

Status of women Empowerment and the need for greater Participation of women in Indian Economy

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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. 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: Gender gap, participation of women, Human Rights, Status of Women, Empowerment

Introduction

The history has shown that women in society, education, business and politics are faced with many challenges compared to their male equal. Women hold up half the sky, but they do it standing on a wobbly ground. The participation of women in developmental and other economic activities is said to be on the increase but development activities have benefited only a small section of the women. Before we speak of women empowerment, we need to know that globally, of the 1.3 billion poor, nearly 70% are women. Women also constitute 75-80% of the world's refugees and two thirds of the world's illiterate. India holds the last position in the health and survival index and the world's worst sex ratio. 25 million girls every year are not even allowed to be born. Almost 70% of women in rural India decide what to cook for the family; but they don't have freedom to go out and spend their hard earned money. The roles that men and women play in society are not biologically determined. They are socially determined, changing and changeable. It

has therefore been realized globally that failure to give proper consideration to the discriminated positions of women in society (rights, and opportunities) can have negative effects on over all development. The perfect solution against the myriads of problems women face could be gender equality, women emancipation and empowerment. Empowerment is the social, political, economic and spiritual strength of an individual, the confidence in developing her capabilities and the realization that power can change. Empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families and communities, and they improve prospects for the next generation. There are some measures of women empowerment which mainly include economic participation and opportunities, educational attainment through improved literacy rate and enrolment ratio, political participation, health and survival, measured with life expectancy and sex ratio. The paper aims at bringing the facts about challenges and Prospects of women empowerment in India. There is lots of challenges to bring women empowerment to gross root level. To deal with the issue of women and participation, women have to make a strong lobby in order to be heard in

Objective

This paper seeks to explore the need for women empowerment from global perspective with special attention to Indian context.

Human Rights or Individual Rights

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 here under.

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.

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, 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.

Gender disparity in India

In the simplest words, empowering the women means creating such an environment in which they can take independent decisions for their personal development and the development of society in general. Empowerment is the process by which the women achieve increased control and participation in decision making which in turn helps to achieve equal basis with men in various spheres – political, economical, social, cultural and civil.

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 strive and adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. We have various laws, policies, plans and programmes aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. However, there exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in these various forms of development measures and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other. This has been analysed extensively in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, "Towards Equality", 1974 and highlighted in the National Perspective Plan for Women, 1988-2000, the Shramshakti Report, 1988 and the "Platform for Action, Five Years After – An Assessment".

The problem essentially is rooted in gender disparity in India. 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 and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other manifestations. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girls and women persists in parts of the country. The gender disparity can be understood that it exists by looking at the sex ration in India which stands at 933.

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 to education, health and productive resources is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalised, poor and socially excluded. There are various issues which poses myriads of challenges towards the vision of Women Empowerment. Literacy rate among women is very less. This is the major cause. Despite the concept of Gender Budgeting and various special provisions for women in Sarva Shikshan Abhiyan, ie, National Literacy Mission, the ground reality has not changed much. This is one of the foremost reason for women not taking active participation in mainstream economic activities thus making half of Indian Population nearly impotent from economic point of view.

Globalization and women empowerment

In social field, women are suppressed domestically and do not enjoy respectable position. They are not regarded as intelligent and powerful enough as men. Politically they do not participate and even where they do as voter or representative, mostly they are used as rubber-stamps in the hands of their male relative. They are generally devoted to household work in India's patriarchal society. Such underprivileged conditions of women led them to face domestic violence, sexual abuse both at home and work place and improper opportunities for progress in every area of life.

Globalization has presented new challenges for the realization of the goal of women's equality, the gender impact of which has not been systematically evaluated fully. From the studies that were commissioned by the Dept. of Women and Child Development, it is evident that there is a need for reframing of policies for access to employment and quality of employment. Benefits of growing global economy have been unevenly distributed leading to widening of economic disparities leading to feminization of poverty, increased gender inequality, often deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in the informal economy and rural areas.

We have endorsed 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 United Nations General Assembly Session on Gender Inequality and Development & Peace for the 21st

century, titled "Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action". But still we lag behind. Where are we wrong this needs to be analysed and as the studies say we need to reframe our policies for the development and empowerment of women.

Crime Against Women

The crimes against women 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 Crime Head Wise details of reported crimes during 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 a 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.

Some Prospects

Lets talk about some of the good policy steps taken by our government in the area of women empowerment.

Firstly, the move to reserve one-third seats in the parliament for women could probably be the boldest and biggest step taken by Indian government in the area of women empowerment. The bill, if passed would result in more than 180 seats in the lower house occupied by women compared to less than 30 occupied currently. This might also produce a "Trickle down effect" where even the state governments would pass a similar bill to reserve 1/3rd seats for women in the State Legislatures.

Secondly, to provide integrated social empowerment of women, the government initiated a scheme called as "Swayamsidha" in 2001 which helps them in establishing self-reliant Women's self help groups(SHG's). The objective is to achieve all-round empowerment of women by ensuring direct access and control over resources. It helps in creating confidence and awareness among the members of SHGs regarding health, nutrition, education, hygiene and economic upliftment. A number of rural women have already been benefited through this scheme and this project is one of the long term strategic initiatives taken by the government in the area of women's empowerment.

Another initiative is a program called as STEP(Support to Training and Employment Program for Women). The objective of this program is to empower women by provide sustainable employment opportunities. The project helps in upgrading their skills(primarily in Agriculture, Dairy and Handlooms), forming viable groups, providing access to credit facilities and arranging for marketing linkages . This program has already made a significant impact in the lives of a number of women in the traditional sectors.

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 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 woman 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 nd 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 gures 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, UttarPradesh, 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. The 108 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.

Need for women participation

1. Under-employed and unemployed:
2. Equally competent and intelligent:
3. Talented:

4. Overall development of society:
5. Economic Benets:
6. Reduction in domestic violence:
7. Reduction in corruption:
8. 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 Benet Programme
15. Mahila police Volunteers
16. Mahila E-Haat

Road ahead

As we see, government is taking some concrete steps in empowering women by helping women to help themselves and their families. But are these programs sufficient? Are they bringing about a change in the attitude of a patriarchic society? Here are some bitter answers:

The maternal mortality rate in India is the second highest in the world. India accounts for more than 25% of all maternal deaths in the world.

In a survey conducted by WHO, more than 80% of pregnant Indian women are found to be anemic. This results in exceptionally high rates of child malnutrition. Malnourished women give birth to malnourished children, perpetuating the cycle

Only 39% of Indian women attend primary schools. Most families pull them out of school, either to help out at home or from fear of violence.

While women are guaranteed equality under the constitution, legal protection has little effect in the face of prevailing patriarchal traditions. Women lack power to decide who they will marry, and are often married off before they reach the age of 18.

As we see, the challenges we face in empowering women are far away from the prospects of development programs initiated by our government. Though some of the recent steps taken by the government seem to indicate that these are the right steps to take, but what India really needs right now are sizable leaps! The move to reserve one-third seats in the parliament is definitely one such.

As we progress from a developing nation towards a developed nation, every care must be taken to compositely develop and empower women along the way to stand true to what our great Jawaharlal Nehru said "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women"

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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