



## Women Empowerment in India: Issues and Challenges

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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. Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender based discrimination. We can analyze their conditions through a number of parameters like their involvement in household decision making right, freedom of thought, financial authority, gender equality, political participation, media exposure, access to education etc. It is noticed that still gender inequality is a serious concern and is prevailing dominantly in our society. This as an agenda has been on top of the lists of most government plans & programs as well. Efforts have been made on a regular basis across nations to address this issue and enhance the socio-economic status of women. However, it has been observed that most of the policies and programs view empowerment in the economic sense only working in the belief that economic self-reliance empowers women ignoring other variables like health, education, literacy etc.

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## 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. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban / rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender based violence and political participation. However there are significant gap between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level. 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 is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, 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. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate 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. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This has been an area of interest for many people and many enlightened us with their knowledge regarding the work done for women upliftment. Time to time things have been looked where there is scope of more improvement and based on the findings a lot has been planned from various dimensions for the betterment.

**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, 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.

**H. Subrahmanyam (2011)** compares women education in India at present and Past. Author highlighted that there has a good progress in overall enrolment of girl students in schools. The term empowers means to give lawful power or authority to act. It is the process of acquiring some activities of women.

**M. BhavaniSankaraRao (2011)** has highlighted that health of women members of SHG have certainly taken a turn to better. It clearly shows that health of women members discuss among themselves about health related problems of other members and their children and make them aware of various Government provisions specially meant for them.

**Doepke M. Tertilt M. (2011)** Does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development? This study is an empirical analysis suggesting that money in the hands of mothers benefits children. This study developed a series of non cooperative family bargaining models to understand what kind of frictions can give rise to the observed empirical relationship.

**Giriappa (1997)** analysed the women empowerment with the corresponding levels of discrimination

and effectiveness of decision-making by women in different rural enterprises and concluded that the female headed households were effective in taking decision in respect of work mobility, schooling, health care, asset creation, employment generation and social participation in low social status households. The informal empowerment was wide spread through women earning members, their decisions were subjected to various degrees of discrimination by males.

**Duflo E. (2011)** Women's Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge The study argues that the inter relationships of the Empowerment and Development are probably too weak to be self sustaining and that continuous policy commitment to equality for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women.

**Sethuraman K. (2008)** The Role of Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence in child Growth and under nutrition in a Tribal and Rural Community in South India. This research paper explores the relationship between Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence, maternal nutritional status and the nutritional status and growth over six months in children aged 6 to 24 months in a rural and tribal community. This longitudinal observational study undertaken in rural Karnataka. India included tribal and rural subjects.

**Venkata Ravi and Venkatraman (2005)** focused on the effects of SHG on women participation and exercising control over decision making both in family matters and in group activities.

### 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. 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.

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, out of 7 female 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 numbers of acid attacks have 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 socio cultural contexts. As the women refuse to speak of the violence and need 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, and 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.

108<sup>th</sup> 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 fields 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
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 Benet Programme

15. Mahila police Volunteers

16. Mahila E-Haat

## **ISSUES RELATED TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA**

1. Women empowerment initiatives
2. Gender disparity
3. Vulnerable, marginalized and women in difficult circumstances

### **A. Women Empowerment Initiatives**

- The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women.
- Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided for reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities for women, laying a strong foundation for their participation in decision making at the local levels.
- India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993.
- The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome Document adopted by the UNGA Session on Gender Equality and Development & Peace for the 21st century, titled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action" have been unreservedly endorsed by India for appropriate follow up.
- The Government of India attempted to gender sensitize the Budget initially through the Women's Component Plan (by state governments also) and then more intensively with Gender Responsive Budgeting institutionalized through the Gender Budget Statement published every year since 2005 - 2006 with the Union Budget (in some states as well). This highlights the budgetary allocations for 100 percent women specific programmes (Part A) and those programmes in which at least 30 percent flows to women (Part B) in the annual expenditure budget.
- The women's movement and a wide-spread network of non-Government Organizations which have strong grass-roots presence and deep insight into women's concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women.

### **B. Gender Disparity**

- However, there still exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the Constitution, legislation, policies, plans, programmes, and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of

the status of women in India, on the other. This has been analyzed extensively in the Report of the High level Committee on the Status of Women in India, 2015.

- Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last few decades. Social stereotyping, violence at the domestic and societal levels, acute wage differentials and discrimination and continuing commoditization in society is some of the other manifestations. Migration, skewed sex ratio, environmental degradation have added to the women's vulnerability.
- The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms, and practices.
- Consequently, the access of women particularly those belonging to weaker sections including Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes/ Other backward Classes and minorities, majority of whom are in the rural areas and in the informal, unorganized sector – to education, health and productive resources, among others, is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded.
- The government has recognized these paradoxes and attempted to address these in policies, legislation and programmes. Development programmes introduced to bring gender equality have produced mixed results. Legislative changes have faced resistance in their implementation due to social, cultural and religious mores.

### **C. Vulnerable, Marginalized and Women in Difficult Circumstances**

The following girls/women are considered as vulnerable and marginalized and in difficult circumstances.

#### **Women Impacted by Violence**

- Domestic violence
- Rape victims
- Women in trafficking
- Women suffer under witch-hunting
- Acid attacking

#### **Women impacted by internal displacement, disasters and Migration**

- Either for economic reasons
- Conflict e.g. refugee women
- Women who have been displaced because of SEZ, building of dams etc,
- Women impacted by natural or manmade disasters

#### **Women and Labour**

- Domestic labour
- Bonded labour
- Destitute women who are homeless

#### **Women in Agriculture**

- Land less women
- Marginal farmers
- Agricultural workers

#### **Women and Health**

- Women affected by HIV/ AIDS

- Women suffering from life threatening diseases
- Women with Disabilities
- Elderly Women

### **Slum Dwellers Women Prisoners Women belonging to Ethnic and Socially Vulnerable Communities**

- Women belonging to Ethnic and Religious Minorities (especially Muslims)
- Women belonging to Socially Backward Communities (SC, ST,OBC)

### **Single Women**

- Adolescent Girls
- Widows
- Women whose husbands are missing due to Conflict
- Migrant women (Economic Migration)
- Divorcee Women
- Unmarried Women
- Unwed Mothers

### **Homeless and Destitute Women**

The above categories of women find themselves more vulnerable on account of their unique social, cultural circumstances or because they are victims of violence or abuse. These groups require special interventions to address their needs.

### **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 sand 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 small but significant 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 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 first 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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