Development of women's Rights in India

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Abstract

Every woman and girl has the right to live a life that is free from prejudice and unblemished by the presence of violence. In the course of human history, communities have often been plagued by injustices that are pervasive and systemic, and which are deeply ingrained into their cultures. Women in ancient and contemporary India have been forced to traverse repressive social structures that are dictated by age, social position, family relationships to males, marriage, childbearing, and patriarchal traditions. These systems have been in place for centuries. The dowry system, the desire for male offspring, and discrimination based on relationship status, caste, skin colour, community, and interactions with other social spheres such as villages, marketplaces, and governmental institutions are all examples of the manifestations of these norms. In spite of this, India's history is replete with examples of women who, while facing overwhelming opposition from society, have bravely fought against these norms. The history of the fight for the rights of Indian women can be broken down into three distinct phases. The first phase, which began in the middle of the 19th century and was sparked by reformists advocating for women's rights through educational and traditional reforms, can be seen as the beginning of the movement. Second, the time period beginning in 1915 and continuing till India attained its independence; at this time, Mahatma Gandhi included the struggle for women's rights within the larger context of the Quit India campaign. After achieving autonomy, the next step is to place an emphasis on ensuring that women are treated fairly within the context of the married household, encourage their involvement in the labour field, and provide them equal rights in the political sphere.

Key words: *Development, women,rights, India,Rights in India*
Introduction

People all over the world are fighting for women's rights in very different ways, depending on their family, society, race, marital status, religion, culture, personal experiences, and the economy. In India, both in the past and now, the patriarchal system is very strong. Women have to deal with a lot of different societal expectations based on their age, social status, family ties to men, marriage, having a child, and patriarchal norms. The dowry system, the preference for male heirs, caste, colour, community membership, village life, market interactions, and government policies are all examples of these kinds of rules. India has a long history of women who have broken social rules even when they were under a lot of social pressure.Indian women's history can be broken down into three time periods: In the first, which started around the middle of the 1800s, reformers fought for women's rights, which led to changes in education and traditions related to women. From 1915 until the country got its independence, the second was marked by Mahatma Gandhi's inclusion of women's issues in the Quit India movement and the growth of independent women's groups. In the third phase, which began after independence, people have worked to make sure that women are treated equally at home, at work, and in politics.

India has made progress, but women still face big problems that keep them from fully enjoying their rights and opportunities. Religious laws and personal laws that are specific to a community often go against the secular Indian Constitution. This means that women can't always get the rights and freedoms they are legally entitled to. People in India are making big steps toward securing women's rights, even though there is still a lot to do.

Objective of papers

1. **Legal Reform and Enforcement Objective**: Assess India's gender equality legislative frameworks, their efficiency, and the difficulties of implementing laws against domestic violence, dowry killings, and gender discrimination.
2. **Political Participation and Representation Objective**: Examine quotas, grassroots initiatives, and legislative reforms that support female leadership in rural and urban India to increase women's political engagement and representation.
3. **Socio-Economic Empowerment Objective**: Analyze how education, employment, and healthcare efforts for Indian women reduce poverty, improve family health, and promote gender parity in many areas of society.

Legal Reform and Enforcement Objective

Assessing India's gender equality legal frameworks, their efficacy, and the challenges of implementing laws against domestic violence, dowry murders, and gender discrimination is crucial to understanding women's rights in India. With its broad legal system, India has passed several laws safeguarding women and encouraging gender equality. Despite this, implementing these laws is difficult.First, Indian laws have evolved. The 1950 Indian Constitution guarantees gender equality. Post-Nirbhaya regulations including the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (2013) addressed sexual violence, marking major advances in India's fight against gender-based violence and discrimination.However, these frameworks' efficiency is sometimes questioned. The laws are on paper, but various problems hinder their implementation. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act is broad, but weak enforcement, lack of women's rights knowledge, societal shame, and a slow court system undercut its effectiveness.Despite the Dowry Prohibition Act, dowry deaths still occur. Dowry is highly ingrained in Indian society, hence this legislation is commonly overlooked. Due to patriarchal beliefs and corruption, law enforcement organisations may be reluctant to implement these laws.Gender discrimination legislation also suffer enforcement opposition. Women may confront a glass ceiling, uneven compensation, or harassment in the workplace. Companies may not have internal complaint committees as required by law, or victims may fear reprisal or slander.The Indian legal system is lengthy, which may dissuade women from seeking justice. Delays in court, callous police treatment, and victim-blaming may lower conviction rates and make victims feel wronged.Socioeconomic aspects exacerbate problems. Women often lack the funds and social support to navigate the judicial system. Legal ignorance and illiteracy contribute to underreporting of crimes against women. Rural communities, where traditional norms and communal councils (panchayats) rule, generally avoid official legal proceedings.To address these concerns, thorough reform must evaluate current laws for weaknesses and improve enforcement via court sensitization, police training, and community engagement initiatives. Equally important are educating women about their legal rights and supporting victims.

Political Participation and Representation Objective

Increasing women's political engagement and representation in India has been a priority, especially to close the gender gap in rural and urban regions. It's important because India is a democracy with a rich socio-cultural fabric, yet women's political participation is limited. Quotas, grassroots efforts, and legislative changes have addressed this disparity and promoted female leadership.Quotas or reservation regulations are India's main political involvement tool for women. The 1993 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments required 33% women's reservation in rural Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and urban Municipalities. This breakthrough law has helped increase grassroots women leaders. It has given women a platform to rule and changed society's view of women leaders. Women in local government have changed policy to enhance water supply, sanitation, and education, according to evidence.

Grassroots Initiatives:NGOs and women's organisations have promoted rural Indian women's leadership. SHGs and women's cooperatives have been essential. These collectives help women learn about their rights, build confidence, and lead. Women have become economically independent and politically informed thanks to SEWA. These grassroots organisations also develop networks to assist women candidates in elections, offering campaigning and governance tools and training.Political leadership training programmes in cities educate and develop women leaders. Managing party politics and urban government are urban-specific difficulties.

Legislative Reforms:A comparable reservation for women in state legislatures and the national parliament has been debated outside local government. The Women's Reservation Bill, which would reserve 33% of Lok Sabha and state legislative assembly seats for women, is controversial. Though it hasn't passed, its periodic presentation into parliament keeps discourse and ambitions for women's involvement alive.Legal structures that facilitate women's political involvement are also under consideration for legislative change. The Election Commission of India has appointed women polling officials and provided separate lineups for women voters to enhance women's participation.

Outcomes and Challenges: These measurements provide promise yet varied results. The number of women in municipal government has increased, although their effect at higher levels is less obvious. Patriarchy, political violence against women, and a lack of funding hinder the efficacy of women MPs, who are typically considered as proxy for male relatives.Women from vulnerable populations confront extra hurdles due to caste, class, and gender. Quotas and grassroots efforts must address these intersecting disparities to divide representation's benefits fairly.

Socio-Economic Empowerment Objective

The socio-economic empowerment of women in India is founded on education, employment, and healthcare, reducing poverty, improving family health, and achieving gender parity.

Empowerment begins with education. The 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) initiative has helped boost female literacy. Education empowers women by teaching them about their rights and health and improving their job prospects.

Educational women are more likely to send both their daughters and boys to school, encouraging gender parity in education and future employment equity.

Employment options for women affect family and community finances. When women make an income, they have greater household decision-making authority and may spend more on health, education, and nutrition, lowering poverty. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Work Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has helped rural women secure income via employment. The rise of women in the workforce undermines gender stereotypes and promotes social equality.

Healthcare for women multiplies family and community health. The Janani Suraksha Yojana (Maternal Safety Program) has enhanced maternal health, which is crucial for future generations. Healthier women may work harder at home and abroad, supporting gender equality.

First stage: (1825–1915)

Caste and gender social change movements were fueled by colonialism, nationalism, and prejudice analysis. This first phase of women's freedom and rights in India was started by males to stop sati, enable widow remarriage, outlaw child marriage, decrease illiteracy, legalise consent, and safeguard property rights. Some upper-caste Hindu women opposed Brahminical rules. Jhansi Rani Laxmibai, Kittur Rani Chennama, Bhopal Quidisa Begum, and Punjab Jind Kaur ruled British-colonized India. British Raj reformers Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Jyotirao Phule fought for women's rights.

1. Raja Rammohan Roy helped Governor-General William Cavendish-Bentinck abolish Sati in 1829.
2. In 1847, Peary Charan Sarkar, a former Hindu College, Calcutta student and member of 'Young Bengal', founded India's first free girls' school in Barasat, subsequently renamed Kalikrishna Girls' High School.
3. Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule founded a ladies' school in Pune, India, in 1848. Savitribai Phule was India's first female teacher.
4. Martha Mault N Mead and her daughter Eliza Caldwell N Mault transformed south Indian girls' education. This strategy was first met with local resistance since it broke tradition.
5. British India's Female Infanticide Prevention Act, 1870 (Act VIII) condemned female infanticide.
6. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's widow reform led to the 1856 Widow Remarriage Act. Many women reformers, including Pandita Ramabai, helped women.
7. John E. D. Bethune founded the Bethune School in 1849, which became Bethune College in 1879, India's first women's college.
8. India and Britain's first female graduates were Chandramukhi Basu and Kadambini Ganguly in 1883.
9. The first Indian women to study Western medicine were K Ganguly and Anandi G Joshi in 1886.

Second Stage: 1915–1947

1. The fight against British control escalated. Nationalism took centre stage. Mahatma Gandhi engaged Indian women in the non-violent civil disobedience campaign

against British rule, legitimising and expanding their public actions. He elevated women's duties of compassion, humility, sacrifice, and tolerance in public life. Small female farmers dominated Borsad and Bardoli's rural satyagrahas. Women's organisations like AIWC and NFIW formed. Women debated political participation, franchise, community prizes, and party leadership.

2. Social reformer Dhondo Keshav Karve founded SNDT Women's University with five students on 2 June 1916.
3. The first Indian National Congress-supported women's delegation visited the Secretary of State in 1917 for political rights. The first female Indian National Congress president was Annie Besant.
4. The first Indian-born female Indian National Congress president was Sarojini Naidu in 1925.
5. In 1927, AIWC was founded.
6. Child marriage was prohibited in 1929 in India, and women may marry at 14.
7. In 1944, Asima Chatterjee became the first Indian woman with a PhD.
8. The first woman governor of the United Provinces of India was appointed on August 15, 1947. On the same day, Amrit Kaur became India's first female Cabinet minister.

After India gained its independence in 1947, nationalist goals and nation-building took precedence over feminist concerns, which hindered the actions of women. There was widespread hostility on a national level to the British government's efforts to "modernise" Hindu families in the middle to late nineteenth century. The issue around the Age of Consent was sparked when the British government proposed raising the minimum age for women to marry from 16 to 18 in order to shield younger generations from the dangers of child marriage and sexual activity.

Post 1947

Women's liberation work informed their critical attitude of their rights in independent India. Women fought racism throughout the 1970s. Women were underpaid, pushed into 'unskilled' employment, and exploited as labour reserves. Ending women's free, inexpensive labour was the aim. Women began to recognise power system discrepancies in caste, tribe, language, religion, region, and class and fought to ensure that satisfying one group's wants would not create further inequalities. Today, Indian women are appreciated for their decision-making and free will, not only as good citizens and equals.

1. Young girls and women cannot be trafficked under the 1956 Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act.
2. India banned dowry in marriages with the 1961 Dowry Prohibition Act.
3. Indira Gandhi became India's first female prime minister in 1966. She was India's prime minister for three terms (1966–77) and four from 1980 till her 1984 assassination.
4. India passed the Equal Remuneration Act in 1976 to end women pay inequality.
5. A 1978 amendment to the 1929 Sharda Act raised women's marriage age from 14 to 18.
6. Indian Armed Forces hired non-medical women in 1992.
7. On October 26, 2006, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 took effect. For the first time, the Act comprehensively defines 'domestic violence' as physical, verbal, sexual, and economic abuse.

8. Sexual harassment was become a crime under Section 354 A of the IPC by the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, punishable by three years in prison and a fine. Disrobing a woman without her consent, stalking, and power-based sexual acts were unlawful under the Amendment.
9. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act banned workplace harassment in December 2013.
10. The Supreme Court of India ordered the Delhi government to strengthen medical systems to establish sexual assault in 2013 after ruling that the two-finger test on rape victims violates privacy.
11. In 2015, India permitted women to fly Air Force fighters. (IAF)
12. The oldest female member of a Hindu Undivided Family may be its 'Karta', according to a 2016 Delhi high court order.
13. The Supreme Court of India allowed women Indian Army officers to command in 2020.

Conclusion:

The history of Indian women is rife with pioneers who have smashed gender stereotypes and worked relentlessly for the improvement of their rights and privileges. Many of these women may be found in the Indian suffrage movement. As a direct consequence of this, women in today's society have made significant accomplishments in a number of disciplines, including politics, the arts, science, the law, and others. These achievements may be directly attributed to the advancement of women in today's society. The pace at which women are achieving their goals, on the other hand, is discouraging, to put it mildly. The good news is that there will soon be improvements, albeit the rate at which they will take place is quite slow and steady. As a consequence of this, all of the necessary parties need to work together in order to make women much more developed and forward-thinking.

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