

Women Empowerment in India: Social and Economic Upliftment

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Abstract

The empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. Because the Word Empowerment of women is still an illusion. In the real scenario, there is picture which is still contradictory. Women play an important role in the family and society, but they were discriminated in all essential areas of life, whether in terms of education, income, partner choice, inheritance laws, property rights, decision-making process, community organization or access to leadership positions in education, business or politics. The need of empowerment of women thus arises from this harsh social scenario. And hence women empowerment has become a major task now-a-days. Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control and transformative action. Women Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal right to women to make them confident enough to claim and enjoy their rights, to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and well being. The progress of any nation is inevitably linked with social and economic upliftment of women in that country.

The role of women is now widely recognized in the sphere of human development and accepted in most parts of the universe. The need to analyze the women empowerment arises because the recent considerable importance that the government of India has placed on this concept. The study is based on the secondary sources. The general objective of this work is to evaluate women empowerment due to social and economic upliftment which ultimately leads to the overall development of the country. The study reveals that women of India enjoy a little less status in today's scenario. They are comparatively in lower position than the men. Through the study it has been found that acceptance of an equal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. Government and its agencies, NGO's and several national and international organizations are working for the empowerment of women. But this work requires multidimensional approach and resources and their role and work with missionary zeal and commitment in the field of Education, Employment and change in social structure.

1-Introduction

Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai famously quoted “I raise up my voice-not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard----- . We cannot succeed when half of us are held back,” and that sentiment precisely outlines the basis of new age women empowerment. Discrimination against women is rampant all over the world even in this 21st century. Patriarchal societies in most countries are adept at exploitation as well as victimization of women. Even though about 50% of the world’s population consists of women, but unfortunately most of them are denied basic rights like education, freedom of speech, voting power and even independent identity. Crimes against women are reported from all over the world. There still remain questions about acceptance of women empowerment in the most advanced countries, while developing nations and nations under political duress are far from achieving the desired status.

In India, in theory women enjoy a status of equality with the men as per constitutional and legal provisions. Although, our country has taken various steps towards inclusion and empowerment of women in all fields of life but with headlines about dowry killing, female foeticides and domestic violence still making the newspapers, put a silent question mark behind the two words. Today, true development and growth can only be achieved by taking successful steps in eliminating deep-rooted ideologies of gender bias and discrimination like the confinement of women to the private domestic realm, restrictions on their mobility, poor access to health services, nutrition, education and employment and exclusion from the public and political sphere.

2- Meaning and Importance of women Empowerment : Review of Literature

‘Women Empowerment’ refers to complete emancipation of women from socio-economic shackles of dependency and deprivations. Empowerment of women would mean encouraging women to be self reliant, economically independent, have positive self esteem, generate confidence to face any difficult situation and incite active participation in various socio-political development endeavours.

Empowerment of women is a socio-political ideal envisioned in relation to the wider framework of women’s rights. It is a process that leads women to realise their full potential, their rights to have access to opportunities, resources and choices with the freedom of the decision making both within and outside home. Empowerment would be achieved only when advancement in the conditions of women is accompanied by their ability to influence the direction of social change gained through equal opportunities in economic, social, and political spheres of life. ¹

The word ‘Women Empowerment’ means that the women have the power or capacity to regulate their day-to-day lives in the social, political and economic terms. Empowerment is an active and multi dimensional process, which enables women to realize their identity and power in all aspects of life.

The growing concept is to accept women as individuals capable of making rational and educated decisions about them as well as the society, increasing and improving the economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal right as men, achieve internationally agreed goal for development and sustainability and improve the quality of life for their families and communities.

As an empowerment of women has emerged as an important issue in recent times, several studies have been undertaken by various research scholars, policy makers and both Government and Non-Government organizations on various aspects of women empowerment in India as well as in abroad. Nobel laureate Amartya sen explains 'empowerment' as the freedom to lead different types of life in reflected in the person's capability set which depends in personal capability set which depends on personal characteristic and social arrangements.²

World Bank (2001) defines empowerment as "the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.' United Nations (2001) defines empowerment as the process by which women take control and ownership of their lives through the expansion of their choices.

Amartya Sen (1997) stressed the importance of empowerment of women which is about change in favour of those who previously exercised little control over their lives. This change has two components, the first is control over resources (financial, physical and human) and the second is control over ideology, belief, values and attitudes. Hemalata Prasad has comprehensively given the parameters of empowerment of women as follows-

- Enhance self esteem and self confidence in women.
- Build a position image of women by recognizing their contribution to the society and the economy.
- Develop in them an ability to think critically.
- Faster decision making action through collective process.
- Enable women to make informed choices in areas like education, employment and health especially reproductive health.
- Ensure equal participation in development process.
- Provide information, knowledge and skill for economic independence.
- Enhance access to legal literacy and information related to their rights and entitlements in the society with a view to enhance their participation in all areas.³

A strong patriarchal society with deep rooted socio-cultural values continues to affect the progress of women's empowerment in the country. The need of the hour is an egalitarian society where there should be no place for gender superiority. Aim of Government policies should be identify and eliminate forces that are directed towards keeping the tradition of male dominance over its female counterpart alive.

Women constitute roughly 50% of the nation's population and a majority of them remain economically dependent, without employment. Many of them are even unaware of the fact that they are eligible for positions that men enjoy. The result is that the economy of the country is weak due to under utilization of available human resources. Women are generally considered less competent, both intellectually as well as physically as compared with men. As a result the opportunities extended towards them become biased without actual evaluation of their competencies. While scientific data proclaims women to be more adapt at multi-tasking than men, they still remain the second choice for employers in the country. In major parts of India, as well as the world, women are still denied basic education and are never allowed to pursue, higher education and this deficiency is definitely holding economics backward.

3- Methodology

The role of women is now widely recognized in the sphere of human development and accepted in most parts of the Universe. The need to analyse the women empowerment arises because the recent considerable importance that the Government of India has placed on this concept. The Study analysed the roll of both Government and Non-Government organizations by evaluating their performance strategies in empowering women in India. The General objectives of this study is to evaluate women empowerment which ultimately leads to the overall development of the country.

3.1- Objectives of The Study

The present study "Women Empowerment in India : Social and economic upliftment" has been formulated with the following objectives:

- To analyse the importance of women empowerment.
- To evaluate the present status of women in the society.
- To analyse the strategies adopted and efforts made by both GOs and NGOs in empowering women.
- To analyse the impact of the reforms undertaken.
- To assess the impact on economic and social empowerment of women.
- To review the challenges and constraints in empowerment.
- To evaluate the role of women empowerment in the overall development of the country.

For accomplishing the objectives of this study secondary data have been utilized. Secondary data are the data collected by different agencies for other than the present purpose and this data has been collected from various publications and other scholarly works which includes Govt and Non-Govt, Publications and Reports, academic journals, newspaper and various websites etc.

3.2- Significance of the study

The present study is a significant attempt to evaluate empowerment of women which will prove helpful to analyse lacuna in the developing economy like India. Further, it can be helpful to explore some untouched areas where potential for development exists. The study will also prove helpful in empowering women by generating employment ways and making the country self-reliant. The study may also be equally important for all those interested in undertaking similar studies in the context of other aspects of the concept because certain methods and approaches involved and employed should be helpful in carrying out further studies of similar nature.

4- Analysis

Women represent nearly half of the world population, but receive less than 20 percent of the world income and own less than two percent of the world's property. As 2011 census, women constitute 48.5 percent of the India's population. Women discriminate in terms of literacy rates, labour participation rates and earnings. Economic empowerment of women led to the empowerment of women in several aspects such as socio-economic, opportunity, property rights, political representation, social equality personal rights, family development, community development and at the last the nation's development. Hence empowerment of women has emerged as an important issue in recent times. The major strategies of women empowerment include social, economic and political empowerment and gender justice along with demographic justice.

4.1- To words empowerment of Women

- Setting up of the National commission for women by an Act of parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women.
- The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment (1992) to provide reservation of seats in the local bodies of Panchayats and Municipalities.
- India's ratification of the convention on Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) in 1993 to secure equal rights for women.
- Upgradation of Department of women and child Development to a Ministry under the independent charge of Cabinet Minister for women and child development with effect from 30th January, 2006.

The Principle of Gender Justice and Gender Equality is enshrined in the India's constitution in its Preamble, fundamental rights, Directive Principles of state policy and fundamental rights. The various articles like articles 14, 16, 19, 23, 39, 40, 42, and 51 A (e) are framed for ensuring gender justice and equality and also empower the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. It started as a movement under the Priministership of Mrs Indira Gandhi, a scheme known as Indira Mahila

Yojana was launched, and UNDP also incorporated issues of women's social and economic upliftment as a primary objective.

4.1.1 – National Policy For Empowerment Of Women 2001

The Government of India has declared 2001 as women's empowerment year. The national policy for empowerment of women (NPEW) was formulated with an aim about women's advancement, development and empowerment. The NPEW laid down detailed Prescriptions to provide equal access to women to health care, quality employment, at all levels, carrier and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public life, equal opportunities for women's participation in decision making and mainstreaming gender concerns in the development process. NPEW envisaged introduction of a gender perspective in the budgeting process as an operational strategy.⁴

4.1.2- National Mission For Employment Of Women

The Ministry of women and child development GOI has launched a programme called, National Mission for empowerment of women (NMEW) on 8th March 2010 with an objective to empower women socially, economically and educationally by securing convergence of scheme / programmes of different ministries / departments of GOI as well as the state Governments.

4.1.3- National Policy For Women 2016- DRAFT

Articulating a vision for empowerment of women ministry of women and child Development GOI has drafted a new National Policy for women 2016. The mission of this policy is to create an effective framework to enable the process of developing policies, programmes and practices which will ensure equal rights and opportunities for women in the family, community, workplace and in governance.

4.2- Schemes For Social And Economic Upliftment Of Women

The ministry of women and child development, as the nodal agency for all matters pertaining to welfare, development and empowerment of women, has evolved schemes and programmes for their benefit. These schemes are spread across a broader spectrum such as women's need for shelter, security, safety, legal aid, justice, information, maternal health, food, nutrition as well as their need for economic sustenance through skill development, education and access to credit and marketing.

4.2.1- Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)

IRDP is a beneficiary oriented programme with the objective of assisting the families below the income level of Rs 11000/ per year and 30 % benefits are allocated for women.⁵

4.2.2- Training For Rral Youth Self- Employment (TRYSEM)

This programme was to train rural youth in the age group of 18 to 35 years for the provision of self / wage employment and 40% of funds allocated under this scheme is meant for women.

4.2.3- Development Of Women And Children In Rural Areas (DWCRA)

This scheme as a sub-scheme of IRDP was introduced in 1983-84. The programme is meant for the development of women and children in rural areas by providing a revolving fund of Rs 25000/ to a group of 10-15 women belonging to poverty group of undertaking economic activities and ancillary services like nutrition, health, adult education facilities etc.⁶

4.2.4- Shwawlamban Programme

This programme was launched in 1982-83 with assistance from the Norwegian Agency for Development corporation (NORAD). The objectives of the programme is to provide training and skills to women to facilitate them to obtain employment or self employment on sustained basis. The first groups under the scheme are the poor and needy women, women from weaker section of the society such as SC/ST etc.

4.2.5- Support to Training And Employment Programme (STEP)

This programme seeks to provide skills and new knowledge to poor and assetless women in the traditional sectors. Under this project, women beneficiaries are organized into viable and cohesive groups or cooperatives. A comprehensive package of services such as health care, elementary education, crèche facility, market linkage, etc are provided besides access to credit.

4.2.6- Mahila Samridhhi Yojana (MSY)

This scheme was a centrally sponsored scheme and through this scheme every rural women aged 18 and above can open an MSY account of money she can save. The government would

contribute an incentive money of 25% of savings. An important aspect of the programme is that of involvement of NGOs at all levels. NGOs hold awareness generation camps in village through which they could mobilize women to take up savings as a conscious choice.

4.2.7- Indira Mahila Yojana(IMY)

Indira Mahila Yojana is there women development programme initiates by the Government, launched in August 1995 in more than 200 Blocks of the Country. The main objectives of this programme is to give a for word thrust to the women education, awareness income generation capacities and the empowerment of women. The platforms for the for word thrust are to be the self-help groups at the gross-root level.⁷

4.2.8- Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)

The Rashtriya Mahila Kosh was established by The Department of women and child Development for the purpose of delivery of credit through women's development Corporations / NGOs and self-help groups to 2 lakh poor women from both rural and urban areas whose family income does not exceed Rs 11000 / per annum in rural areas and Rs 11800/ per annum in Urban areas.⁸

4.2.9- Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana(SGSY)

SGSY was launched in Apl 1999 after restructuring the IRDP and allied programmes. It is the only self employment programme currently being implemental for the rural poor. The objective of the SGSY is to bring the assisted Swarozgaris above the poverty line by providing them income generating assets through banks credit and Government Subsidy.

4.2.10- Swa- Shakti

The Project jointly funded by IFAD, World Bank and The GOI was launched in Oct 1999. The objective of the programme was to bring out socio-economic development of women through promotion of women SHGs, micro credit and income generating activities.

4.2.11- Swayamsiddha

This was an integrated scheme for women empowerment through formation of self half groups launched in Feb 2001. The long term objective of the programme was holistic empowerment of women through a sustained process of mobilization and convergence of all the on going sectoral programmes by improving access of women to micro-credit, economic resources etc.

4.2.12- Swadhar

This scheme was launched in 2001-02 for providing relief and rehabilitation to women in difficult circumstances. The main objectives of the scheme is to provide primary need of shelter, clothing

and care to the marginalized women/ girls living in difficult circumstance and provide emotional support and counselling to women.

4.2.13- Rajeev Gandhi Scheme For Empowerment Of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)- SABLA

Adolescent girls (11-18) years in India constitute nearly 18 percent of the country's population and are a core resource for national growth. The scheme aims at improving the health and nutrition status besides equipping the girls on family, welfare, health hygiene, etc and information and guidance on existing services. The focus of the scheme is on out of school girls.

4.2.14- Indira Gandhi Matritva Shayog Yojana(IGMSY)

The objectives of the IGMSY scheme are to improve the health and nutrition status of pregnant and lactating women and their young infants. A cash incentive of Rs 4000/ is to be provided under the scheme to P&L women of 19 years of age and above, for the first two live births, subject to the women fulfilling specific conditions relating to maternal child health and nutrition.

4.2.15- Ujjawala

The scheme has five components – prevention, rescue, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and repatriation of trafficked victims of commercial sexual-exploitation.

4.3. Institutional Services

4.3.1- State Homes

State Homes are established for the women discharged from correctional institutions and who are unable to protect themselves from adverse social forces and also for those women who voluntarily seek shelter. They are given free lodging and boarding.⁹

4.3.2 – Service Homes

These homes are meant for destitute women, helpless widows and deserted wives who are in the age group of 18-35 years. Rehabilitation will be made through job courses and training- cum- production. During their stay with children who are below the age of five years are provided with free food, shelter; clothing and medical aid.¹⁰

4.3.3-Working Women's Hostels

These hostels are established to provide food, shelter and other facilities including

security to the working women who are away from their families on payment of charges prescribed by the Government.¹¹

4.3.4- Vocational Training Centres

The vocational Training centres provide job- oriented technical training in courses like type writing and short hand.

4.3.5- Craft Training Centres

In these centres Training in local crafts is imparted to the women belonging to the low income group to enable them to prepare for gainful employment.

These above mentioned various policies and programmes intended for empowerment of women have been implemented for which special budget allocations are made in five year plans. Besides, various Scheme are being implemented to uplift socio-economic status of rural poor women and paving a path for their empowerment. Thus the Government has been making sincere efforts to empower women in socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects, so that a welfare state and a prosperous nation can be built.

4.4- Special Legislation For Women

- Legal practitioners (women) act, 1923
- Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
- Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
- Crimes Identified Under I.P.C
- Indecent Representation of women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
- Commission of sati (Prevention) Act 1987
- Pre-conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994
- Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- Prohibition of child marriage Act, 2006
- Protection of children from sexual offences as (POCSO) Act, 2012

Immoral traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 lays down provision for stringent punishment to the perpetrators of the crime. Dowry prohibition Act, 1961 is purported to check and to ensure the effective enforcement for containment of women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 was enacted with the specific objective of prohibiting the indecent Representation of women through advertisement, publication, writing, painting, figures or in any other manner. The protection of women from Domestic violence Act, 2005, Provides civil remedies in the nature of Protection orders, residence orders, maintenance, compensation and temporary custody orders to

women facing domestic violence within the home. POCSO Act was formulated in order to effectively address sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children. It defines different forms of sexual abuse, including penetrative and non-penetrative assault, as well as sexual harassment and pornography.

4.5- Means Of Empowerment

- Social Empowerment
- Economic Empowerment
- Political Empowerment
- Legal Empowerment
- Cultural Empowerment

4.5.1- Social Upliftment/Empowerment Of Women

Under the social empowerment of women steps need to be taken to improve the health status of women, reduce maternal mortality rate especially in the areas which do not have good medical facilities. Awareness programmes for diseases need to be launched. Women face high risk of malnutrition hence focus should be given to meet the nutritional needs of women at all stages of their life cycle. Schemes need to be introduced for helping women who are victims of marital violence, who are deserted and those engaged in sex trafficking. Government has to be vigilant for ensuring that there is no discrimination against the girl child and her rights are protected.

4.5.2- Economic Empowerment

It is one of the means to empower the women. Enhancing women's economic productivity is an important strategy for improving the welfare of 65 million Indian households living below the poverty line. The existence of women in a state of economic, political, social and knowledge disempowerment is known to be a major hindrance to economic development. According to J. Cooper "status of women in any society depends on her recognised rights, duties, liberties and opportunities chiefly in the domestic, economic, social, political and religious spheres."

4.5.3- Education And Women Empowerment

Education is a powerful tool of social transformation. Hence, education for women has to be paid special attention. Greater access for women to education must be ensured by the educational system. Gender sensitivity must be developed. A watch has to be kept on dropout rate of girls and corrective measures should be taken to check the dropout rates.

4.5.4- Factors Influencing Women Empowerment

- Economic Independence.

- Establishing own creative Ides.
- Establishing own Identify.
- Achievement of excellence.
- Building confidence
- Developing risk taking ability.
- Equal states in society.
- Interpersonal Trust (Maurya & Agarwal, 2013b)
- Supportive Leadership (Maurya & Agarwal, 2015)
- Motivation & Motivation to Lead (Maurya & Agarwal, 2013a, 2018)
- Greater freedom and mobility.

4.5.5- Constraints In Women Empowerment

It is clear from the study that the women especially rural women are facing some prime constraints in empowerment which are follows-

- Lack of freedom to take decision.
- Lack of education.
- Lack of social mobility.
- Over burdened with dual responsibilities.
- Lack of proper training
- Ego problems of men talk
- Insufficient loans.
- Caste system in the village.
- Family restrictions
- Doubts regarding the women's capabilities.
- Partiality of government officials
- Lack of knowledge and skill.
- Perceived workplace harassment (Maurya & Agarwal, 2014)

4.5.6- Role Of NGOs In Women Empowerment

Governmental organizations are formal agencies working for the empowerment of women. But this work requires multidimensional approach and hence a large number of voluntary organizations / NGOs have gained increased attention in the field from grasroot level to national and international level. Their role is so impressive because they work with missionary zeal and commitment. The working style of NGOs is open, transparent and personal. So they are more effective in

this direction. They organize seminar's conferences and workshops on women's rights and elimination of discrimination for the awakening of the masses.

4.5.7- Role Of Self- Help Groups

SHG is a voluntary association of persons with common interest, formed and managed democratically without any political affiliation. SHG have emerged as are of the major strategies for women's empowerment and various schemes of the GOI have shown that strong women's group could contribute substantially to the development and convergence of services and activities. Different groups in various states all over the country have to crossed on skill development and awareness generation, promoting economic development through income generating activities including credit management activities among poor women.

4.5.8- Role Of International Agencies In Women Empowerment

Promotion of equality between women and men and the empowerment of women is central to the work of United Nations. The U.N. actively promotes women's human rights and works to eradicate, discourages of violence against women. Then are various U.N. agencies working for the empowerment of women like The Commission on the states of women, The committee on the elimination of discrimination against women, for the advancement of women, The United Nations Development Fund For Women, and recently the U.N. women associations formed which co-ordinates the activities of all the former U.N. Agencies. These International Agencies work to ensure Institutions as well as in the private sector and civil society. So they can participate equally with men in public dialogue and decision-making and influence the decisions that will determine the future of their families and countries.

5- Conclusion

Women empowerment is currently a burning issue on the minds of Nation's policy makers as it commands a lot of media attention and international focus. According to the country Report of the Government of India "Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power." In fact, the status, employment and work performed by women in society are the indicators of Nation's overall progress. Women are regarded as the "better half" of the society but in reality, our society's still male dominated and women are not treated as equal partners both inside and outside the four walls of the house. It is fact that women are built different than men by nature yet this difference can not be translated to mean inferiority

In the few last decades, India has witnessed some change in the status and role of women in our society. There has been shift in policy approaches – what was focused on 'welfares in the seventies, 'development' in the eighties and 'growth' in the nineties, has now been tagged with the

contemporary term of 'empowerment'. Empowering women socially, economically, educationally, politically, and legally is going to be Herculean task. It will not be easy changing the deep-rooted perception that women are inferior, dependent and dispensable. But it does not mean that change is implausible. Time is needed to eradicate the perception. But with the push towards the right direction and a lot of effort directed, this task might just be achievable. All we need is an organized approach from the Government and law enforcement agencies of the country focused in the right direction that would rest only with the liberation of women from all forms of evil. Because India can become a powerful nation only if it truly empowers its women.

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