

# A JOURNEY FROM IRON CAGE TO FLYING FREE: STORY OF WOMEN OF INDIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *The countless success stories in the form of PepsiCo CEO Indira nooyi, Bicon head kiran shah, Tessy Thomas ( the missile women of India) none of them subdued their family responsibility to rise up the ladder instead they demonstrate a successful example of **tightrope balancing act** of family values of commitment, selflessness and empathy on one side and professional values and organizational leadership on the other. The example of Australian lawmaker breastfeeding her child in the parliament demonstrates the multifaceted roles woman plays. Indian judiciary too has played a significant role in the emancipation of women with the judgments like Hadiya case verdict, Triple Talaq, Right to privacy, it has empowered women. But does all this enough to dismantle the systematic subordination of women? Are the women free enough to pursue their dreams transcending economic, social or legal hurdles? There are many obstacles which require great concern. Recently, PRIA survey found out that most of the Gramsabha women representation (73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment) suffered from “ **Beta Baap Pati Syndrome**” where women representation just act as a rubber stamp while the real head remains his son, father or husband. As per ASER survey, women are deprived of their basic right to education (Article 21A), with only 37% women completing their education that sets off a domino effect in the loss of freedoms. There share of 27% in the Indian labour force is also too meager. Not only in jobs they face discrimination in pay (gender wage gap is 29%). Women form only 11% of parliamentarians in India. All this clearly shows the systematic exclusion of Indian women from the mainstream. The need of the hour is to incorporate women in the development process. This is what this research paper will try to analyze that, how women of India can achieve the great heights of balanced and equitable society and become a free woman in true sense*

*“A free woman is one who does not live in the shadow of other judgments but one who makes her own choices based on her own wisdom”.*

**Key Words:** *Gender, Empowerment, Feminization, egalitarianism and sustainable development*

## Introduction

Kalpna was born in the village of Haryana she was given bangles to wear and was made to assist in the farmlands, but kalpna was not happy..... perhaps she was hoping for the new emancipation.

Women constitute half of the number of humanity. Woman is born and right from the start she is guided to serve man as a wife, daughter, mother and many other roles. As rightly said by Simon de Beauvoir that “man moulds the personality of the women as sex is natural but gender is artificial”. Woman also craves to pursue their dreams and to become a free woman. A free woman is one who tackles the situation without any superior guidance. She has her own notions about handling the situations and executes her plans to achieve her ultimate goals.

## The Iron Cage: Barriers Imposition

Since time immemorial, history showcases how women have been subdued to decision of others. The practice of sati where right to life is on whims and fancies of society, women are married at so early ages of 6, 7 and politics was the man’s game. Women had been at the receiving ends of the wisdom of others

Patriarchy is so entrenched that women start living with the way patriarchal system wants. Women are considered the property of men. The implicit patriarchy has ensured that women are relegated to a secondary position in both family as well as society. To be successful they are expected to break the glass ceiling that guards the world of men. She is told what to wear, what to eat and what to drink **e.g khap panchayat decision to ban girls to wear jeans and eating noodles as it give rise to early maturity** came really shocking to all. Misogynism is prevalent in the society we can see that not even 100 leaders of countries in the world have been women in the last 100 years. Women over world head less than 2% of organizations. The Indian society misogynism is practiced in every sphere of life. It is most virulent in the religious sphere where in the name of tradition, customs and religiosity women are constantly reminded of their subordination. **Sabrimala temple** issue illustrates this when women belonging to a particular age group are denied entry in the temple.

A part from this the **son meta preferences** as pointed out by the economic survey has led to 1 million missing women and unwanted girls in India. Feminization of agriculture is happening, 5percent of female workforce is in agricultural sector but only 12 Percent owns the operational landholdings (census 2011). **Gender equality index** of world economic forum ranks India at a dismal low (108<sup>th</sup>) the main reason is lack of political participation and unequal opportunity and unequal payment in jobs. All these points leads towards the complete exclusion of women from the society and demonstrates how the women have been considered as “recipients or passive benefactors” of decision making by society, politics alike. Their independence is restricted, free will is choked by the juxtaposition of a number of factors like masculine political representation, lack of education and skills etc. The need of the hour is to incorporate women in the development process. Most of the decisions on women issues are decided mostly by men who though are apparently feminist and try to strengthen women but miss one important fact that they need to change their perceptions for women.

### **Real Freedom: Act According To Wisdom and Breaking the cage**

The idea of **equality liberty and fraternity** came with the demolition of Bastille prison and the heralding of French revolution. Along with man charter of rights these rights could emancipate a woman from the chains of subordination by the male counterpart from centuries. The spillover effect was the awareness and the rise of feminization many leaders started of demanding for equality of women vis-à-vis man and also freedom to shape and choose her dreams without under any external guidance.

This resulted in the success of liberation of the woman although a limited one. Most of the country granted **adult franchise to woman** in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from this, participation of woman in the fight against colonialism had a truly emancipator effect. **Sarojini Naidu** participated in the “Dhassana salt satyagraha” proving that nationalism is not the only field of men. Despite this history also witnessed enormous leadership qualities in women leaders, right from Razia sultan to Indira Gandhi. In the Chipko and Apikko movements they came out for ecological rights of all, not just for themselves. In the Narmada Bachao Andolan they led the women to restore water rights to all , not just for themselves. In the LGBTQ rights movement they have joined hands as an act of solidarity to humanity. But,women will not be free until substantial investment is done to augment the human capital. IMF points out that, if the potential of Indian women is harnessed it can spur India’s growth to a great extent. As and when women will participate in the innovative and economic fields it will accelerate the economy. Free women can also act as a tool to counter social evils like illiteracy, malnutrition, low sex ratio as many reports has suggested that a well educated and empowered women is likely to be more responsible in her family duties.

In order to capitalize on the demographic dividend the Indian government is pursuing various programmes which can provide the women a platform to realize her freedom. BBBP( beti bachao beti padhao), Beti apki dhan laxmi or vijay laxmi along with sukanya kanyashree prakalpa yojana are steps in this direction. The political empowerment through the true implementation of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments act has provided for the reservation to women in the local government. The 108<sup>th</sup> Constitutional amendment bill also aims to provide reservation in parliament. Indian judiciary judgments too helped to empower women. Progressive legislation such as maternity benefit act, 2017 goes a long way in assisting women to balance their professional and domestic lives. The abrogation of adultery act and death penalty for rape of minor are good measures.

At the global level United Nations SDGs aims to reduce gender inequality. Sweden is the first country which has incorporated **feministic foreign policy**. Feministic foreign policy aims to shape a foreign policy according to the qualities of woman proponents and believe that women being calm and relax can help tackle the rising threat of war. In the recent **WTO ministerial meeting** at the Buenos Aires the gender issues featured in the talks which indicated towards the acknowledgement from the international community on the need to have women oriented development growth. World Bank in recent study claimed that increased women participation will result in an increase of 1.5% in GDP.

The basic idea of free women emerges from one basic principle i.e woman decide what is best for them any reform change that is brought by women unless includes them is a fascicle exercise. Every policy measure must involve participation of woman and from all sectors as well. Only then can we stand true to the idea of utopia society/ nation. “In the era of caging and shackling them let’s remember the best society is what- lets them be”. The cage can be set free when change is brought by them in all the fields of social environment, education, health, economy and importantly in political domain. Thus, there is a urgent need to remove all the shackles and nation can sustains itself only when it is inclusive. Caging half the population makes development, democracy, growth nothing but a farce.

Kalpana was lucky to get the benefit of the rising tide of women freedom. She became "Astronaut The kalpana chawala" whose name got inked in the sky. For her, sky was the limit and thus the free women can expand the overall developmental borders of the worlds as well as India.

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