

## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND ACHIEVEMENTS: A PATH TOWARDS TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

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### Abstracts:

*Women have always led a life of oppression and exploitation, being the most ostracized and marginalized sections of the society. But gone are the days when women were subjected to all kinds of injustices and discrimination on the name of sexual harassment, rape, dowry and domestic violence. The times have changed and the facts reveal that today's women are examples of self independent and empowered entities who are well-awakened and conscious of their rights and powers. The paper is an attempt to showcase the journey of women's transformation, signifying women empowerment and achievement. The paper by employing Case Study Method tries to make an indepth study of a leading women organization whose role and functions are the testimonial of how today's women have become courageous and more confident in raising their voice against all social evils and gender injustices and gender biases to grant women their deserved rights and dignified place in the society.*

**Keywords:** achievement, courageous, dignified place, oppression, women empowerment

**W**rapped silence, soaring rage, fear of being ostracized and marginalized and the inability to speak out and express in forms and words are perhaps the few definitive terms for a woman's description in India a few years back. Clothed in years of deplorable suffering under the wrap of oppressive practices such as bigamy, dowry, domestic violence and also the various manifested forms of sexual offence, rape, women are really coming out in the open now, at last braving all odds to shed their long standing fears and inhibitions. In the wake of the horrific Delhi gang rape in December 2012, there has been an overhaul of the rape and sentencing laws thereby scrutinizing national gender policy and also sensitizing women as equal citizens and participants and raising several questions related to women safety and gender justice in the present times. Certainly there are changes. There is much more awareness now especially about violence against women manifested in rape, property issues or communal riots. Women are not as invisible in 2014-15. But the greatest problem that remains is the huge gap between promise and implementation. Pay disparity, prevailing prejudices and poor and unequal representation in the total workforce are some of the problems we can't deny working women grapple with. Gender bias and gender



discrimination continues to be an enormous problem within Indian society. India still has a very low ranking in the Gender-Gap Index. There are numerous dominant gender equity issues prevalent in India as the Indian society still continues to be patriarchal.

Well, a Nirbhaya still gets crucified somewhere for buying few moments of her freedom and happiness, a Rohtak girl still meets a savage death crushing all norms of humanity and a housewife still languishes somewhere in the dark corridors of her suffocating silence. Undeniably women have always been and will always be lynched in forms and ways but then as destruction always leads to creation and death to living, women have evolved too. From household to socio-political, business and entrepreneurship, they have really taken to multi-tasking, signifying a great development in the area of women empowerment and gender justice and women's transformative leadership. When it comes to leadership the examples are huge and still roaring.

Closing all gender gaps are aspiring stories of women role models who scaled impossible heights to attain success and leadership. They have left their indelible mark and modern India's script cannot be complete without their contributions. Women are at the forefront of social movements, hold important political positions and have also gone a long way in boosting the corporate sector with their enterprise and skilled and efficient performance. Do you know that we are number 15 in the world when it comes to political empowerment. Women are 25% of the Union Cabinet, 10% of Parliament, 9% of MLA's across India and we've had a woman head of state and head of government. Arundhati Roy became the

first Indian woman to win the Booker Prize for the novel "God of small Things" and instead of embracing glory that came along with it, she took to controversies with her writings, on dams, Maoists and the Kashmir issue. Chanda Kochar the CEO of ICICI Bank (India's biggest private bank) has been listed by the Fortune Magazine as among the top powerful women in business. Ela Bhatt, the Ramon Magsasay Awardee went a long way in becoming a pioneer of self employed women's association (SEWA) with 687,000 women members. SEWA's women members are vegetable and garment vendors, bididi rollers, paper pickers, incense stick makers and also agricultural workers.

Kiran Bedi, a simple girl brought up in both hindu and sikh traditions grew up to become a famous tennis champion, joined IPS, worked at different key positions earning the title of India's first and highest woman ranking officer, also joined as Inspector General of Delhi Prisons and the sole person behind introducing several reforms for the inmates of Tihar Jail. Sushmita Sen, a famous model and the holder of beauty pageant Miss Universe Title, she is the perfect example of women's transformative leadership. From again a very humble childhood to being the recipient of the world's most prestigious beauty and glamour event title, from being a great model to being a single mother, she has truly demonstrated that women are no longer weaker in comparison to men and they have all the skills and potentials to challenge the men and demand for gender justice and gender equality. . Shahnaz Hussain, a role model in the field of beauty and care. She is again a very famous Indian woman entrepreneur who has created a mark for herself in the pages of history



by her herbal cosmetic products under the brand name of Shehnaz. Who can forget the name of Mrs. Aruna Roy? A prominent Indian political and social activist. The pioneer of the great "Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan", the sole person behind the Right to Information Act. Indra Nooyi, again a befitting example of women's changing perspectives and personality. Being the chairperson & CEO of Pepsi Co, she has consistently ranked among the world's 100 most powerful women. The list is endless with many more names like Shikha Sharma, CEO, Axis Bank, Preetha Reddy, MD Apollo Hospital Enterprises, Shobhana Bhartia, Chairperson HT Media, Vinita Bedi, MD Britannia Industries, Naina Lal Kidwai, Country Head, HSBC India. All these women have shown the world that women are no longer just a body of flesh and bones but they can also be examples of highly confident and courageous people who can play the role of great leaders behind the development and transformation of society and can be role model for the masses.

Well all these examples of women leadership in different areas hint enough that feminist interests and strategies have undergone drastic changes with the unfolding times, perhaps more recently. Besides change in the societal structure, government's initiative towards women empowerment and the change in the thinking pattern of men folk, it was also the result of a change in the ambitions of women which played a major role in the over all development of their personality. Men's systematic control over women's sexuality have undergone a plunge in all institutional wings such as family, community, market and state. Women across the board have really emerged as key players in reproductive activities of

family, community, business, occupation and society. It is also remarkable to see that more women than men tend to be advocates for women's interests both practical and strategic.

## 1. Review of Literature

Kollan Bharti & Parikh J. Indira in their paper titled, "A Reflection of the Indian Women in Entrepreneurial World", discusses the chief reasons behind women's transformation.

- 1) Women regarded work as an integral aspect of their life space
- 2) Income Generation and a career choice where both the social system and occupation were equally significant
- 3) Educated and qualified women aspired for a different role and life vis-à-vis their stereotyped role as mothers and grandmothers
- 4) The women wanted homes, marriage and children as well as occupation also became a top priority in the lives of few women who wanted to lead a life of independence, self-respect and confidence
- 5) The women accepted the social traditional role behaviors from the older generation but from their husbands, colleagues and children, they expected understanding and support in their occupation choice. They looked for redefinition of systems and redesigned interfaces across the systems and institutions they worked with

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2013, released by Non-Profit organization, World Economic Forum,



ranked India at 101 among 136 countries that were assessed for women empowerment on social, economic and political parameter. The report ranks countries by measuring the size of the gender inequality gap in four areas

- Economic participation and opportunity
- Health and survival
- Educational attainment
- Political growth empowerment

India is the only South Asian country that has consistently fluctuated a lot in the gender gap rankings since 2009. According to the report “India is ranked 9<sup>th</sup> in the world in the list of countries where women are most empowered politically, marginally behind its South Asian counterpart Bangladesh, that is ranked 7<sup>th</sup>. But at rank 135, India is rated the worst in South Asia when it comes to ensuring health and survival for its women and ranked behind Bangladesh and Nepal on the parameter of economic participation and opportunity.

No doubt there are four reasons for the gender gap in India. The double burden of holding down a job while looking after the family, the inability to use the “anytime-anywhere” performance model, the lack of public and societal support mechanisms and the limited number of role models and opportunity. We have cited a lot for gender equality and a radical practical approach to women issues so that every women can feel a leader in her own capacity. For that a change is needed. Just as Prime Minister Narendra Modi has launched the “Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan”, its time he launch a campaign for women employment. For the first time powerful women ministers are there in the cabinet. They should make this an issue rather than focus on

whether IIM or IIT canteens should stick to a vegetarian menu.

As rightly said by Oxfam(Canada), an international organization working worldwide to find solutions to deal with poverty, “ That the kind of changes we want to see in society requires transformative leadership. Gender justice is the goal of full equality and equity among women and girls and men and boys in all spheres of life. It is the result of women jointly- and on an equal basis with men-defining and shaping the policies, structures and decisions that affect their lives and society as a whole. It is both an outcome and a process. Gender Justice requires we work together on two levels.

- a) To change societal attitudes and behavior that lie at the heart of gender inequality
- b) To change those laws, policies and government programmes that discriminate against women and sustain gender inequality”

Kawatra, S. & Krishnan, V.R.(2004), talks about women’s transformational leadership and how the life of women have changed drastically from just being a pound of flesh to occupying positions carrying great leadership roles and responsibilities. In his literature review section, Lord, De Vader and Alliger (1999) have suggested that masculinity-Femininity is an important personality trait in forming leadership perceptions.

Rosener (1990) showed that women described themselves in ways that characterize transformational leadership. Eagly and Johannesen Schnidt (2001) meta-analyzed 47 studies and showed that women exceeded men significantly on individualized consideration.

A significant study in the direction of showcasing how women have transformed themselves drastically have



been done by Batliwada, S. & Rao, A. (2002). The authors by taking interviews of eighteen outstanding women leaders have uncovered many major facts and issues related to women's transformative leadership, their perspectives and visions. Through conversations, women talked about the practice of women leadership for bringing about social change. The interviewees while supporting women's leadership, pointed out the need for:

- Building an enabling environment for the articulation of women's visions of development and rights at a global level
- Supporting coalition building within the women's movement and across women's organizations as well as coalitions between the women's movement and other social change movements
- Challenging power structures and resource control in the political, economic and social arenas and in all types of organizations that keep women and women's interests out
- Supporting the emergence and sustenance of women leaders at all levels for a transformative social change agenda
- Building accountability mechanisms across institutional arenas for women's interests

## 2. Objective of Study

The following were the objectives behind the study:

1. To develop a deeper insight by making an exhaustive study of existing literature dealing with the cases highlighting Women Transformation and Women

Empowerment and their achievements..

2. To bring out certain facts related to the issues of Women Empowerment, Achievements, Gender Equality and Gender Justice on the basis of a practical field based Case Study highlighting the immense transformation in the consciousness level of women regarding their rights and powers in the present times which motivates them to fight against all kinds of Gender Injustice and Biases leading towards Women Empowerment.

## 3. Research Methodology

The study employs Case Study Method to develop a deeper understanding about how women have come in the forefront and have started exercising their fundamental rights and independence to showcase their opinion in front of the masses. The study describes about a real life case study of a leading and well established Women Organization where few courageous and extremely dedicated women members are playing a major role to exhibit their existence as strong identities in the society at par with men, signifying Gender Justice and Women Transformation and Achievements.

As a part of the Case Study Method, Interview was also conducted of the leading members of the organization to collect information on the roles and functions of the body and their achievements as an exemplary women body.

Along with the case study method, Secondary Data has also been used to get an insight about the issue of



Women's Transformative Leadership in the past few years.

#### 4. Case Study

When we talk of women empowerment and their achievements and the journey of women's transformation from a timid, highly tortured and discriminated identity to a strong and awakened identity, we need to go to the grass root level and make a deeper study of those cases where women have truly showed their existence and have become an example of women empowerment and role models for the masses.

As a part of the Research Method, a Case Study was conducted of a leading woman organization based in the region of Virar, a suburban region of Palghar District, Taluka Vasai, Mumbai, Maharashtra. The group is called by the name of "Mahila Dakshata Samiti", a leading woman organization consisting of a committee of few highly dedicated and extremely focused and courageous women who have been fighting and raising their voice against all social odds and evils and gender injustices and biases prevalent in the society

Mahila Dakshata Samiti is a powerful woman organization group and a part of Virar Police Station. The body has been created by the Virar Police Station and has been functioning as a significant part of it serving the purpose of women empowerment and transformation from the past 20 years. The group consists of 15 outstanding women members drawn from the different walks of life and who have voluntarily agreed to dedicate their time and skills for the upliftment of women and granting them justice. This group in association with Virar Police Station works almost 24 hrs , fully dedicated for the purpose of listening to

women's problems and solving them on time.

The names of Committee Members along with their contact numbers are displayed on the board of Virar Police Station and whenever any case related to women injustice and torture comes to the police station, the case is handed over to the Mahila Dakshata Samiti immediately, based on the area of the incident and the availability of the members in the region to resolve the problem. A very significant part of the functioning of the Mahila Dakshata Samiti Committee is that besides the routine police investigations, the committee members also help in going into the depth of the incident , interrogating the aggrieved woman and all concerned parties, finding out the truth of the incident. A noticeable exploration of my study was that the Samiti Members besides their routine investigations, also employ Counseling as a primary method of resolving various cases which come to them.

To make the study more factual and indepth, an interview was also conducted of the two leading members of the Mahila Dakshata Samiti. They are:

1. Mrs. Ashwini Shinde, who had entered into politics at a tender age of 22 yrs. She has been associated as an active member of the Mahila Dakshata Samiti from the past 10-12 yrs. She is a member of the Virar Police Station and a member of the Vikas Aghadi Party, which is a leading party of the Palghar District and the Vasai Taluka region. She has also been very active in politics and had been even nominated for the Corporator post under the Aghadi Party.



2. Mrs. Jyoti Pawar is a very senior member of Virar Mahila Sangathan of Shiv Sena, Virar Region. She is also an outstanding Social Worker and an active politician too. She has been an active member of Shiv Sena from the past 20 years and has been associated with Mahila Dakshata Samiti and Virar Police Station from the past 12 years.

As a part of the interview, a couple of questions were asked related to the nature of functioning of the committee and the varied nature of cases dealt by them which helped immensely in women empowerment.

On being asked as to what is their nature of functioning, the interviewees replied that the names and contact numbers of all the Samiti Committee members is displayed on the board of the Virar Police Station and as soon as a case of women injustice or torture or gender violence or women's rights comes to the police station, the women committee members become instantly active and they are immediately contacted by the police authorities to start their indepth investigations into the case by their interrogations and various other measures which they employ to bring out the truth of the case. The Samiti members are far more successful in revealing the truth of the case as they being women can understand the aggrieved woman party in much more better manner. The woman victim too feels more comfortable to discuss their painful stories and everything related to the incident in detail with no concealment with the women Mahila Dakshata Samiti members and this is the biggest achievement of the functioning. The interviewed women replied that they are on duty almost 24 hrs and are always

vigilant on the issue of women rights and independence. The members start their own pattern of investigations as soon as a case approaches them and their discovery of truth is considered as a significant part of the case and the various facts discovered by the committee members are authenticated by their signatures before the case is presented in the court. Their signatures are given a great amount of weightage in normal police investigations and court proceedings. The police station maintains a register consisting of the details of the case and the summary of the course of action followed by the members of the Mahila Dakshata Samiti to resolve the case.

Another important question was are they paid being a member of the body. The two ladies replied that all women who want to serve for the betterment of women sections and want to fight for women rights and women empowerment, voluntarily become a member of this body and it is not a salaried occupation. Most of the women members of the Mahila Dakshata Samiti besides being members of the body are also into some or the other profession. The two interviewed women had their own Catering Business besides being members of the Samiti.

To find out the varied number of tasks carried out by the body, the ladies were asked about the different functions performed by them, they replied that they deal with all types of cases involving women rights, safety, women atrocities and fighting for their cause.

The following are some of the very important areas they work upon which have tremendously contributed in Women Empowerment and have been a major part of Women Achievement :

1. Counselling the woman victim in terms of suicide cases and trying to



- find out the real reason behind their suicide, making them come out of their miseries and helping them to lead a normal life.
2. Fighting against black marketing and illegal hoarding of goods in ration shops and staging protests for it
  3. Dealing with cases of fraud involving sale of jewellery, where specially old women are cheated.
  4. Raising the status and dignity of women in the society by taking strict action against the call girls who destroy the serenity and lower down the safety of the area by standing on the road at night which has a bad impact on the passer byes and encourages the men to look at all other passing women in the same manner. The Mahila Dakshata Samiti members had been very active in their fight for bringing back normalcy in the areas and actively participate in the removing this social menace.
  5. Taking care of safety of girls at night along with police authorities
  6. Handling cases of women, specially old women being cheated in ATM Outlets while withdrawing money
  7. Dealing with cases of women safety like gold chain snatching at night. The women members are very active and vigilant in the crowded areas at night and they try to catch all such anti-social elements involved in such acts.
  8. Taking care of maintenance of safety in crowded areas by controlling the goons and vandalizing agents.
  9. Counselling rape victims and motivating them to be strong in their lives and encouraging them in all possible ways to come back to their normal lives

They were also asked to cite certain important cases where they played a very

important role in fighting for women's rights and their freedom and independence. The interviewees replied that every day they come across various critical cases which are highly sensitive and which require great amount of sincere efforts and experience in resolving them. In many rape cases besides police panchnama , they also investigated every small and intricate aspect of the case which can have a good amount of impact on the routine police investigations and in many cases they have been successful in revealing significant facts related to the case. They replied that they also had long discussions with the rape victim as they feel more free and comfortable to narrate their painful incident and every such truth related to their case in front of the members of Mahila Dakshata Samiti, as they are women members. The members had also been very successful in resolving one more case involving extra-marital affair of the husband, where the husband had left no stone unturned in proving his wife an insane. The Samiti members went into the depth of the case and investigated the various medical records maintained at different hospitals where she was admitted. The members staged a very forceful battle fighting for the restoration of normal life to the woman and granting justice to her.

## 5. Conclusion

To bring transformation in the real sense, still there is a need to remove all crucial barriers to equality. Women transformation and empowerment means working on three major issues and areas

- a) First and foremost the women have to be made financially independent to make them more self-independent and self-reliant and less dependent on





male sections of the society. The real socio-economic upliftment of women can come by their active involvement in economic activities and by developing their ability to earn an independent income.

- b) Creating mass consciousness and awareness regarding the empowerment and development in the life of various victimized and abused and weak sections of women through various active government support and initiatives as well as by the efforts of various woman and social activist organizations
- c) Establishment of more women centric organizations like the National Mission for Empowerment of Women which can work solely with the mission to strengthen women and bring about an all round development of their personality

Still the root causes for all the evils faced by the women are:

- Illiteracy is still prevalent in major sections of women
- Economic dependence is there in a good number of females
- Caste restrictions prevent women to enjoy their piece of liberation
- Religious prohibition still hinders women's growth
- Lack of leadership qualities
- Dominant, indifferent and callous attitude of males in the society since the society still today remains to be patriarchal.
- Violence against women still takes place in some or the other form which requires more conscious and immediate strong efforts from the side of law makers, opinion leaders, and voluntary social and activist organizations in order to raise a

mass awareness about the various heinous crimes inflicted on women. The present situation demands more fast stringent laws and its enforcement.

In the long drawn war of the sexes, why should women have to lobby with men for things which are rightfully theirs. A rightful thought and a gentle persuasion is all that is needed. No matter how much we talk of gender justice and gender equality, complete transformation in the life of women towards delivering a constructive leadership role in society demands great change in the existing power structure and working consistently towards a target of creating a world where men are equal to women in all aspects. Gender gap in politics, in economic participation, in education and in healthcare has to be bridged in. Safety and security at the workplace needs to be heightened and responsibility of motherhood has to be realized and shared. Do you know women in India on average spend 351.9 minutes everyday doing housework while men spend just 51.8 minutes on such duties, a difference of 300.1 minutes. Quite appalling!!! . No doubt the celebration of Women's Day every year indicates a remarkable change in the role and functions of women, in their changing status in society and they emerging as a more strong and confident entities. Every year's Women's Day celebration is again a day dedicated to the demonstration of emerging "Women Power" and their strong determination to fight against all Gender Injustice and Gender Inequality. But in spite of all these facts and initiatives, a lot more still needs to be done to attain the goal of complete Gender Justice and Equality and to bring a major transformation in the lives of women towards their empowerment .



Several legislative enactments and constitutional provisions exist which were solely formulated to provide gender equality and justice to women but the irony of the situation is that inspite of many transformations in the lives of women which have some where led to women occupying key leadership positions, a lot more still requires to be done.

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