty. A young woman based in Bengaluru was quoted saying “that rapists in India are certain that they can always get away with such crimes” (which is evidence that there are no strict laws that protect women), and unless laws are put in place to bring wrong-doers to book and deliver justice speedily, crimes of that nature will continue to escalate.

Crimes against women

According to statistics from the National Crime Record Bureau, gender-based issues are getting worse. Women have been relegated with secondary status within the community and households. Even the literacy level of women is only at 54%, compared to that of men which is at 76%. Crime is one of the main reasons that hinder women empowerment in India.

The negative effects of the oppressive societal values are as follows:

- Women are forced to get married at a tender age
- They are expected to fend for themselves while taking charge of the domestic chores
- They become malnourished since they are always expected to serve themselves last, after every member of household has received their portion
- They suffer from unfair and biased inheritance and divorce laws
- Women are not able to accumulate any substantial amount of asset, making it pretty difficult for them to establish their own financial security

And worse still, studies conducted as from the year 2010 show that crimes against women have risen in the recent past by 7.1%. Again, there has been a sharp increase in the number of rape cases recorded each year. The National Crime Record Bureau recorded 24,206 cases of rape in 2011 alone, which indicated a rise of 9% from the previous year. It still indicated that more than half of the victims of such rape incidences appeared to fall between 18-30 years of age. These figures continued to point out that 10.6% of the victims of rape were young girls under the age of 14, while 19% were teenagers between 14 and 18. Shockingly, in the 94.2% of the cases reported, offenders were known to the victims. They included their family members, relatives and neighbours.

According to the Indian Penal Code, crimes against women include rape, kidnapping and abduction, homicide for dowry, molestation, torture, sexual harassment and importation of girls. In 2011, over 200,000 cases of crimes against women were reported. At the time, the North Eastern city of Tripura recorded the highest number of these crimes at 37%, compared to the national average crime rate of only 18.9%. During the same period, both kidnappings and trafficking rose by 19 and 122 percent respectively. And how about those crimes against women that go unreported? One might ask. It's not a surprise that 'eve teasing' or harassment, heckling and sexual innuendos against Indian women in public places like cinema halls, public transport, alongside rape of women and minors in the villages go unrecorded. Going by the records, Madhya Pradesh, a state in India with a large population of tribes recorded over 3000 rape cases, which was considered the highest number of such offences in 2011.

Society – Sample Copy

Generally, what has been happening in India has attracted the attention of the world as a whole, and only strict measures implemented by both the government and external forces can bring the change that women have yearned for. It's a fact that many rape incidences go unreported, and that's according to legal experts in the country. Due to what is called "family honour", several complaint files are withdrawn and in most cases, the police don't give a fair hearing. Again, medical evidences go unrecorded making it easy for criminals to pass scot free under the prevailing conditions. But it's quite alarming that outside the legal rooms of India, it is very common for Kangaroo courts to advise victims to marry off the criminals in an attempt to "preserve them" honour. And in some cases, rape is used to settle local disputes and caste issues. What's worse, the maximum sentence of a rapist continues to remain unclear under the prevailing laws. It's a challenge because there's a huge debate on whether or not to introduce death sentence for rape offenders. One side argues that it could bring down the rate of rape crime against women in India, while the other side says this will lead to massive killings of rape victims in an attempt to escape the death penalty. However, protesters all over the country are demanding that the government should amend the Archaic laws.

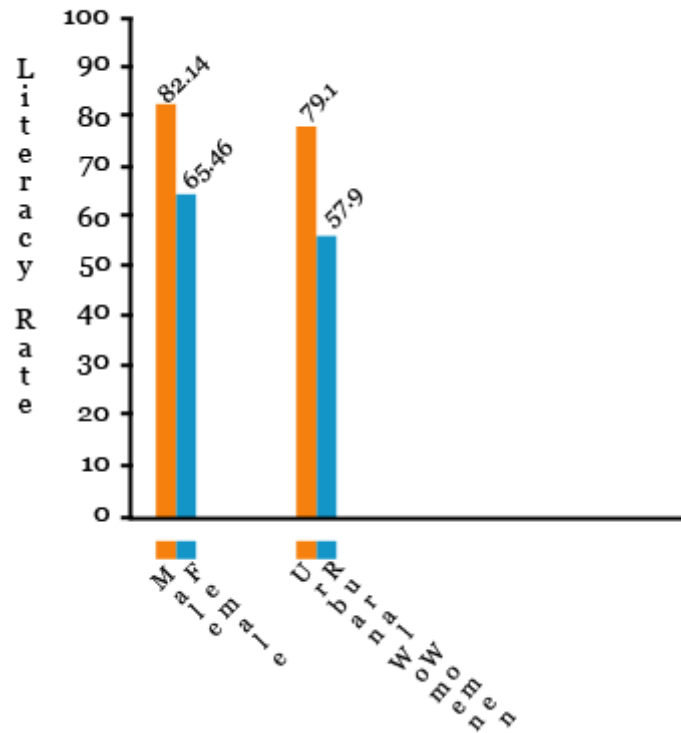
CHALLENGES

There are several challenges that are currently plaguing the issues of women's rights in India. A few of these challenges are presented below. While a lot of these are redundant and quite basic issues faced across the country, these are contributory causes to the overarching status of women in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India.

Education

While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since its independence where education is concerned, the gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India. Not only is an illiterate woman at the mercy of her husband or father, she also does not know that this is not the way of life for women across the world. Additionally, the norms of culture that state that the man of the family is the be-all and end-all of family decisions is slowly spoiling the society of the country.

Literacy Facts of Women in India



*Literacy rates relate to the population aged 7 years & above

Data Source: Census of India 2011

As said in a study conducted by the Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism, “In spite of the UN Charter of Human Rights and the provisions of the Indian Constitution, women continue to be victims of exploitation. The view that the future generation of a family is carried on and preserved by boys-only has degraded the position of women in society. Similarly, it is noticed that majority of the women are lacking in the spirit of rebellion. If careful attention is not paid and major steps are not taken, the situation will become extremely critical.” Eradicating this gap and educating women about their real place in the world is a step that will largely set this entire movement rolling down the hill to crash and break the wall of intolerance, negligence and exploitation.

Poverty in the Country

Poverty Headcount Ratio (2010)	
Poverty Trend	World Bank
Live less than \$1.25 a day	32.7% (400 million)
Live less than \$2 a day	68.7% (841 million)
Live less than \$2.5 a day	81.1% (992 million)
Live less than \$4 a day	93.7% (1,148 million)
Live less than \$5 a day	96.9% (1,179 million)

Data Source: Wikipedia

About a third of the country's population lives on less than 1.25USD per day. The GINI index keeps rising slowly over the years, indicating that the inequality in the distribution of wealth in the country is increasing, currently hovering a little close to 33.9. Poverty is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradication of poverty should be a national goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy. Due to abject poverty, women are exploited as domestic helps and wives whose incomes are usurped by the man of the house. Additionally, sex slaves are a direct outcome of poverty. Andhra Pradesh accounts for nearly half of all sex trafficking cases in India, the majority involving adolescent girls. According to police estimates, a shocking 300,000 women and girls have been trafficked for exploitative sex work from Andhra Pradesh; of these just 3,000 have been rescued so far. The state is relatively prosperous, ranking fourth in terms of per capita GDP in India, but it is also home to some of the poorest people in the country. If poverty were not a concern, then the girl child will be able to follow her dreams without concerns of sexual exploitation, domestic abuse and no education or work.

Health & Safety

The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country, and are an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned. In its 2009 report, UNICEF came up with shocking figures on the status of new mothers in India. The maternal mortality report of India stands at 301 per 1000, with as many as 78,000 women in India dying of childbirth complications in that year. Today, due to the burgeoning population of the country, that number is sure to have multiplied considerably. The main causes of maternal mortality are:-

- Haemorrhage: 30%
- Anaemia: 19%
- Sepsis: 16%
- Obstructed Labour: 10%
- Abortion: 8%
- Toxaemia: 8%

While there are several programmes that have been set into motion by the Government and several NGOs in the country, there is still a wide gap that exists between those under protection and those not. Poverty and illiteracy add to these complications with local quacks giving ineffective and

downright harmful remedies to problems that women have. The empowerment of women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES IN INDIA

India is one of the world's fastest growing economies, with women mainly from the middle class increasingly entering the workforce. Urban centres like Delhi and Bangalore have seen an influx of young women from semi-urban and rural parts of the country, living alone and redefining them. However, the story of economic empowerment for women is not a singular narrative; rather it is located in a complex set of caste, class, religious, and ethnic identities. The Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum in 2009 ranked India 114th out of 134 countries for inequality between men and women in the economy, politics, health, and education. On equal economic opportunities and women's participation in the labour force, India ranked 127th and 122nd respectively. The number of women in the workforce varies greatly from state to state: 21% in Delhi; 23% in Punjab; 65% in Manipur; 71% Chhattisgarh; 76% in Arunachal Pradesh. The diversity of women's economic opportunities between states is due to the cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity of each state. Northern states like Delhi and Punjab lag far behind on gender equality measures, including the alarming sex ratio between men and women (due to son preference and sex-selective abortion), low female literacy levels, and high rates of gender-based violence.

In rural India, women's economic opportunities remain restricted by social, cultural, and religious barriers. Most notably inheritance laws embedded in Hindu and Shariat civil codes continue to marginalize women in the household and the larger community. Rural women, particularly of lower caste and class, have the lowest literacy rates, and therefore do not have the capacity to negotiate pay or contracts and most often engage in the unorganized sector, self-employment, or in small scale industry. Self-help groups (SHGs) are a widely practiced model for social and economic mobility by NGOs and the government. SHGs provide women with the opportunity to manage loans and savings that can be used by members for varying needs. SHGs also are used to promote social change among the members and the community at large. Members of SHGs have used their experiences as leverage to enter other local institutions such as the Panchayat Khap.

Rural, low caste and tribal women also make a large part of domestic workers in India, a sector which is largely unregulated and unorganized. India's growing economy has allowed for many upper and middle-class women to enter the workforce, and while poor rural women have little access to education and training, there is a high demand for domestic workers in urban hubs. Domestic workers are mostly illiterate, with little or no negotiating power for wage equity, and are highly vulnerable to exploitation and sexual and physical abuse. There is a movement at the policy level to organize domestic workers and to create laws to regulate minimum wage, working hours, and other measures such as life and health insurance. Currently a national-level Taskforce on Domestic Workers has been formed that will present recommendations to the central government on better enforcement of rights for the many undocumented domestic workers in India. Women are also very visible in the construction sector in India, and like domestic workers are largely unorganized and rely on daily wagers. Women construction workers are mostly poor and illiterate and have little negotiating power. This sector is also unregulated and highly vulnerable to exploitation. Women workers also earn significantly less than men, although women are the ones who do most of the backbreaking work like carrying bricks and other heavy materials on site. On the other end of the spectrum, while India has one of the highest percentages of professional women in the world, those

who occupy managerial positions are under 3%. Most women work in low administrative positions, and many of the young women migrating to urban centres mostly work in service and retail industries, although more and more women are entering the IT and other technical sectors.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

The movement to assure women's economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR) as basic human rights is just emerging in India. The movement aims to locate women's rights within the larger human rights framework, and by doing so moves away from looking at women's issues only within the framework of violence against women and reproductive rights. ESCR attempts to look at the broader issues facing women, namely poverty, housing, unemployment, education, water, food security, trade, etc. While the human rights movement on ESCR is largely contained at the international policy level, there are emerging social movements around the world. In the Indian context, projects like the Programme on Women's Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (PWESCR), for example, is creating linkages between the international human rights movement and the local articulation of women's rights.

PWESCR aims to build a women's rights movement in India that creates equality in all spheres of women's lives. By empowering women economically and socially, ESCR provides for a broader discourse on rights that moves women's rights from a victim centered approach to one that cuts across other fundamental human rights issues. Women's economic opportunity in India is a rapidly changing landscape. Women are increasingly entering the workforce—particularly women professionals—and are creating change, but there remains a large number of invisible women workers in unorganized and volatile sectors. However, organizing at the local level, albeit small, is widespread. Implementation of national and state level policies lags behind in ensuring that women workers have equal pay and are free from exploitation.

WOMEN IN POLITICS IN INDIA

Historical Context

During the independence movement, women were visible and active as nationalists, and as symbols of "Mother India". Gandhi, in particular, was instrumental in creating space for women through his non-violence (and some would argue feminized) mode of protest. Gandhi's legendary salt march initially excluded women, but due to demands from women nationalists he later realized the power of women organizers at the local level. His inclusion of women, however, was not located within a gender equality framework, but was a means to achieving a stronger and unified Indian state. The inclusion of women in the nationalist movement was also to debunk the British colonial assertion of "needing to save the poor, vulnerable women" of pre independence India. As in many nationalist movements, women in India took part in the struggle, in turn propelling a women's rights movement. And, as seen historically in many post-colonial countries, the nationalist women's movement in India was confronted by the rebuilding of a patriarchal nationalist state. Women revolutionaries gave way to their male counterparts who (as a result of Partition politics) created a strong, male, and Hindu "New India". The first post-independence Lok Sabha (the People's Council or the Parliament) had 4.4% women. The period between the early 1940's and late 1970's saw an emergence of the Indian women's movement, but it was not until the 1980s that the women's movement gained real momentum.

Reservation at the Panchayat Level

In 1976 the Committee on the Status of Women in India was established and published a report recommending an increase in elected women at the grassroots level, which led to the introduction of the 33.3% reservation at the Panchayat level in 1988. It was only in 1993 that an amendment in the constitution made the proposed reservation at the Panchayat (village level governing councils) a reality. In the last two decades since the reservation for women in elected Panchayats was passed, many studies have been conducted to look at the impact of this policy. A survey conducted in 2008 yielded that women made up close to 50% of all the village councils across the India. The number of women representatives has certainly increased at the grassroots level; however, questions still remain regarding their decision-making power within the councils. A study in West Bengal and Rajasthan by the Institute of Management Studies (Calcutta) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) found that where women Panchayat members were active, there were more robust programs on water, irrigation, and infrastructure. The study conclusively states that in Panchayats where women were present policies were more beneficial to the community than in Panchayats where women were absent. A study by The Accountability Initiative also states that in Panchayats with female presidents, the participation of women in the larger council rose close to 3% in one year. The reason for the increase in women's participation is correlated to two possible factors: first, women representatives exemplified new possibilities for change; and second, women leaders took up issues that would have a positive impact on the community as a whole.

Caste and Class Politics

The complexities of politics in India are embedded in class, caste, and religious identities. An analysis by International Idea of women in the Indian Parliament between 1991 and 1996 found that among the small number of women Parliamentarians, a disproportionate number represented the Brahmin caste (the higher caste in the Hindu caste system). Most local governments remain largely patriarchal and caste-based institutions, hindering inclusive governance. Furthermore, social mobility remains a privilege of members of higher classes and caste, although this is dramatically changing as a result of reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in politics and education. For women politicians, class, age, and caste all have significant impact in their political lives. India is one of the few countries in the world that has elected a woman leader. Indira Gandhi was among the very few women leaders in the world during her time in office. However, her role as the Prime Minister was not seen as a win for the women's movement in India. She was the granddaughter of Jawaharlal Nehru and represented the political dynasty of her family. Additionally, her controversial political moves during the declared period of Emergency (1975- 1977) suppressed dissent, forcing many of the radical women's rights movements to go underground.

In 2007 India elected its first female President, Ms. Pratibha Patil. While the President holds a mostly ceremonial role in Indian politics, Ms. Patil's election was deemed a symbolic move towards a more equitable representation of women at the highest levels of government. Although representation of women and members of the lower castes in Indian politics is rapidly changing, complexities of caste politics continue to govern representation. An interesting case study is that of Mayawati, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Mayawati, a woman and a member of the Dalit caste, was the youngest Chief Minister when first elected, and the only woman Dalit to be elected as a Chief Minister. Although Mayawati represents transcendence of India's caste system, her political career is regrettably tainted with corruption charges, extravagant spending, and little positive impact on the realities of caste and class barriers for men and women in her State.

33% Reservation for Women

The Women's Bill in April 2010, which gives 33.3% reservation for women in all levels of Indian politics, took 14 years after its introduction to finally pass by the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of parliament). It is yet to be passed by the Lok Sabha (the lower house of parliament). The reservation bill will ensure 181 out of the 543 seats at the Parliament level, and 1,370 seats out of the 4,109 seats at the State Assembly level.⁴⁴ This is a historic move in the Indian political landscape, as currently women occupy less than 10% of seats in the national Parliament. The Women's Bill will also significantly change the demographics of class and caste among women politicians in leadership positions in the Indian political structure. It will create a path for women from lower classes and castes (who are currently confined to local-level governance) to enter state and national level governments. In addition to the existing reservations for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, one third of the SC and ST candidates must be women. Other Backward Class (OBC) members are not included in the reservation due to the wide disagreement about who constitutes OBC and a lack of existing data on the OBC population. The two main arguments against the bill are that it will only benefit elite women (particularly in national level politics) and that there should be reservations for Dalit, minorities (particularly Muslim women), and OBCs. However, supporters of the bill do not agree with creating quotas within the existing 33% women quota in parliament, as SC and ST quotas already exist.

The bill mandates that all political parties reserve one third of their electoral ticket for women, including in the already mandated reservations for SC and STs. This will inadvertently create spaces for lower caste and class women to enter state and national level politics. The passage and implementation of the Women's Bill, and its impact on the existing gender, class, and caste barriers, is yet to be realized, but one thing is clear: India's politics is moving closer to equitable inclusion than ever before.

ACTIONS TAKEN TO EMPOWER WOMEN

Millennium Development Goal

The United Nations Development Programme constituted eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for ensuring equity and peace across the world. The third MDG is directly related to the empowerment of women in India. The MDGs are agreed-upon goals to reduce certain indicators of disparity across the world by the year 2015. The third MDG is centred towards promoting gender equality and empowering women: "Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education by no later than 2015" While India's progress in this front has been brave, there are quite a few corners that it needs to cut before it can be called as being truly revolutionary in its quest for understanding what is women empowerment. As UNDP says:-

India missed the 2005 deadline of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. However, the country has hastened progress and the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) in primary and secondary education has risen. Given current trends, India is moderately or almost nearly on track. However, as the Government of India MDG Report 2009 notes, "participation of women in employment and decision-making remains far less than that of men, and the disparity is not likely to be eliminated by 2015." Achieving GPI in tertiary education also remains a challenge. In addition, the labour market openness to women in industry and services has only marginally increased from 13-18 percent between 1990-91 and 2004-05.

Ministry for Women & Child Development

The Ministry for Women & Child Development was established as a department of the Ministry of Human Resource Development in the year 1985 to drive the holistic development of women and children in the country. In 2006 this department was given the status of a Ministry, with the powers to formulate plans, policies and programmes; enacts/ amends legislation, guiding and coordinating the efforts of both governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the field of Women and Child Development. It delivers such initiatives such as the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) which is a package of services such as supplementary nutrition, health check-ups and immunisation. As mentioned earlier, the empowerment of women begins with their safety and health and this Ministry is committed to providing them.

Swayamsiddha Programme

Additionally, the Ministry is also implementing the Swayamsiddha programme – an integrated scheme for the empowerment of women at a total cost of Rs. 116.30 Crores. Core to this programme will be the establishment of women's self-help groups which will empower women to have increased access to all kinds of resources that they are denied, in addition to increasing their awareness and skills. This programme will benefit about 9,30,000 women with the setting up of 53,000 self-help groups, 26,500 village societies and 650 block societies.

National Commission for Women

The National Commission for Women is a Department within the Ministry of Women and Child Development. It was set up exclusively to help women via the Constitution – by reviewing Legal and Constitutional safeguards for women, recommending remedial legislative measures, by facilitating quick redressal of grievances and by advising the Government of India on all policy matters affecting women. The website allows for online submission of complaints and fast redressal exclusively for women. Additionally it is also a good resource of information for women and the Commission is committed to helping out women in need.

THE ROAD AHEAD

India as a country is still recovering from years of abuse in the time of the Raj and more years of economic suffering at the hands of the License Raj. It is only now that globalisation, liberalisation and other socio-economic forces have given some respite to a large proportion of the population. However, there are still quite a few areas where women empowerment in India is largely lacking. To truly understand what is women empowerment, there needs to be a sea-change in the mind-set of the people in the country. Not just the women themselves, but the men have to wake up to a world that is moving towards equality and equity. It is better that this is embraced earlier rather than later, for our own good. Swami Vivekananda once said “arise away and stop not until the goal is reached”. Thus our country should thus be catapulted into the horizon of empowerment of women and revel in its glory. We have a long way to go, but we will get there someday. We shall overcome.

WOMEN EDUCATION IN INDIA

While illiteracy levels in India continue to stand at about 54% for women and 76% for men, school enrolment, attendance and quality of education, especially for the girl-child threatens to deteriorate even further if appropriate measures are not put in place and mostly this is due to the lack of women education in India. Illiteracy is one of the main obstacles in women empowerment in India. Let's sample 3 case studies below:

Case study 1

Amla (not her real name) didn't tell her parents when the older boys started to harass her on the one-hour-long walk to school from their apartment in Madanpur Khadar, south of Delhi. They occasionally grabbed her hands and demanded that the little girl kiss them. She knew that the blame would be placed on her, as if she was some-what encouraging them to do so. But she was pretty right when her family found out. They literally "banned" her from ever going back to school again, worried about the effects on their "honor" in the event that she was sexually assaulted. Guess what, now the plan is to marry her off once she reaches 16 years of age.

Case study 2

Amita is luckier, her mother is determined to take her to school so that one day she would become a doctor. However, in her class, there are 70 pupils and the teacher (one teacher) never shows up for most parts of the lessons. The facilities at the school are poor, the drinking water is so filthy that pupils have to bring along their own water to school. And what's more, Amita confesses that the toilets are very dirty that she has never used them since she got enrolled in that school. Though she doesn't understand, her mother saves at least 900 rupees so that she can get coached in 3 subjects where she is not doing well.

Case study 3

Sumen, a woman who is 35 years old is battling with her daughter's future. The little girl who is only 9 years has learning disabilities and her mother has tried every year to enroll him in schools but with very little success. Luckily, the authorities have agreed that the little girls should get some education, but it's only once in 7 days. Sumen, who is a house wife, wonders if she should try to teach her daughter herself. The question is this; how will she teach her when she never went to school herself? It's sad how she was quoted speaking—"But if I haven't studied myself, how much value will I add to her life?"

Just 4 years ago, the World Bank upgraded India from "poor" to middle income country. The UK, on the other hand announced that it would end its financial aid to India come 2015, citing unclear reasons. Under the Rights to Education Act that was passed in the year 2009, every child between ages 6 and 14 was guaranteed a free and compulsory education, which saw enrolment figures at an all-time impressive-sounding of 98%.

GOING TO SCHOOL VERSES THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Concerns have been raised by those monitoring millennium development goals. They are saying that going to school is one thing, but the quality of education is another. Pupils enrolled in public schools in India are experiencing numerous challenges as far as their education is concerned, says Oxfam India. Some of the issues that have been sited include:

- Over-crowding of classes
- Absentee teachers
- Unsanitary conditions
- Teachers who lack professional qualification

Because of the prevailing conditions, it is feared that pupils, especially the girl-child may be adversely affected. Parents may decide that it's not going to be beneficial taking their children to school, so they would rather have them remain at home. This definitely needs to change with the encouragement given to women education in India. The National Council for Teacher Education released a report in 2010 saying that an additional 1.2 million teachers were needed to fulfill the RTE Act guidelines. A civil society made up of about 10,000 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) realized that only 5% of government schools complied with the required infrastructural standards as spelt out in the act. 40% of the primary schools had more than 30 pupils per class, while 60% of classes didn't have electricity.

The RTE forum also discovered that 21% of the teachers weren't professionally trained teachers. Worse still, the independent annual status of Education Report discovered that rural schools were most affected by poor achievements. More than half of the children aged 10 and below who are in standard 5 were unable to read a standard 2 level text. The only way to put a stop to girl-child labour is to fix the education system. The enrolment figures are not a sure way of gauging who is attending school and who is not. The enrolment figures don't reflect who is attending school and who is not. In 2008, the number of primary school-aged children was estimated at 2.3 million. Other estimates indicated that it could be as high as 8 million. According to the government report, the primary school drop-out rate was at 25% in 2009. It's the girls and marginalized groups who are being affected. It's a fact that girls in India attend primary school roughly in the same numbers as boys, but the gap widens as they grow older because they are either married off or forced to stay at home to help with the chores. It's shocking because out of the school drop-outs in 2008, 62% were girls who make up two thirds of the illiterate population aged between 15 and 24 years of age. Most of these girls were from tribal groups, lowest in the caste system. Nevertheless, neighborhood private schools with a low budget have also mushroomed to serve children and parents (like Sumen's daughter) who really want to go to school. The problem is that they are unregulated, so it's possible that they will have untrained teachers and also lack the necessary infrastructure.

CHALLENGES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED

Back to the streets, girls like Amla are still suffering what is called "eve-teasing". It affects women education in India in various ways. The violence suffered by women also makes them scared, not knowing what to do. And the police inaction is much more affecting.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA

The process of women empowerment in India has had a long and rich history. Women have faced a lot of challenges during the medieval era but this was changed overtime by vigorous campaigns from reformers and activities, which lead to the promotion of equal rights and reduction of violence against women in India. It is said that the position of women in a society is the society's index of cultural and spiritual attainment. Today, women struggle to pursue respectable careers and work to survive like their male counterparts. However, women still have challenges that have led to the

emergence of numerous women empowerment groups to fight social injustices that inhibit women prosperity. These campaigns mainly focus on fighting illiteracy, sexual harassment etc. lately, there has been a more focused violence against women campaign aimed at educating women to know more about their rights. The women organizations in India today are not free agents or autonomous; they inherited a particular area or field and its accompanying social relation then preside over it and within it. Women in India have held some of the top jobs in the land including that of presidency. Even then, they still continue to face atrocities and violence cases such as like rape, forced prostitution, dowry killings and brutality. According to a report by Thomas Reuters, India is ranked fourth among the most dangerous countries for women among the G20. This is the reason why violence against women in India is becoming one of the government's major goals.

INDIAN WOMEN DURING THE BRITISH RULE

Early European scholars discovered that the Indian woman of the 19th century had a natural glamour and was more vigorous than the rest. It is during this period that many women empowerment groups and reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy emerged and fought for the rights of women. Peary Charan Sarkar set up the first free school for female students in India in 1847 in Barasat. She was a former student of Hindu collage called Calcutta. Even though one could argue that there was little support from the British Administration during the Raj era, the contrary was the case. British missionaries' wives deserve that respect they enjoy to date for they pioneered the education and training of girls in India. Their intervention was received with fierce resistance from the locals in the early stages as it was seen to defy their traditions.

Later, reforms, which touched on marriage and politics among the women, began to take effect. Women in India played a major role towards the attainment of its independence. Women such as Kittur Chennamma, queen of the state of Kittur Karnataka led armed rebellions against the British rule. The queen of Jhansi named Rani Lakshmi is widely considered a national hero for leading the 1857 rebellion against the British. In 1929, the Child marriage Restraint Act was passed that enforced fourteen as the minimal marriage age for a girl. Finally, Sarojini Naidu, Indian poet, became the first Indian woman to be the president of the Indian National Congress and governor of Uttar Pradesh state. Her birthday is celebrated as Women's Day in the entire India today.

INDIAN WOMAN IN MODERN INDIA

Women in Indian today fully participate in all areas like education, politics, science and technology and many more. The violence against them is reducing and more women are beginning to realize their rights in the society. In short, it is no longer a man's world. The Indian constitution guarantees all Indian women equality with no discrimination by the state. It stipulates equal opportunities and equal pay for work. It further advocates for affirmative action that provides special provision for women and children by the state. The law renounces cultural practices, which are derogatory to the status of the female figure by ensuring a humane environment for work and maternity relief.

THE PROCESS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women in India are still facing obstacles due to a male dominated culture despite efforts made by different organizations to reverse the norm. However, they are gradually getting empowered in areas like education, politics, professional and eventual in their households. It is agreed that women need to gain more power to equal their male counterparts in this contemporary world. The value of social development and civilization can be entire arbitrated by the role of women in a society. Today, women take active roles in politics and management positions in world-class companies. India has come of age in enhancing the position of women through laws that protect their rights. They majorly focused on eliminating women suffrage, feminism, improving their property rights and advocating for equality in terms of opportunities.

The result has been loud with increased reports showing the girl child competing vigorously in academics and other areas. It means that the girl child is now confident and can get well-paying jobs as their male counterparts. This development is a complete reversal of how the situation was in the olden days. However, the single but more worrying problem that continues to thrive in India is the negative sexual attention attached to the Indian Women. Women are hassled, stalked, raped and trafficked for sexual immorality. Furthermore, the heinous practice of female feticide and infanticide, where over 10 million infants have been killed in the last two decades. It is now the responsibility of law enforcing bodies to avert crime against women.

How to achieve women empowerment

A report by International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) evaluation came up with four main areas to enhance women empowerment:

- Improved women mobility and social interaction -When women are given the opportunity to interact freely and frequently with people in top ranks like international organization CEOs and government officials, they develop a sense of self-realization and motivation to desire achievement.
- Improved labour pattern
- Women should have equal access to all job opportunities and receive equal pay as their male counterparts.
- Access and control of resource
- Opportunity to manage country's national resource and the right to own property should not be left to the males alone. Women too should feel a sense of ownership and power over property.
- Involvement in decision-making
- Women should be allowed to participate fully in the decision making process right from their households to the national government.

Reasons for the Empowerment of Women

Today we have noticed different Acts and Schemes of the central government as well as state government to empower the women of India. But in India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. A few women are engaged in services and other activities. So, they need economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men. Other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. According to 2001 census, rate

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of literacy among men in India is found to be 76% whereas it is only 54% among women. Thus, increasing education among women is of very important in empowering them. It has also noticed that some of women are too weak to work. They consume less food but work more. Therefore, from the health point of view, women folk who are to be weaker are to be made stronger. Another problems is that workplace harassment of women. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment, and so on. For these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. To sum up, women empowerment can not be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

Reforms needed

In an effort to curb the problem of rape and other violent activities against women, the government formed a 3-member panel of legal experts to amend the laws. And this time, India's capital city-Delhi, become the centre of focus. In fact, it has even been nicknamed "rape capital of India". Some of the measures that the government has put in place to tame these criminals include:

- Carrying out night patrols
- Thorough supervision and checks on public utilities such as the transport system, bus drivers and their assistants.
- Vehicle with tinted windows or curtains have also been banned
- Posting of photos of people convicted with such crimes on official government website to deter people who may want to commit such crimes.
- The Delhi government has also set up a committee that is responsible for the task of speeding up cases related to sexual assault against women

The culture of patriarchy

While reforms and affirmative action to deal with violence against women may be a feasible solution, these crimes are strongly associated with traditions of patriarchy and repressive attitude that prevail across the masses. Masculinities provide an ideological basis for impunity to be legalized and practiced. That way, crimes against women have to be much easier because men believe that they can only express their masculinity by bringing fear and hatred to the feminine close to their heart.

Women rising

Thanks to the NGOs who are working hard to address the problem of crime against women in India and make women rise amid such chaotic conditions. As a result of the massive protest that followed the killing of the medical student, the agitation by the crowd sparked public debates in the media about how both the government and policymakers should find ways of stopping such crimes. The societal changes in India are being engineered by women getting access to better education and jobs. They are also taking it to the streets to demand their rights of being able to walk freely without the fear of men.

IMPORTANT CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.

Constitutional Privileges

- i) Equality before law for women (Article 14)
- ii) The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (i))
- iii) The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15 (3))
- iv) Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Article 16)
- v) The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); and equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d))
- vi) To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Article 39 A)
- vii) The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42).
- viii) The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46).
- ix) The State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people (Article 47).
- x) To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e)).
- xi) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat (Article 243 D(3)).

- xii) Not less than one- third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women (Article 243 D (4)).
- xiii) Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality (Article 243 T (3)).
- xiv) Reservation of offices of Chairpersons in Municipalities for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the legislature of a State may by law provide (Article 243 T (4))

LEGAL PROVISIONS

To uphold the Constitutional mandate, the State has enacted various legislative measures intended to ensure equal rights, to counter social discrimination and various forms of violence and atrocities and to provide support services especially to working women. Although women may be victims of any of the crimes such as 'Murder', 'Robbery', 'Cheating' etc, the crimes, which are directed specifically against women, are characterized as 'Crime against Women'. These are broadly classified under two categories.

- 1) The Crimes Identified Under the Indian Penal Code (IPC)
 - i) Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)
 - ii) Kidnapping & Abduction for different purposes (Sec. 363-373)
 - iii) Homicide for Dowry, Dowry Deaths or their attempts (Sec. 302/304-B IPC)
 - iv) Torture, both mental and physical (Sec. 498-A IPC)
 - v) Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC)
 - vi) Sexual Harassment (Sec. 509 IPC)
 - vii) Importation of girls (up to 21 years of age)
- 2) The Crimes identified under the Special Laws (SLL)

Although all laws are not gender specific, the provisions of law affecting women significantly have been reviewed periodically and amendments carried out to keep pace with the emerging requirements. Some acts which have special provisions to safeguard women and their interests are:

- i) The Employees State Insurance Act, 1948
- ii) The Plantation Labour Act, 1951
- iii) The Family Courts Act, 1954
- iv) The Special Marriage Act, 1954
- v) The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
- vi) The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 with amendment in 2005
- vii) Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- viii) The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (Amended in 1995)
- ix) Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- x) The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
- xi) The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1976
- xii) The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
- xiii) The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006
- xiv) The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 1983
- xv) The Factories (Amendment) Act, 1986
- xvi) Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986

xvii) Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987

xviii) The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

SPECIAL INITIATIVES FOR WOMEN

i) National Commission for Women

In January 1992, the Government set-up this statutory body with a specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women, review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc.

ii) Reservation for Women in Local Self-Government

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act passed in 1992 by Parliament ensure one-third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies whether in rural areas or urban areas.

iii) The National Plan of Action for the Girl Child (1991–2000)

The plan of Action is to ensure survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future for the girl child.

iv) National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001

The Department of Women & Child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource Development has prepared a “National Policy for the Empowerment of Women” in the year 2001. The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.