

A MITTAL PUBLICATION

Women Empowerment in INDIA

(TWO PARTS)



Shamim Asmat
Chanda Devi

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

[TWO PARTS]

PART-ONE



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WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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THE EDITORS

Shamim Asmat, (*b.* 1956) a proficient writer and scholar in her own right, she is a former member of teaching faculty at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. A post-graduate in Sociology and Literature, along with a degree in Education, she has now whole-heartedly devoted to research and writing. She has penned a few books on social subjects, which are in pipe-line. This work is her first on the subject. Currently, she is engaged in accomplishing her forthcoming book on: *Emancipation of Women in the Third World*.

Chanda Devi, (*b.* 1975) a post-graduate in English Literature, she fluently writes on various subjects of significance, concerning social issues. She is a former teacher, now fully devoted to serious writing and editing. Based in Faridabad, she is now working on: *Women in Panchayati Raj in India*.

Preface

Women are the better half of men and a part and parcel of the society in our country. The status of women in India has been subject to many a great change over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times, through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been quite eventful. In modern India, women have adorned high offices including that of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Deputy Chairperson of Rajya Sabha and Leader of Opposition, among others.

Women empowerment is a significant issue in our society and polity. Women in India now participate in all activities, such as education, politics, media art and culture, service sector, science, technology and sports, etc. Indira Gandhi, who governed the country as Prime Minister of India for an aggregate period of fifteen years, was the world's longest serving woman Prime Minister.

The Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women, equality, no discrimination by the State, equality of opportunity equal pay for equal work, etc. In addition, it allows special provisions to be made by the State in favour of women and children and renounces practices, derogatory to the dignity of women and also allows for provisions to be made by the State for securing just and human conditions of work and for maternity relief.

The feminist activism in India picked up momentum, during late 1970s. Female activists are united over issues, such as female infanticide, gender bias, women health, and female literacy. In 1990s,

grants from foreign donor agencies enabled the formation of new women-oriented NGOs, which have played a pivotal role in safeguarding women's rights in India. Many a woman have emerged as leaders of local movements. The Government of India declared 2001, as the Year of Women's Empowerment. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was also framed, the same year. In 2010 on March 9, one day after International Women's day, the Rajyasabha passed Women's Reservation Bill, ensuring 33% reservation to women in Parliament and State legislatures.

Indian woman plays a vital role. Her image has changed from that of a housewife to a useful person in almost all spheres. A woman's physical weakness is no longer a barrier in getting herself established in the modern world. It is no longer said, 'behind every man's success there is a woman,' but the new saying is, "by the side of every man, there is a woman, trying to succeed."

This is a compiled book, based on authentic accounts and other sources. The honest intention of the compilers and editors is to produce a brief but exhaustive work on the vast subject, under one cover. We are indebted to all the scholars, authors and compilers, whose valuable contributions, we have benefited from, while preparing this book. We are also thankful to the publishers and website operators, whose works, we have referred to, during the compilation of this book. And last but not the least, the undersigned express their wholehearted gratitude to all the associates, who extended their full cooperation in shaping and finalising this book.

This modest book is a small step in the direction, towards women emancipation and women empowerment. Hopefully, this comprehensive and exhaustive work would succeed in creating awareness, regarding the gender equality, women's lib and other feminine issues. We are sure that this research-based study would draw the attention of all scholars, researchers, social activists and standard bearers of women's movements. Wise comments and purposeful suggestions are invited, sincerely.

—Editors

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Part – One



Introduction

General Aspects

Women in India are on the path of empowerment and emancipation in all fields; including politics. Women bear almost all responsibility for meeting basic needs of the family, yet, they are systematically denied the resources, information and freedom of action they need to fulfil this responsibility. The vast majority of the world's poor are women. Two-thirds of the world's illiterates are female. Of the millions of school age children not in school, the majority are girls. The vast majority of the world's poor are women. Around the world, millions of people eat two or three times a day, but a significant percentage of women eat only once. And, now, many women are denying themselves even that one meal to ensure that their children are fed. These women are already suffering the effects of even more severe malnutrition, which inevitably will be their children's fate as well. The impact of this crisis will be with us for many years. Two-thirds of the world's illiterates are female. Of the millions of school age children not in school, the majority are girls. Women bear almost all responsibility for meeting basic needs of the family, yet are systematically denied the resources, information and freedom of action they need to fulfil this responsibility.

Women openly display their power, knowledge, and skill, receiving public recognition and honour. But also females who manage to wield power in societies that try to limit it or decree female submission; where their leadership is stigmatised and their creativity disdained. Women resist and overthrow oppressive traditions and regimes. Women break the rules in defiance of unjust legal and religious authorities. Women pursue their vision in spite of the personal cost.

Women have determined the course of events and the forms of human culture. We originated, founded, governed, prophesied, created great art, fought for our rights, and for our peoples. These are the women edited out of history, their stories omitted, distorted, and replaced with an endless litany of men (and the occasional Queen or meddling concubine). Our ignorance of these women is greatly compounded by the omission of information on societies which accorded females power in public life, diplomacy, religion, medicine, the arts as well as family structure and inheritance. Both racism and sexism are implicated in these silences and gaps.

So we need a remedial history that reconstructs the female dimensions of human experience and achievement, and recovers the distorted and obliterated past of Africa, the Americas, and all other regions neglected by the standard textbooks and mass media. This will be a provisional history, because all the facts are not in yet, and previous interpretations are being re-evaluated for gender, race, and colonial bias. More importantly, the indigenous oral histories have only barely begun to be integrated into mainstream narratives.

Women have often been relegated to the footnotes of history, and even those are highly selective. As Sandra Cisneros wrote of her search for Latina sheroes, "We are the footnotes of the footnotes." Yet the heritages of women of colour, especially the indigenous cultures, supply the most dramatic examples in recent history of open embrace of female power.

From ancient times in India power, power of rule is associated with the male and females are associated with the kitchen, food making and baby making cow. How do we identify and integrate the social and economic needs of the women if we do not accept

them as the important factor in decision-making. Not being able to participate or make your voice heard, due to oppression, caste, gender or just lack of strength, is something that does not go well together with a democratic society.

Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. It often involves the empowered developing confidence in their own capacities. Empowerment is then the process of obtaining these basic opportunities for marginalised people, either directly by those people, or through the help of non-marginalised others who share their own access to these opportunities. It also includes actively thwarting attempts to deny those opportunities.

Empowerment also includes encouraging, and developing the skills for, self-sufficiency, with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the group. This process can be difficult to start and to implement effectively, but there are many examples of empowerment projects which have succeeded.

Empowerment includes the following, or similar, capabilities:

1. The ability to make decisions about personal/collective circumstances
2. The ability to access information and resources for decision-making
3. Ability to consider a range of options from which to choose (not just yes/no, either/or.)
4. Ability to exercise assertiveness in collective decision-making
5. Having positive-thinking about the ability to make change
6. Ability to learn and access skills for improving personal/collective circumstance.
7. Ability to inform others' perceptions through exchange, education and engagement.
8. Involving in the growth process and changes that is never ending and self-initiated