

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It involves the building up of a society wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure.

One major therapy prescribed by woman empowerment advocates is empowering women through legislation for ensuring participation in political decision making. Such an approach provides the women with a constitutional platform to stand up to men, to raise their voice on issues concerning women oppression, subjugation and related issues and thus in effect, providing them with an identity in an orthodox male dominated socio-political set up, in addition to providing a much needed forum to seek redressal of problems directly affecting them: the true essence of empowerment.

Today the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. From early twenty century (national movement) their statuses have been changed slowly and gradually. The study reveals that women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by government. Gender gap exists regarding access to education and employment. Household decision making power and freedom of movement of women vary considerably with their age, education and employment status. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. Rural women are more prone to domestic violence than that of urban women. A large gender gap exists in political participation too. The study concludes by an observation that access to education and employment are only the enabling factors to empowerment, achievement towards the goal, however, depends largely on the attitude of the people towards gender equality.

Key words: Women Empowerment, Education, Health, Socio-Economic Status. Crimes against women, Policy implications.

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender-based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices. Women empowerment does not mean 'deifying women' rather it means replacing patriarchy with parity. In this regard, there are various facets of women empowerment, such as given hereunder:—

Human Rights or Individual Rights: A woman is a being with senses, imagination and thoughts; she should be able to express them freely. Individual empowerment means to have the self-confidence to articulate and assert the power to negotiate and decide.

Social Women Empowerment: A critical aspect of social empowerment of women is the promotion of gender equality. Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life.

Educational Women Empowerment: It means empowering women with the knowledge, skills, and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. It means making women aware of their rights and developing a confidence to claim them.

Economic and Occupational Empowerment: It implies a better quality of material life through sustainable livelihoods owned and managed by women. It means reducing their financial dependence on their male counterparts by making them a significant part of the human resource.

Legal Women Empowerment: It suggests the provision of an effective legal structure which is supportive of women empowerment. It means addressing the gaps between what the law prescribes and what actually occurs.

Political Women Empowerment: It means the existence of a political system favoring the participation in and control by the women of the political decision-making process and in governance.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Malala Yousafzai, there is no denying the fact that women in India have made a considerable progress in almost seven decades of Independence, but they still have to struggle against many handicaps and social evils in the male-dominated society. Many evil and masculine forces still prevail in the modern Indian society that resists the forward march of its women folk. It is ironical that a country, which has recently acclaimed the status of the first Asian country to accomplish its Mars mission in the maiden attempt, is positioned at the 29th rank among 146 countries across the globe on the basis of Gender Inequality Index. There has been amelioration in the position of women, but their true empowerment is still awaited.

Swami Vivekananda, one of the greatest sons of India, quoted that, *“There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved, and it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.”* Therefore, the inclusion of ‘Women Empowerment’ as one of the prime goals in the eight Millennium

Development Goals underscores the relevance of this fact. Thus, in order to achieve the status of a developed country, India needs to transform its colossal women force into an effective human resource and this is possible only through the empowerment of women.

Empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors is essential to building stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men, families, and communities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

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.
6. To offer useful Suggestions in the light of Findings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. In this paper an attempt has been taken to analyze the empowerment of in India. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the need of this study. Crime against Women The crimes against women y directly against orchestrating Women Empowerment in India. A report on the crimes against Women by the National Crime Records Bureau comes up with alarming statistics. The rate of incidence of crimes against women was reported at 11 per cent in West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh - among the highest. Among the major states, West Bengal and Assam saw approximately one fifth of reported crimes against women.

The suicide rate among women was approximately half that of men and there has not been much variation in it over the past decade. The prevalence of suicides was approximately 75 per cent for those below secondary level of education. Family problems were the major cause of suicides among both genders - 23 per cent for women and 21 per cent for men. This was followed by illness, at 18 per cent, for both genders. The study said among women who committed suicide, approximately 47 per cent were housewives, 64 per cent were married and 76 per cent were matriculates or below. Among men who ended their lives, 67 per cent were married and 73 per cent were matriculates or below.

PRESENT SITUATION OF WOMEN

2014: A record 7 female ministers are appointed in the Modi ministry, of whom 6 hold Cabinet rank, the highest number of female Cabinet ministers in any Indian government in history.

2017: On 25 March, Tanushree Pareek became the first female combat officer commissioned by the Border Security Force.

The literacy rate is lower for women compared to men: the literacy rate is 60.6% for females, while for males it is 81.3%. The 2011 census, however, indicated a 2001–2011 decadal literacy growth of 9.2%, which is slower than the growth seen during the previous decade. There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India: effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) in 2011 were 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. (population aged 15 or older, data from 2015). Official statistics show a dramatic increase in the number of reported crimes against women.

CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA

Acid throwing: A Thomas Reuters Foundation survey says that India is the fourth most dangerous place in the world for women to live in. In India, acid attacks on women who dared to refuse a man's proposal of marriage or asked for a divorce are a form of revenge. Acid is cheap, easily available, and the quickest way to destroy a woman's life. The number of acid attacks has been rising.

Child marriage: According to UNICEF's "State of the World's Children-2009" report, 47% of India's women aged 20–24 were married before the legal age of 18, rising to 56% in rural areas. The report also showed that 40% of the world's child marriages occur in India.

Domestic violence: Many studies have reported about the prevalence of the violence and have taken a criminal-justice approach, but most women refuse to report it. These women are guaranteed constitutional justice, dignity and equality but continue to refuse based on their sociocultural contexts. As the women refuse to speak of the violence and seek help, they are also not receiving the proper treatment.

Dowry: In 2011, the National Crime Records Bureau reported 8,618 dowry deaths. Unofficial estimates claim the figures are at least three times as high.

Female infanticide and sex-selective abortion: Female infanticide (killing of girl infants) is still prevalent in some rural areas. Sometimes this is infanticide by neglect, for example families may not spend money on critical medicines or withhold care from a sick girl. Continuing abuse of the dowry tradition has been one of the main reasons for sex-selective abortions and female infanticides in India.

Honor killings: People marrying without their family's acceptance, and sometimes for marrying outside their caste or religion. Haryana is notorious for incidents of honour killings. In 2010, the Supreme Court of India issued notice in regard to honor killings to the states of Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

Rape: New Delhi has the highest rate of rape-reports among Indian cities. Sources show that rape cases in India have doubled between 1990 and 2008.

Sexual harassment: The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act came into force in December 2013, to prevent Harassment of women at workplace. A study by Action Aid UK found that 80% of women in India had experienced sexual harassment ranging from unwanted comments, being groped or assaulted. Many incidents go unreported as the victims fear being shunned by their families.

WHY NEED OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The most famous saying said by the Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is “To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves”. In India, to empower the women, first it needs to kill all the demons killing women's rights and values in the society such as dowry system, illiteracy, sexual harassment, inequality, female infanticide, domestic violence against women, rape, prostitution, illegal trafficking and other issues. Gender discrimination in the nation brings cultural, social, economic and educational differences which push country back. The most effective remedy to kill such devils is making women empowered by ensuring the Right to Equality mentioned in the Constitution of India.

Giving priority to the gender equality facilitates women empowerment all over the country. To get the high level goal of women empowerment, it should be promoted from the childhood in each and every family. It needs women to be strong physically, mentally and socially. Since the better education can be started at home from childhood, the upliftment of women needs healthy family to bring a holistic development of the nation. Still in many backward areas, there is a trend of early marriage and childbirth because of the poverty, insecurity and illiteracy of the parents. In order to empower women, various steps have been taken by the government to prevent violence, social separation, gender discrimination and abuse against women.

108th Constitutional Amendment Bill (also called Women's Reservation Bill) was passed to reserve one-third of the seats for women only in the Lok Sabha to make them actively involved in every area. In other words also the seats for women have been reserved for their active participation without any limitation and competition. Various mass campaigns need to be organized in the backward rural areas to make them aware about the real values of women and all the facilities available by the government for their bright future. They need to be promoted for the survival and proper education of female child to really bring the dream of women empowerment come true.

Why Women Empowerment is Important?

- Under-employed and unemployed
- Equally competent and intelligent
- Talented
- Overall development of society
- Economic Benefits
- Reduction in domestic violence
- Reduction in corruption
- National Development

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT SCHEMES

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme
2. One Stop Centre Scheme
3. Women Helpline Scheme
4. UJJAWALA : A Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation
5. Working Women Hostel
6. Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme For the Children of Working Mothers
7. Ministry approves new projects under Ujjawala Scheme and continues existing projects
8. SWADHAR Greh (A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances)
9. Revision under IGMSY in Accordance with National Food Security Act, 2013 in XIIth Plan
10. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)
11. NARI SHAKTI PURASKAR
12. Awardees of Stree Shakti Puruskar, 2014 & Awardees of Nari Shakti Puruskar
13. Awardees of Rajya Mahila Samman & Zila Mahila Samman
14. Archived Maternity Benefit Programme
15. Mahila police Volunteers
16. Mahila E-Haat

CHALLENGES

There are several challenges that are plaguing the issues of women's right in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India.

Education: While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since independence where education is concerned, the gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India. The gender bias is in higher education, specialized professional trainings which hit women very hard in employment and attaining top leadership in any field.

Poverty: Poverty is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradication of poverty should be a national goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy. Due to this, women are exploited as domestic helps.

Health and Safety: The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country and are an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned.

Professional Inequality: This inequality is practiced in employment and promotions. Women face countless handicaps in male customized and dominated environs in Government Offices and Private enterprises.

Morality and Inequality: Due to gender bias in health and nutrition there is unusually high mortality rate in women reducing their population further especially in Asia, Africa and china.

Household Inequality: Household relations show gender bias in innitesimally small but signicant manners all across the globe, more so, in India e.g. sharing burden of housework, childcare and menial works by so called division of work.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. There are several Government programmes and NGOs in the Country, there is still a wide gap that exists between those under protection and those not.
2. Poverty and illiteracy add to these complications, The Empowerment of Women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety.
3. Empowerment of Women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved. This could be possible only by adopting denite social and economic policies with a view of total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings.
4. In order to create a sustainable world, we must begin to Empower Women.

SUGGESTIONS

1. The rst and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grassroots problem. Hence, education for women has to be paid special attention.
2. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights.
3. Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in the society.
4. Strict implementation of Programmes and Acts should be there to curb the mal-practices prevalent in the society.

CONCLUSION

“When women move forward the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves”. It is essential as their thought and their value systems lead the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation. The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the mainstream of development. Women empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed income and property so that they may stand on their feet and build up their identity in the society. The Empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in

which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

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