

A STUDY ON EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to analyze the status of Women Empowerment in India and highlights the Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment. Empowerment of women is a critical aspect of societal development, particularly in a country as diverse and populous as India. This research paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the various dimensions of women's empowerment in India. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including surveys, interviews, and literature review, this study examines the status quo of women's empowerment in India, identifies the key challenges and barriers hindering progress, and explores potential solutions and strategies to foster empowerment. The paper delves into various aspects such as education, employment, health, and social norms to understand the multifaceted nature of women's empowerment. Additionally, it investigates the role of government policies, NGOs, and grassroots movements in promoting gender equality and women's rights. The findings of this study aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse on gender equality and inform policymakers, activists, and stakeholders about effective interventions to enhance the empowerment of women in India.

KEYWORDS: Women Empowerment, Gender Equality, Women Rights & Security, Education, Employment.

INTRODUCTION

The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti). The National Policy for The Empowerment of Women came was passed in 2001. Women's economic empowerment refers to the ability for women to enjoy their right to control and benefit from the resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and well-being.

As a developing country India still faces major problems of unemployment and under employment. These both problems can be reduced through creation of employment opportunities, business activities, providing educational facilities, etc. made by the countries. It is therefore necessary for the nations to ensure an equitable distribution of wealth. Economic growth and development of a country depends upon its citizens. Food and shelter are the basic facilities needed by the mankind across the world. Several people in many countries are suffering due to non-availability of the basic needs in spite of the technological advancement both economic and technological amongst them. Globalization and increased procedure of communication technology have brought the countries nearer but the poverty lead problems still remain. The way out is “empowerment of women” and providing “equal status to men and women” in all fields. It is through the women; the development of families and nations take place. Any development without considering the role of women and their upliftment cannot be successful.

India has become a Centre for growing commerce day by day. And while it is prospering from the business front, our Indian women have left no stone unturned to make the most out of it. With minimum to no support women in business have proved that leading a company all by themselves is not beyond their understanding. Women's economic empowerment includes women's ability to participate equally in existing markets; their access to and control over productive resources, access to decent work, control over their own time, lives and bodies; and increased voice, agency and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all. Women empowerment refers to increasing the inner, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and societies of women. Women's empowerment in India is deeply dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban / rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age.

Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of cruelty, misuse, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown uneven sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today.

Women in Present Times:

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few periods. With a decline in their status from the ancient to medieval times, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, their history has been exciting. The situation of women in India. In Indian society, women are traditionally discriminated against and excluded from political and family related decisions. Despite the large amount of work women must do on a daily basis to support their families, their opinions are rarely acknowledged and their rights are limited.

However, in the last decades, the situation of women in India has greatly improved. An increasing number of Indian women are entering local and national politics and since 2015, the country has been under the rule of a woman, PratibhaPatil. She is the first woman to hold this position since the creation of the Indian Republic in 1950.

Indian society does indeed recognize many women's rights, including the rights to political involvement, family allowance and set up a business. Nevertheless, in rural areas, poverty and a lack of information represent real barriers to women's independence and empowerment. Programs aimed at advancing human rights, literacy and microfinance are therefore necessary in order to restore Indian women to the place they deserve and open doors to a better future.

Women's Rights and Security in India:

Women's Rights:

No country today can claim to have achieved gender equality. Vast challenges remain for women in the 21st century. Women account for half the world's population, yet many face judgements in work, health care and education, or suffer physical and sexual violence. They are understated on most decision-making bodies and in positions of economic power. They continue to earn systematically less than men for the same work and are more prone to occupy precarious, low-paid jobs. In many parts of the world, girls are still more likely than boys to stay out of school. The scourge of violence against women is also a main issue in every country and internationally. No nation is immune. Records published by the World Health Organization in 2016 estimate that one out of every three women worldwide has experienced violence at the hands of a partner, or sexual violence by someone other than a partner.

Discrimination and violence against women are rooted in gender stereotypes, harmful cultural norms and discriminatory legislation. Unequal social and legal statuses prevent women and girls from enjoying their human rights in all areas of life, from maternal and health services to education, equal opportunities and fair pay. We believe that parliament as an institution, as well as men and women MPs, must address these issues as a priority.

Women's Rights Policies relating to women's rights have had a positive trajectory in the past few decades with the central government articulating many progressive measures to advance gender equality in social, economic, and political arenas. The Government of India (GoI) has two main bodies to advance gender equality: The Ministry of Women and Child Development and the National Commission for Women, which is an autonomous organization under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Both bodies work on national- and state-level legal and social policies to advance gender equality. The Ministry has widely implemented local-level micro-finance schemes to advance economic opportunities for rural women. The National Commission for Women has been instrumental in creating legislative changes, and has set up Complaint and Investigate Cells at the state level. The Grievance Cells receive complaints of gender-based violence and are mandated to investigate, provide referrals and counselling, and

ultimately report on such cases. With a vibrant women's rights movement in India, there are continuous demands for better laws, provisions, and accountability for implementation.

On the grounds of gender equality, here are 11 rights an Indian woman holds in India:

- Women have the right to equal pay
- Women have the right to dignity and decency
- Women have the right against workplace harassment
- Women have a right against domestic violence
- Female sexual assault victims have the right to keep their identity anonymous
- Women have the right to get free legal aid
- Women have right not to be arrested at night
- Women have the right to register virtual complaints
- Women have the right against indecent representation
- Women have the right against being stalked
- Women have a right to Zero FIR

Unfortunately, many of the women do not know their rights. We live in a world where goddesses are worshiped and women get tamed, harassed, abused, raped, and kidnapped every single day. Despite this, women play an essential role in building peace in their local communities. Research by Womankind Worldwide, Action Aid, and the Institute of Development Studies has shown that women are highly active in public level peacebuilding during and after conflict, coming together to create change.

Women' security:

Our work on women's rights includes a focus on the agenda on women, peace and security, based on the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325 adopted in 2000, which sets out international standards and commitments on the issue. UN Women works to protect women's rights and enhance their security by supporting gender mainstreaming and strengthening gender-responsive rule of law institutions by advising on law and policy reforms, promoting access to justice for women and girls, and supporting accountability for conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. UN Women is an active member of the Global Focal Point (GFP) on Rule of Law and supports efforts to enhance knowledge and capacity to improve women's access to justice and security in conflict and post-conflict settings, and compliance with gender policies at the country level.

“Almost 20 years since the adoption of resolution 1325, we don't just need to be at the peace table. It's time to redesign the table,” said Sharon Bhagwan-Rolls, Chair of Board of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict, speaking at a side event on 15 March at the 63rd session on the UN Commission on the Status of Women. “We are having this discussion with the singular goal—to close the implementation gap,” said Mavic Cabrera-Balleza, Chief Executive Officer of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, moderator for the event titled, “The Road to 2020: Accelerating Action on Women, Peace and Security”.

As the 20th anniversary of the groundbreaking UN Security Council resolution 1325 approaches in 2020, experts and advocates on the women, peace and security agenda came together on 15 March to take stock of progress and the way forward at the event organized by UN Women, the Governments of Germany, Canada, Namibia and Uruguay, in partnership with the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network, NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders and the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict.

In 2000, resolution 1325 became the guiding Security Council resolution on women, peace and security. The resolution affirmed the importance of the participation of women and inclusion of gender perspectives in peace negotiations, humanitarian planning, peacekeeping operations, and post-conflict peacebuilding and governance. “After nearly two decades, we have not been able to realize the agenda in its fullness,” said UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. “We know that we have irrefutable evidence on the positive impact of women’s participation in peace and security. We know for sure that women’s meaningful participation makes peace processes more durable. We know for sure that women peacekeepers increase the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions to respond to needs of communities they serve.”

In many parts of North India son preference is a widely practiced wonder. Some preference has direct linkages to sex-selective abortion (illegal across India; however, enforcement by both police and some doctors is still lacking), and discrimination of girl children in access to health, nutrition, and education. Research conducted by the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) found that, although not universal, particularly in households where there is more than one daughter there are significant differences in food and health levels between male and female children. Additionally, at the household level, incest, rape and domestic violence continue to hinder women’s development across India. 40% of all sexual abuse cases in India are incest, and 92% of the incest cases had a known member of the household as the perpetrator. Dowry related deaths, domestic violence, gang rape of lower caste women by upper caste men, and physical violence by the police towards ethnic women all contribute to women’s insecurity in India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The empowerment of women in India has been a subject of extensive research and scholarly inquiry due to its significance for sustainable development and social progress. This literature review synthesizes key findings and insights from existing studies on women's empowerment in India across various dimensions including economic, educational, social, and political empowerment.

According to Kabeer, 2005; Desai & Joshi, 2010, Economic empowerment is considered crucial for enhancing women's agency and autonomy. Studies have highlighted the importance of women's participation in the workforce and access to income-generating opportunities for poverty alleviation and economic development. However, challenges such as gender wage gap,

occupational segregation, and limited access to credit and financial services persist, hindering women's economic empowerment in India.

Education plays a pivotal role in empowering women by enhancing their knowledge, skills, and decision-making capabilities. Despite significant improvements in female literacy rates, disparities in access to education persist, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Studies have emphasized the importance of addressing barriers such as gender stereotypes, early marriage, and lack of infrastructure to promote girls' education and ensure equitable outcomes (Duflo, 2001; Kingdon&Unni, 2001).

Social empowerment involves challenging traditional gender norms and promoting gender equality in social relationships and institutions. Research indicates that women in India continue to face discrimination and violence within familial and societal contexts, perpetuated by patriarchal attitudes and cultural practices. Efforts to empower women socially require comprehensive strategies that address root causes of gender-based violence and promote women's rights and agency (Sen, 2001; Krishnan et al., 2010).

Political empowerment encompasses women's participation and representation in political processes and decision-making structures. Despite constitutional provisions and affirmative action measures, women remain underrepresented in elected bodies and leadership positions. Studies have identified factors such as socio-economic status, education, and cultural barriers as significant determinants of women's political participation. Enhancing women's political empowerment requires addressing structural barriers and promoting inclusive governance mechanisms (Chattopadhyay&Duflo, 2004; Iyer et al., 2012).

Several cross-cutting themes emerge from the literature, including the intersectionality of gender with other social identities such as caste, class, and religion, which exacerbate disparities in empowerment outcomes. Additionally, the role of legal frameworks, policy interventions, and grassroots initiatives in promoting women's empowerment is emphasized, highlighting the importance of multi-sectoral approaches.

OBJECTIVES

- To avoid sex-selective elimination that is gender skewed.
- To guarantee the female child's survival and protection.
- To guarantee the girl child's education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Secondary data sources provide the foundation of the study. The essential data on women's empowerment schemes in India and its constituent parts is gathered from a variety of books, periodicals, and websites covering relevant subjects. Government of India programs for women's empowerment and well being.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, has developed a number of programs, social welfare schemes, health and nutrition initiatives, scholarships for women's

empowerment, and initiatives pertaining to girl child pregnancy, mothers, ward members, Anganwadi Workers, Women Health Volunteers, women living in rural and tribal areas, women who are widowed or destitute, elderly women, women self-help groups (SHG), women entrepreneurs, and teenage girls. Women and children who belong to Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC), Minority Category, below the poverty line (BPL), and General Category are also assisted by it. This program offers support for self-employment, education, training, financial aid/cash, loan subsidies, scholarships, nutrition, and other services. The care, development, empowerment, and protection of women and children are the main objectives. Scheme for BetiBachaoBetiPadhao, The Indian government's Ministry of Women and Child Development.

The Government of India sponsors the BetiBachao, BetiPadhao (Save female child, educate girl kid) Central Government Program. This program's main objective is to raise awareness and increase the effectiveness of social programs intended for women. It also seeks to support girls' education and honor the girl child. An initiative called BetiBachao, BetiPadhao (BBBP) has been launched to tackle the problem of the falling Child Sex Ratio (CSR). All states and union territories are included in this program, which is being carried out through a nationwide campaign and targeted multi-sectoral action in 100 districts with poor CSR. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and the Ministry of Human Resource Development have all joined forces to undertake this program. On January 22, 2015, Prime Minister Modi announced the initiative in Panipat, Haryana. In honor of the International Day of the Girl Child, the Prime Minister demanded that female foeticide be eradicated.

Analysis & Interpretation

This paper reviews the evidence on both sides of the empowerment-development relationship. It first shows that poverty and lack of opportunity class inequality between men and women, so that when economic development reduces poverty, the condition of women improves on two counts: first, when poverty is reduced, the condition of everyone, including women, improves, and second, gender inequality declines as poverty declines, so the condition of women improves more than that of men with development. Economic development, however, is not enough to bring about complete equality between men and women. Policy action is still necessary to achieve equality between genders. Such policy action would be unambiguously justified if empowerment of women also stimulates further development, starting a virtuous cycle. This essay contends that empowering women does indeed change society's choices in important ways, although the usual depiction of women as always making the best decisions for long-term development is somewhat overstated. The result here is a more composed, somewhat more pessimistic picture of the potential for women's empowerment and economic development to mutually reinforce each other than that offered by the more strident voices on either side of the debate.

Enhancements in the areas of social, political, educational, health, and economic standing are all included in the category of women's empowerment. Education is one of the most important factors that determines empowerment. According to the NFHS-5, women aged 15 to 49 are almost 13% less literate than males as of 2019–21. The percentage of women over six who have ever attended school has slightly increased from 68.8% to 71.8%, while just 41% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 have finished ten or more years of education, compared to 50.2% of men in this age group. Going ahead, achieving gender equity in education will continue to be a top governmental objective. Economic empowerment encompasses assets, finances, and employment as its second domain. According to the data, in 2019–21, 43.3% of women aged 15–49 own a home or land either alone or jointly with others, up from 38.4% in 2015–16. With a notable increase of almost 25% from the previous cycle, 77.4% of women currently possess bank or savings accounts that they actively utilize. However, the employment statistics is still not at all promising. The female labor force participation rate has been under pressure with a rise in the working-age population; according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey, it is 20%, while it is 50.6% for males. (PLFS 2019–20)

The weight of unpaid household chores and child care in married couples frequently influences women's participation in the labor field. The NFHS-5 reports that a noteworthy 23.3% of women aged 20–24—a 3.5% decrease from 2015–16—are married before the legal age, compared to a smaller but nevertheless considerable 17.7% of males aged 25–29. Even while the general fertility rate has decreased, the shamefully high 43% teenage fertility rate among women between the ages of 15 and 19 may be a key indicator of why women are not joining or remaining in the labor. Furthermore, in 2019–20, only 13.6% of children under the age of five attended pre-primary school, which probably increased the caregiving responsibility placed on women. Additional facets of empowerment are found in the sociopolitical sphere, where they materialize at the nexus of decision-making and voice. Remarkably, 88.7% of married women often make decisions on their own health care, major home purchases, and trips to friends or family. This is really positive and paves the way for more progress in the field.

The internet is one of the more recent virtual commons and areas of expression, and the evidence on this is shocking. The percentage of women who say they have ever accessed the internet is 33%, whereas the percentage for males is 57%. This indicates a significant gender gap in internet usage. This is particularly pertinent to the distribution of scheme updates and benefits through mobile devices, which is being marketed as a one-size-fits-all option in light of the nation's growing mobile usage. It's crucial to balance these aspirations with reality. As of right now, just 54% of women in the nation own a cell phone, down from 45.9% in 2015–16

CONCLUSION

In order to really bring women empowerment in the Indian society, we need to understand and eliminate the main cause of the ill practices against women which are patriarchal and male dominated system of the society. We need to be open- minded and change the old mindset against women together with the constitutional and other provisions.

As women constitute almost one-half of India's population, without their engagement and empowerment, rapid economic progress is out of the question. For economic growth to be really inclusive, women empowerment is of utmost value. It is crucial for achieving sustainable economic development of our country and even beyond. Still a large part of women do not have sufficient autonomy regarding the value choices for their own life. The data also revealed that there is a necessity to look beyond economic resources or material prosperity and into cultural and social incenses, which are playing an important role in shaping the women's autonomy and empowerment. Along with government, civil society organizations and all other stake holders must come forward and involve in the women empowerment process is the need of the hour.

Overall, the literature underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of women's empowerment in India, influenced by socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. While progress has been made in certain areas, persistent challenges remain, requiring sustained efforts and targeted interventions to achieve gender equality and women's rights.

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