

A study on issues and challenges of Women Empowerment in India

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to analyze the status of women empowerment in India and highlight the issues and challenges of women empowerment. The discussion regarding the status of Indian women has been there since decades. It is an acknowledge fact that though the Indian women are given importance in the society, their status is not equal to that of men. Indian women are not able to lead a free and independent life. Still it is astonishing to observe that Indian women who suffered from various problems and setbacks are far more than 2000 years, have been trying to come out of their traditional cells and getting themselves ready to make best use of the opportunities offered to them. Women empowerment is needed to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. The study reveals the problem faced by women in India and unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. An attempt has been taken to analyze the empowerment of women in India. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources.

KEY WORDS: Education, Future Prospects. Problems of women, Women Empowerment,

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I. Introduction

Empowerment of women refers to the process of strengthening the hands of women who have been suffering from various disabilities, inequalities and gender discrimination. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but traditionally people in India seem to have been orthodox in thinking that girls and women are fit for household jobs only. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. Historically women have been regarded as a weaker section. However with the concerted efforts of social reformers, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Dayanand, Mahatma Gandhi and others, the need to pay more attention to their education and status has been gradually appreciated and several steps taken in this direction. Grant of voting right to women in America and Britain in the beginning of 20th century brought about a series of changes in the

status of women especially in western world. On the contrary, women of India were not able to secure equal status and opportunities. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave. Women continued to suffer from one or other kind of disability. Their exploitation was continued. They were given unequal treatment on the basis of sex. This development was termed as “gender discrimination”. Important fields of gender inequality are-Gender bias in political institutions, Gender bias in administration, Disparity in Literacy rates and disparity in Sex ratio.

1.1 Government Schemes for Women Empowerment

The Government programmes for women development began as early as 1954 in India but the actual participation began only in 1974. At present, the Government of India has undertaken a number of measures with a view to promote the development and welfare of women by different department and ministries. Some of these are as follows;

1. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) 1992-1993
2. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) October, 1993.
3. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) 1995.
4. Women Entrepreneur Development programme given top priority in 1997-98.
5. Mahila Samakhya being implemented in about 9000 villages.
6. Welfare of women through legislation.
7. Govt concern for Women through observance of Women's day programme.
8. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP).
9. The dairy Schemes
10. Crèches/ Day care centre for the children of working and ailing mother.
11. Hostels for working women.
12. Social and Economic development programmes for women.
13. National Mission for Empowerment of Women.
14. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (1975),
15. National policy for Empowerment of Women (2001)
16. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls (RGSEAG) (2010).
17. The Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers.
18. Integrated Child Protection scheme (ICPS) (2009-2010).
19. Dhanalakshmi (2008).

20. Short Stay Homes.
21. Ujjawala (2007).
22. Scheme for Gender Budgeting (XI Plan).
23. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).
24. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM).
25. Prime Minister's Rojgar Yojana (PMRY).
26. Women's Development Corporation Scheme (WDCS).
27. Working Women's Forum.
28. Indira Mahila Kendra.
29. Mahila Samiti Yojana.
- 30.. Khadi and Village Industries Commission.
31. Indira Priyadarahini Yojana.
32. SBI's Sree Shaki Scheme.
33. SIDBI's Mahila Udyam Nidhi Mahila Vikas Nidhi.
34. NGO's Credit Schemes.
35. National Banks for Agriculture and Rural Development's Schemes
36. Educational development programmes for women.

The efforts of government and its different agencies are ably supplemented by nongovernmental organizations that are playing an equally important role in facilitating women empowerment. Despite concerted efforts of governments and NGOs there are certain gaps. Of course we have come a long way in empowering women yet the future journey is difficult and demanding.

1.2 Constitutional Provisions for Empowering Women In India

- Equality before law for all persons (Article-14).
- Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15(I)).
- However, special provisions may be made by the state in favors of women and children Article 15(3).
- No discrimination shall be made by the state against its citizens including women for providing jobs. (Article 16).
- State policy to be directed to securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a);
- Equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)).

- Provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42).
- Promotion of harmony and fraternity by every citizen of India and renouncement of such practices which are derogatory to the dignity of women Article 51A (e).
- Reservation of not less than one-third of total seats for women in direct election to local bodies, viz; Panchayats and Municipalities (Articles 243(d) and 243 (T).

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the need and factors facilitating Women Empowerment in India
2. To identify the Hindrances in the Path of Women Empowerment.
3. To offer useful Suggestions and future prospects in the light of Findings.

Research Methodology

This paper is basically descriptive in nature. In this paper an attempt has been taken to analyze the empowerment of women in India. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the need of this study.

Crime against Women

The crimes against women fly 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.

NCRB Data, 2016: Cruelty by husband, sexual assault, top crime against women in State/UT

Table 1

Crime head	Crime incidence			Crime Rate			Percentage Variation	
	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016	2014-2015	2016
Total crime against women	3,39,457	3,29,243	3,38,954	56.6	54.2	55.2	-3.0%	2.9%

Table 2

S.No	Crime Head	Total cases Reported	Major State/UT during 2016		
1	Cruelty by husband	1,10,378	West Bengal(19,302)	Rajasthan(13,811)	Uttar Pradesh (11,156)
2	Sexual assault	84,746	Maharashtra(11,396)	UttarPradesh(11,335)	Madhya Pradesh(8,717)
3	Kidnapping & Abduction	64,519	Uttar Pradesh(12,994)	Maharahtra(6,170)	Bihar (5,496)
4	Rape	38,947	Madhya Pradesh(4,882)	Uttar Pradesh (4,816)	Maharashtra (4,189)

Crime against women in Major Metropolitan Cities

Table 3

Crime head	Crime incidence			Percentage Variation	
Total crime against women	2014	2015	2016	2014-15	2015-16
	38,385	41,001	41,761	6.8%	1.8%

Table 4

S.No	Crime Head	Total cases Reported	Major Metropolitan Cities during 2016		
1	Cruelty by husband	12,218	Delhi(3,645)	Hyderabad(13,11)	Jaipur (1,008)
2	Sexual assault	10,458	Delhi(3,746)	Mumbai(2,183)	Bengaluru(820)
3	Kidnapping & Abduction	9,256	Delhi(3.364)	Mumbai(1,142)	Bengaluru(674)
4	Rape	4,935	Delhi(1,996)	Mumbai (712)	Pune(354)

*Delhi reported 33.0%(13,803 out of 41,761 cases) of total cases of crimes against followed by Mumbai (12.3%)(5,128 cases) during 2016.

Why Need of Women Empowerment?

Reflecting into the “Vedas Purana” of Indian culture, more than 400 verses in the Vedas are ascribed to 24 women seers. Here we give some few quotes from the Vedas and other ancient literature to highlight the factual position of the status and education of women in earlier times in this country; “O learned lady! All life is dependent upon you because you impart education to all.(R.V.2,49.17)“Just as boys acquire sound knowledge and education by the practice of Brahamacharya”,so should girls”(Atharva Veda’,XI.16.3.18)“In the battle field, in the absence of the king the queen should take command of the forces and inspire then”(A.V.XU.16.3.18)|

Women cannot be empowered in a magical manner. It is not an automatic or a spontaneous process but requires deliberate and consistent efforts. It is through the combined and coordinated efforts of the government, people and the women the task can be fulfilled. Women cannot be effectively empowered by statutory provisions or governmental efforts alone. Women are empowered through women emancipation movement, education, communication, media, political parties and general awakening.”

The process of empowerment of women belonging to weaker sections will definitely have multiplying effects on society. For example, when a women in village gets elected as member of the gram Panchayatsamiti, She becomes automatically powerful in the family, kin group and village. She is listened by the people for she has the power to take a decision and she can do and certain things in the village and so on. For example, she can expand the facilities of the village school and raise it to higher standard; she can get a bore well and a water tank for the village, she may fetch for the village a community hall, a reading room and so on. She is not of course everything. But by becoming the member of the Gram samithi, she can definitely influence the decisions of the Samithi.

Reasons behind the need for improvement

1. Education or Literacy-Among other countries of the world, India has the highest number of illiterate people. As per the 2011 census literacy rate of men were 82.14 while only 65.46 % women are found to be. In rural areas level of illiteracy is still higher. Illiteracy is biggest weakness of women. Giving them Education means empowering them to enjoy the benefits of development which in turns enable them to contribute further to national progress.

2. Health problem of Women-Poor health on the part of women has also added to their weakness. Women consume less food and work more. They are shy of complaining about their health. They prefer to suffer silently than to approach a medical practitioner for obtaining medical assistance. This is mostly true in the case of a large majority of rural women. Surveys and studies have revealed that traditional importance shown towards the male children is also one of the reasons for neglecting the health of female children. Women are found to be maintaining relatively good health in the regions wherever the rate female literacy is high. Kerala provides the Best example. Thus from the health point of view also, womenfolk who are found to be a weaker, are to be made strong.

3. Economic Exigencies of women-Indian women are economically weak in two respects : i. The per capita income of the Indians is quite low and a large number of the families are under the tight grip of poverty. This economic distress naturally affects women who are a part and parcel of family ii) Since property law in this country were not in favour of women for hundreds of years, women do not seem to be possessing property of their own. Even the working women who get some income give it to the custody of their men folk who take decisions to spend it. Economic dependence of women on men still continues. This dependence weakens them economically. Thus women require economic power to stand on their legs on par with men.

4. Atrocities against Women: Women constitute the weakest sex. This fact is also borne by the number of crimes and atrocities committed against them. There are cases of rape, Kidnapping of girls, dowry harassments, abuse of women, incestuous sex relations and so on. Women in all walks of life are discriminated against by men. They become the victims of atrocities in a number of ways. They require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves against all types of atrocities and to preserve their purity and dignity.

Problems of women in modern India

Some of the major problems haunting the modern women may briefly be analyzed as:

1. Increasing Violence against Women:

a. Violence is almost universal: Most societies exhibit violence in one way or other. Violence against women is a social problem. Every society creates institutions designed to achieve certain ends. Every act of violence, from assault to armed revolution, detracts to some degree from authority normally vested in society.

b. Women as Victims of Violence: Violence against women is not a new phenomenon in India.”Women in Indian Society have become victims of ill treatment, humiliation, torture and exploitation for as long as written records are replete with incidents of abduction, rape, murder and torture of women.

c. Increasing crime against Women: Crime against women is increasing problem. This problem has been growing more and more acute in India during the recent years. It includes rape, molestation, dowry harassment, wife battering, kidnapping female children, forcible religious conversion, and cheating young women with a promise to marry them or fetch them a job and various types of sexual harassments and abuse of women including eve teasing.

d. Violence against Women within and outside Family-Women are often subject to violence within the family, a place which is expected to protect their dignity and assure their safety. This type of violence includes such crimes as-Dowry related harassments including death, wife battering , marital rape ,sexual abuse of female children and women’s of one owns family, deprivation of sufficient food to family members and so on. Kidnapping, raping and murdering women are very serious offences. The society at large itself is to be blamed for many type of violence that are committed against women outside the family. Such violence includes-compelling women for abortion , forced prostitution, mutilating the organs of female children to use them for the purpose of begging, throwing acids at the faces of girls ,sex crime against women in the border areas and so on.

2. Gender Discrimination-It has weakened the strength of female community in India. Though constitutionally men and women are equal, socially men are given priority. The reasons are as:

a. Discrimination in socialization-The policy of male preferences and female negligence has lead to what is known as female disadvantages. Males are wanted during their old age to offer protection, males have greater scope than women and occupational avenues are also wider for males than for females. Their male preference has led to the abuse of advanced technology.

b. Discrimination in the distribution of power and work-Most of the Indian families are patriarchal. Domestic works such as cooking, looking after the children, washing clothes and vessels, keeping the house neat and clean, looking after the domesticated animals etc are branded as “Women’s work”. But when the question of exercising power comes, it is the man who dominates. The female voice is always suppressed.

c. Women neglecting their own health-Studies have revealed that our women themselves are neglecting their own health. Normally Indian women consume less food and spend more energy on work. Women toil for the good of the family and children even at the cost of neglecting their own health. Women very

rarely complain about their ill-health because of their virtue of self-denial. The records in the health centres reveal that women are lagging behind men i.e 1:3 meaning one women taking medical help for every 3 men even in matters of availing of medical help.

d. Gender Discrimination in Occupations and Public Life-Women workers are paid less than the male workers for the same type of work. Much labour is extracted from women by giving them minimum wages. In public life also women are not given importance on par with men.

3. Problem of Female Education: Social reformers believe that in a nation like India giving Education to women in as large a number as possible can prove to be a panacea for many of the problems of women. Accordingly much attention is paid to education of women after independence; The female literacy rate is also increasingly steadily. It has increased from 39.42% in 1991 to 64% in 2001 and 65.46% in 2011. In spite of this change in the trend towards literacy, some problems have cropped up. We find glaring differences between the level of education of men and women. For example:

a. It is found that girls are being discouraged to go for higher education and also for professional and technical education.

b. There are regional Imbalances too. In states like Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra female education is encouraged whereas in states like Bihar, Orissa, Madhyapradesh etc. education of girls is neglected even today.

c. Increasing drop out of female children from schools is another problem. More than 74% of the female children between age groups 6-14 years quit schools and lapsed into ignorance.

d. Admission to schools-Even in the matter of admitting children to school at elementary level, female education is neglected. It means complete awareness is not there among people regarding female education.

4. Problems relating to employment and unemployment of women-In the economic field the situation is such that majority of women are not finding suitable work of their satisfaction. Those who are in the employment are becoming the objects of exploitation and harassment. Though an increase in the female literacy level and extensions of employment opportunities for women in the nonagricultural sector, have added to the trend in favour of female employment, these two problems continue to exist:

a. Large Number of employed women are illiterate-Of every 100 women employed in rural areas, 88.11% are illiterate. These illiterate women in organized sectors are totally exploited by their employers.

Women working in factories, mining industries, building construction process, in dams, bridges and road repair are not paid less but also paid to work in unhealthy surroundings.

b. Decreasing Economic Participation of Women-Technological developments seems to have a negative effect on employment opportunities of women. Application of new technology in agrarian sector, textiles, mines, jute, small scale industries, animal husbandry rendered many women jobless. Computerization has also adversely affected the job prospects of women as clerks, typist and accountants.

5. Harassment of women at work place: Women constitute an important labour force in all the countries. Working women constitute 16.43% of the female population of the country. The main problem with this female worker is that they are harassed in work place in different ways as:

a. Economic exploitation-Equal pay for equal work remains only a slogan. Women workers are given much work and paid less. Equal Remuneration Act.1976 has proved to be a dead letter in this regard.

b. Threat of removal from job- In Indian Context, majority of Women go for work not for fun but out of necessity. Employers who are aware of the helplessness of these female employees exploit them in all possible ways. Due to fear of losing the job, women bear all the exploitations and do not protest,

c. Discrimination in giving opportunities: In spite of the hard work which women do, many employers consider these working women as non-serious workers. They are also regarded as non-permanent employees especially in case of unmarried female workers. They are discriminated with regard to recruitment, promotion, increment, facilities at work place and so on.

d. Sexual Harassment of Women: Sexual harassments' of women at workplace refers to giving indecent treatment to women workers in violating all norms of modesty. Many female workers have complained of such harassments' during the recent years.

6. Divorce and Desertion-During the recent years , instances of divorce and desertion are increasingly making the lives of women miserable.

a. The Hardship of Desertion-Desertion is defined as "deliberate abandonment of conjugal relationships". In the Indian context it is the husband who goes away from the family. Desertion causes a lot of hardships especially for women. It immediately drives a woman to a state of uncertainty and helplessness. Some of them may resort to immoral activity, some others fall prey into hands of anti-social elements, while few of the may commit suicide.

b .The Agony of Divorce-It damages the social image of the wife .The impact of divorce on children is also very severe. Jobless and resource less divorced women find themselves in a big economic crises.

Challenges and Future prospects

There are several constraints that check the process of women empowerment in India. Social norms and family structure in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. One of the norms is the continuing preference for a son over the birth of a girl child which is present in almost all societies and communities. The society is more biased in favor of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities. The root cause of this type of attitude lies in the belief that male child inherits the clan in India with an exception of Meghalaya. Women often internalize the traditional concept of their role as natural thus inflicting an injustice upon them. Poverty is the reality of life for the vast majority women in India. It is another factor that poses challenge in realizing women's empowerment. 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 is an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned.

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

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

Household Inequality: Household relations show gender bias in infinitesimally 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.

Suggestions

Today we have noticed different Acts and Schemes of the central Government as well as state Government to empower the women of India. The following observations and generalizations can be made to improve the socio economic condition of women:

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. Other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. According to 2011 census, rate of literacy among men in India is found to be 84% whereas it is only 64% among women. Thus, increasing education among women is of very important in empowering them.
2. Poverty and illiteracy add to these complications, The Empowerment of Women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety. It has also noticed that some of women are too weak to work. They consume less food but work more. Therefore, from the health point of view, women folk who are to be weaker are to be made stronger.
3. Another problem is that workplace harassment of women. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment, and so on. For these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity.
4. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights.
5. 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.
6. Strict implementation of Programmes and Acts should be there to curb the mal-practices prevalent in the society.
7. Empowerment of Women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved. This could be possible only by adopting definite 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. In India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. A few women are engaged in services and other activities. So, they need economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men.
8. There needs to be a sea – change in the mind set of the people in the country. Not just the women themselves, but the men have to wake up to wake up to a world that is moving towards equality and equity. It is better that this is embraced earlier than later for our own good.

9. 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.

10. In order to create a sustainable world, we must begin to Empower Women.

To sum up, women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

Conclusion

Women in India are not yet equal to men .There is no legal or constitutional barrier to equality. There is only the social barrier. Women in India are more after a ‘respectable’ and , meaningful social status which is free from all sorts of exploitation. There is no urge in them to outsmart men. They want their interests to be protected and problems solved. As long as the problems of women remain as “women’s problems “ and not as “Societal Problems”, so long, attempts at the solution of these problems do not get the required speed.

Indian women are not very much after equality with men. But they expect a change in the attitude of men towards them and their status. On the contrary, they expect greater freedom, better education, self dependence, decent jobs, a proper treatment of women by men folk and a type of socio-economic environment free from all types of exploitation. Our attempts to provide such a type of socio-economic environment to women will definitely influence their social status and the socio-economic conditions in the days to come.

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