

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA: MYTH OR REALITY

***B.Lakshmi Prasanna,**

Research Scholar, Department of Commerce SVUniversity Tirupati Dt.

****Dr. G.Venkatachalam,**

Assistant Professor on Contract, Department of Commerce, V.S. University College Kavali. Nellore Dt.

ABSTRACT

In developing countries, there exist social, economic, political and familial disparities among men and women. Women are relatively poor than men in all aspects of life in an unequal society. Here arises the concept of empowerment which has goals to get decision making power, work and choices in investments into the hands of women that brings equality. Empowerment has been recognized as multidimensional. Economic empowerment has a major role to play in development and bringing equality for women. Gender equality promotes economic growth as well. Economic empowerment of women is dire essential for accomplishment of equality. In this context, the study examines the inequities existing among genders stressing the importance of employment and economic opportunities in India. The paper investigates the inequities existing among genders in India stressing the importance of employment and economic opportunities. The paper also talks about advancement in economic empowerment in India.

Key words : Women Empowerment; Women Security; Crime; Indian Society; Women Protection

INTRODUCTION

Almost half of the population of the world is constituted by women but the dominance of men and their masculine ideology that they belong to a superior race has denied equal opportunities. The need of women empowerment arose because of the gender discrimination and male domination in the Indian society since ancient time. Women are being suppressed by their family members and society for many reasons. They have been targeted for many types of violence and discriminatory practices by the male members in the family and society in India and other countries as well. In the ancient Indian society, there was a custom of sati pratha, nagar vadhu system, dowry system, sexual violence, domestic violence, female infanticide, parda pratha, wife burning, sexual harassment at work place, child marriage, child labour, devadashi system, etc including other discriminatory practices. All such type of ill practices is because of male superiority complex and patriarchal system of the society.

Among all, empowerment of women through economic opportunities creates financial freedom and power to make decisions. Economic empowerment of women is essential to accomplish equality among genders (OECD, 2012). Women's access to education and employment reduces the likelihood of household poverty, living standards raises thereby. Resources in women's hands have a range of positive outcomes for human capital and capabilities within the household (Kabeer 2003). Economic empowerment and participation are basic aspects to strengthen the women's rights in the society. Golla et al (2011) defined economic empowerment of women as the capability to gain economic prosperity and power to make decisions. The skills and resources are essential for women to compete in market and succeed economically. Women's economic empowerment is required for the sustainable

development. Malhotra et al (2002) have views on economic empowerment at household, community and macro levels. Figart (2005) argued that gender inequality is expensive to the economy. The attention of Cerrutti (2000) is on the effect of economic restructuring on the behaviour of female workers and the conditions led to the labour market.

Empowerment refers to a situation where the powerless gain greater control over resources and ideologies. It has been associated with terms such as autonomy, power, status and agency. The Indian constitution has very clearly given an equal level playing ground to women and has directed authorities to frame rules and regulations to safe guard the right. However, feminist scholars during 1970s as a way to challenge patriarchy, as a radical approach concerned with transforming power relations in favour of women's rights and gender equality

OBJECTIVES

1. To know the need of Women Empowerment.
2. To assess the Awareness of Women Empowerment in India.
3. To analyze the Factors influencing the Economic Empowerment of Women.
4. To study the Government Schemes For Women Empowerment.
5. To identify the Hindrances in the Path of Women Empowerment.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The Government programmes for women development began as early as 1954 in India but the actual participation began only in 1974. At present, the Government of India has over 34 schemes for women operated by different department and ministries. Some of these are as follows;

1. Rastria Mahila Kosh (RMK) 1992-1993
2. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) October,1993
3. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) 1995
4. Women Entrepreneur Development programme given top priority in 1997-98
5. Mahila Samakhya being implemented in about 9000 villages
6. Swayasjdha
7. Swa Shakti Group
8. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women(STEP)
9. Swalamban
10. Crèches/ Day care centre for the children of working and ailing mother
11. Hostels for working women
12. Swadhar
13. National Mission for Empowerment of Women
14. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (1975)
15. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls (RGSEAG) (2010)

16. The Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers
17. Integrated Child Protection scheme (ICPS) (2009-2010)
18. Dhanalakahmi (2008)
19. Short Stay Homes
20. Ujjawala (2007)
21. Scheme for Gender Budgeting (XI Plan)
22. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)
23. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM).
24. Prime Minister's Rojgar Yojana (PMRY)
25. Women's Development Corporation Scheme (WDCS)
26. Working Women's Forum
27. Indira Mahila Kendra
28. Mahila Samiti Yojana
29. Khadi and Village Industries Commission
30. Indira Priyadarahini Yojana
31. SBI's Sree Shaki Scheme
32. SIDBI's Mahila Udyam Nidhi Mahila Vikas Nidhi
33. NGO's Credit Schemes
34. National Banks for Agriculture and Rural Development's Schemes

The efforts of government and its different agencies are ably supplemented by nongovernmental organizations that are playing an equally important role in facilitating women empowerment. Despite concerted efforts of governments and NGOs there are certain gaps. Of course, we have come a long way in empowering women yet the future journey is difficult and demanding.

Inequality and economic empowerment of women

Women's primary role remains as a care taker for the family consists of children and old aged in Indian context. The access to gainful employment for women is limited and declining further. The gender inequality is cultivated due to poverty and lack of opportunity (Duflo, 2012). Poverty is one of the prominent chronic issues in developing economies in the world. The reduction of poverty and pacing economic growth are accompanying with increased women's participation in economic activity and earnings. 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. Education is the tool to gain power. However, it is observed that women are found to be less literate than men (Hazarika, 2011). The poverty is condensed when women enhance their education and skill, participate in the economy and have secure access to resources such as land. Men will also benefit from the paybacks of economic empowerment other than women (World Bank, 2006).

At household level, women's access and control on income of the households which is a greater support that brings the family out of poverty or in other words, reduction of poverty at household level. By and large, employment admittance, asset ownership, credit access and markets have larger support at community level. Moreover, high paid jobs, macroeconomic policies and women's economic interests have a key role to play on larger basis for the women's economic empowerment. But, education is one of the intangible resources (Kapitsa 2008) to empower through which women could gain knowledge, skills and ability to compete in labour market and accomplishing prospects in the economy. The main determinants identified for the cause of increasing female labour force participation are improvements in female educational levels, decreasing fertility, and increase in occupational opportunities in tertiary activities. And the argument here by the author is that most of the female LFP growth has been a response to decreasing job opportunities and labor conditions and as a way of diversifying household's economic risks.

National governments and their development partners are all working to reduce poverty. Although it is often thought of as a lack of material resources, poverty is correlated closely with all aspects of a person's life: the world's poor are more likely to be malnourished, they have less access to services like education, electricity, sanitation and healthcare, and they are more vulnerable to conflict and climate change. Understanding poverty is thus fundamental to understanding how societies can progress. Reducing poverty and inequality are central to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the World Bank Group's twin goals for 2030: ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity in every country in a sustainable manner. National statistical systems, household surveys and poverty measurement methodologies are at the heart of tracking these global goals.

Reducing poverty

How poverty is defined and measured varies across the world. The national poverty line for a country is typically a monetary threshold below which a person's minimum basic needs cannot be met, taking into account the country's economic and social circumstances. Poverty lines not only vary widely by country but they are also often revised as countries develop: richer countries typically have higher poverty lines than poorer ones. Governments track how many people are living on less than the national poverty line so that they can monitor their development progress. The national poverty line is also a central indicator for [SDG 1](#), ending poverty "in all its forms".

To aggregate and compare poverty rates across countries, poverty thresholds that reflect the same real standard of living in each country are used. The \$2.15 a day poverty line, which reflects the value of national poverty lines in some of the poorest countries, is often referred to as the extreme poverty line. For added perspective, the World Bank also tracks poverty at \$3.65 a day, the typical line for lower-middle-income countries, and \$6.85 a day, typical for upper-middle-income countries.

Poverty measured at the international poverty line of \$2.15 a day is used to track progress toward meeting the World Bank target of reducing the share of people living in extreme poverty to less than 3 percent by 2030. The SDG target of 1.1 is even more ambitious by 2030, it wants all countries, regions, and groups within countries to achieve zero poverty at the same international poverty line.

Inequality and shared prosperity

As with poverty, there are many ways to measure inequality. The World Development Indicators (WDI) databases present a wide range of inequality indicators such as the Gini index and the share of consumption or income held by each quintile. The measures offer different ways to capture and communicate aspects of the income distribution.

To monitor progress against its goal of boosting shared prosperity, the World Bank tracks growth in the consumption or income of the poorest 40 percent of the population in each country—the bottom 40 percent. Similarly, SDG target 10.1 aims for the income of the bottom 40 percent to be growing faster than the national average by 2030. Progress is measured by the difference between growth in the consumption or income of the bottom 40 percent and growth in the consumption or income of the mean of the population as a whole.

Inequality is a broader concept than poverty. It is defined in terms of an entire population, not just the portion below a certain poverty threshold. Most inequality measures do not depend on the mean of the distribution. How income is distributed is measured by the share of income or consumption accruing to different groups within the population ranked by income or consumption levels. Those in the group ranked lowest in personal income receive the smallest shares of total income.

In October 2014, after announcing its new goals of ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity around the world, the World Bank Group introduced the Global Database of Shared Prosperity. To generate measures of shared prosperity that are reasonably comparable, the World Bank Group has a standard approach for choosing time periods, data sources, and other parameters. The purpose of the Global Database is to allow cross-country comparisons and benchmarking.

Promoting shared prosperity

Promoting shared prosperity is defined as fostering growth of the incomes of the bottom 40 percent of the welfare distribution in every country. The bottom 40 percent differs by country, and over time it can change within a country. Because boosting shared prosperity is country-specific, there is no global numerical target; and at the country level the shared prosperity goal is unbounded (World Bank 2015). Improvements in shared prosperity require both a growing economy and a commitment to equity. Shared prosperity explicitly recognizes that while growth is necessary for improving economic welfare in a society, progress is measured by how those gains are shared with the society's poorest members. Moreover, in an inclusive society, it is not enough to simply get everyone above an absolute minimum standard of living; economic growth must increase the prosperity of poor people over time. Although the World Bank recognizes that welfare has many dimensions, the decision to measure shared prosperity based on consumption or income was motivated by the need for an indicator that is easy to understand, communicate, and measure—though the choice does not resolve all measurement difficulties. Indeed, shared prosperity comprises many dimensions of the well-being of the less well-off, and when analyzing shared prosperity in a given country, it is important to consider a wide range of indicators of welfare.

THE WAY FORWARD

National Sample Survey (NSS) data shows, that there has been a steady decline of men in agriculture over the last three decades. This trend can be conveniently termed as “Feminization of Indian Agriculture”. As more and more men have moved to non-farm work in the industrial and service sectors, women have remained in agriculture in substantive manner. Keeping in view women’s contribution in farming; the need of the hour is greater inclusion of women farmers in planning schemes & programmes, and also in developing strategies to successfully implement them. Realizing the present feminized agriculture scenario, women farmers contribution in agriculture and understanding that it is ‘Gender’ that differentiates the roles, responsibilities, resources, constraints and opportunities of women and men in agriculture, precise gender information is the need of the hour. Incorporating gender into agricultural development is the required for articulating gender perspectives in development activities. In line with the National Agricultural Policy-2000, provisions under National Policy for Farmers-2007 and recommendations of the Report on Doubling of Farmers Income, the strategy of the Government is to focus on

women farmers' empowerment and development welfare by making farming viable both for men and women. This may improve farm women's access to productive resources including agricultural extension services thereby bringing overall improvement in the lives of rural women. This may not only enhance the production and productivity of agricultural sector and improve overall national food security but would also smoothen the transition of women from being beneficiaries of the Programmes & Schemes to their active participation in shaping the empowerment.

CONCLUSION

The status of women in modern India is a sort of a paradox, on one hand she is at the peak of ladder of success; on the other hand she is mutely suffering the violence afflicted on her. Two Indian women Kalpana Chawla and Sunita Williams have made their mark in the whole universe by flying to space; still women education receives little attention in India, especially in rural areas. As compared with past women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality they have to still travel a long way. Women have left the secured domain of their home and are now in the battlefield of life, fully armoured with their talent. They had proven themselves, but as education is concerned, the gap between women and men is severe. Violence against women in its various forms is a violation of human rights, the very nature of which deprives women of their ability to enjoy fundamental freedoms. It is a serious obstacle to equality between women and men and perpetuates inequality. Violence against women intersects with multiple forms of discrimination. While violence against women is universal, its manifestations and women's personal experiences of it are shaped by factors such as economic status, race, class, religion etc.

The paper has found gender gaps in economic opportunities in three main sectors of the Indian economy. The occupations are different for both genders. The women are mostly engaged in low paid jobs and they are working in poor conditions. Likewise, women engaged mostly in low productivity jobs, agriculture and unpaid works in India. Women participation is very high in agriculture than men all over the period. However, it has started declining in agriculture and industry post 2010. A rise in women share of employment in service sector observed from 2010. The engagement of women in services concerted in jobs like nursing, teaching and providing secretarial services. Though, It has been found that men share of employment is higher than women in agriculture, industry and Services. In India, huge gap has found between labour force participation rate of men and women in the past two and half decades approximately. There is a need of strict policy to erase the inequalities among genders. There is need of immediate attention towards the share of employment of women by which women participation in economic activities can be increased, thereby, enhance the economic freedom and deciding power. The enhancement of women participation in economic activities can also impact the Indian economy at a greater extent.

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