



Women Empowerment in INDIA

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WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA Ranita Das Asst. Professor Shri Agrasen Girls College, Korba Email ID- Ranita.das1988@gmail.com "Woman is an incarnation of 'Shakti' - the Goddess of Power. If she is bestowed with education, India's strength will double. Let the campaign of 'Kanya Kelavni' be spread in every home; let the lamp of educating daughters be lit up in every heart."

- Hon'ble Prime Minister of India; Shree Narendra Modi ABSTRACT India's struggle for freedom is one such instance in history where women had stepped out of their regular roles as home-makers, mothers and wives to shoulder the responsibility of sculpting the concept of a new nation amidst the conflict between the people and the colonial state.

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ABSTRACT

India's struggle for freedom is one such instance in history where women had stepped out of their regular roles as home-makers, mothers and wives to shoulder the responsibility of sculpting the concept of a new nation amidst the conflict between the people and the colonial state. While they were at it, they had stood shoulder to shoulder with their men-folk to rally the masses to the cause, face bullets, picket shops, and participate in propaganda making. They embodied self-sufficiency as Gandhi had first visualized through the skill of spinning using a "charkha" (spinning machine for household spinning of cloth). India, the world's fastest-growing major economy, could do a lot better if only it treated its women better. The country could add up to \$770 billion more than 18% to its GDP by 2025, simply by giving equal opportunities to women. As women's contribution to the country's GDP is currently just 18%, one of the world's lowest, with only 25% of India's labor force being female, India's economy also has the second-largest potential in the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region from improving gender parity. Women play an important role in the development of a family and society. From last few decades, they have been actively participating in various economic & social activities, but their efforts remain unrecognized. In this male-dominating society, they are still

subjected to discrimination in the social, economic and educational field. Women have been facing issues since the day they are born. Fighting for their rights, society stereotypes, and for their freedom. Women Empowerment means encouraging women through education, at a professional level, accepting their opinions, and providing them with the right whatever they desire. Women should not stay behind someone's shadow not able to express themselves. The main motive of women's empowerment is to give women a chance to outshine others and get equal rights in society. The first step of women empowerment is literacy. A well-educated woman is confident, outspoken, and able to make decisions. Especially in a country like India, If women get a chance to study they can be a prime minister like Indira Gandhi, IPS like Kiran Bedi, or become a famous CEO like Indira Nooyi.

KEYWORDS

Women Empowerment, Education, Economic, Gender Equality.

INTRODUCTION

Women are taught to mold themselves based on others' preferences and men are taught to lead because at the end of the day, women have to manage household chores whereas men are the heroes saving their family and providing them financial support. This is the stereotype that has existed for centuries in India and one of the reasons women are denied basic human rights in society. A woman is denied the right to raise her opinions even in her household matters, political or financial viewpoints are far behind. Women are born leaders and if given the opportunity can excel in every field. We live in a male dominant society where a male has every right to do whatever he desires however thought in women's minds is sacred. For centuries, women were not allowed to eat before men or sit in front of other men. Gender equality and women empowerment is major concern globally. Gender equality starts with providing the same and equal resources of education to both genders. Education of girl child should also be a priority and not just an option. An educated woman will be able to build a better life for herself and the ones surrounding her. Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for the growth of women in society. Women empowerment ensures that every female gets an opportunity to get an education, seek professional training, and spread awareness. However, gender quality will ensure that access to resources is provided equally to both genders and ensure equal participation. Even at the professional level women faces gender inequality because a male candidate is promoted way before a female candidate. The mindset should be changed and only deserving candidates should be promoted. Gender quality is a key step towards sustainable development and ensures basic human rights for everyone.

Women empowerment mainly refers to the practice of making women independent so that they can make their own decisions as well as handle their lives without any familial or societal restrictions. In simple terms, it entitles women to take charge of their own personal development. Since women have always been the oppressed ones in a patriarchal society, the main motive of women empowerment is to help them stand equally with men. It is a foundational step to ensure the prosperous growth of a family as well as the country. Empowering women, the world would definitely witness gender equality and help women from every stratum of society stand on their own and steer their lives as per their own wishes.

Women empowerment is the process of giving women the ability to live a happy and respected life in society. Women are empowered when they have unrestricted access to chances in a range of domains, such as education, profession, and lifestyle, among others. It involves things like education, awareness, literacy, and training to help them improve their position. It also involves decision-making authority. A woman feels powerful when she takes a significant decision. Empowering women is the

most important factor in a country's overall growth. If a household has just one earning member, while another family has both men and women earning, who will have a better standard of living? The solution is straightforward: a household in which both men and women work. As a result, a country where men and women work together grows more quickly.

Almost all countries, regardless of how progressive, have a history of mistreating women. To put it another way, women from all over the world have been defiant to achieve their current standing. While Western nations continue to make progress, third-world countries such as India continue to lag behind in terms of women's empowerment. Women's empowerment is more important than ever in India. India is one of the countries where women are not safe. This is due to a variety of factors. Not only that, but horrific crimes against women such as rape, acid attacks, the dowry system, honour killings, domestic violence, and other forms of violence against women continue to occur throughout India. Women should account for 50% of the entire population. However, due to female foeticide practises, which is still prevailing in the rural and underprivileged sections of the Indian societies, the girl child population is rapidly declining, affecting the country's sex ratio. Furthermore, the education and freedom scenario is extremely regressive in this situation. Women are not permitted to continue their education and are married off at a young age. In certain areas, men continue to dominate women, as though it is the woman's responsibility to labour for him indefinitely. They don't let them go out or have any form of freedom and personal life. As a result, we can see how women empowerment is a pressing issue. We must equip these women with the tools they need to stand up for themselves and never be victims of injustice.

Data

Women are currently particularly under-represented in India's economy compared with their potential. Study estimates suggest that, at 17 percent, India has a lower share of women's contribution to GDP than the global average of 37 percent, and the lowest among all regions in the world. In comparison, China's women contribute 41 percent, those in Sub-Saharan Africa 39 percent, and women in Latin America 33 percent. Women in India only represent 24 percent of the labour force that is engaged in any form of work in the market economy, compared with an average of 40 percent globally. India's position on share of women in workforce is on a par with countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where, unlike India, legal provisions can restrict many forms of female employment in many countries. India's economy would have the highest relative boost among all regions of the world if its women participated in paid work in the market economy on a similar basis to men, erasing the current gaps in labour force participation rates, hours worked, and representation within each sector (which affects their productivity). Women empowerment in simple words can be understood as giving power to women to decide for their own lives or inculcating such abilities in them so that they could be able to find their rightful place in the society. According to the United Nations, women's empowerment mainly has five components:

- Generating women's sense of self-worth;
- Women's right to have and to determine their choices;
- Women's right to have access to equal opportunities and all kinds of resources;
- Women's right to have the power to regulate and control their own lives, within and outside the home;
- Women's ability to contribute in creating a more just social and economic order. Thus, women empowerment is nothing but recognition of women's basic human rights and creating an environment where they are treated as equals to men.

Need for Women Empowerment

In term of every indices of development and socio-economic, women have faced worse than men, in all regions and in all strata of the population. Hence the need and importance of women empowerment can be looked up on in the following direction:

- (a) **As women:** Women constitute 70 percent of the world's poor population or almost 900 million of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty. Two-thirds of the world's illiterate population of 876 million people are women. They produce 50 percent of the food worldwide but receive only 10 percent of the incomes.
- (b) **Earnings:** Women's average earnings are consistently lower than those of men but in the unorganized sector, which account for 94 percent of economically active women, earning are even lower.
- (c) **Health:** In terms of food intake, women suffer greater deprivation intra familiarly (women eat last as part of the culture of self-effacement and services to other and if there is insufficient food the men and children get fed first and the women do without). A very systematic sex bias is also reflected in higher nutritional or caloric deficiency among girls viaboys.
- (d) **Education:** Of the 960 million illiterate persons in the world, 640 million or 2 /3 rd are women. In 2001, the literacy rate of women has increased to 54.16 still it is lower than male literacy rate. School enrolment figures for girls have been - and continue to be lower than for boys at all stages and ages, and the dropout rates also higher for girls at every stages from primary to high school.
- (e) **Politics:** Political space has always been monopolized by men. Representation of women among Member of Parliament and state legislations has never exceeded 7 percent and has remained around 5 percent over the years despite the increasing visibility of women. Women's representation at the higher rungs of the decisionmaking position has also been consistently low.
- (f) **Socio-cultural Factors:** The cultural construct of son preference adds to the psychological diffidence of the female child, dowry deaths, violence against women has its roots in the subordination of women at the social level and their vulnerability has not decreased but increased in developing economics as a consequence of social disruptions backlash and a general degeneration values etc.

Challenges Faced by Women in INDIA

Today, only 25% of Indian women are employed. According to the World Bank's 2017 India Development Report, India ranked 120 among 131 countries on female workforce participation. So, why are women not a part of our country's economic progress? There are many challenges that are currently plaguing the issues of women's rights in India. A lot of issues are redundant and quite basic which has been faced across the country; they are contributory causes to the overarching status of women 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 its independence the gap between women and men education is severe. In comparison to 82.14% of adult educated men, only 65.46% of adult literate women are there in India. Additionally, the norm of culture that states that the man of the family is the be-all and end-all of family's decisions is gradually deteriorating the Indian society. Eradicating this gap and educating women about their real place in the world is a step that will largely set this entire movement rolling down the hill to crash and break the wall of intolerance, negligence and exploitation.

Poverty in the country

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 abject poverty, women are exploited as domestic helps and wives whose incomes are usurped by the man of the house. If poverty were not a concern, then the girl child will be able to follow her dreams without concerns of sexual exploitation, domestic abuse and no education or work.

Health and Safety

The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country, and are important factors in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned. While there are several programs that have been set into motion by the Government and several NGOs in the country, there is still a wide gap that exists between those under protection and those not.

A Robust Mark of Growing India Poverty and illiteracy add to these complications with local quacks giving ineffective and downright harmful remedies to problems that women have. The empowerment of women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety. Acceptance as Working Professionals Most Indian men are yet to come to terms with the fact that women are also capable of working with them, shoulder to shoulder, in any field or professional sphere. They still visualize women as individuals who should be in charge of the kitchen and other domestic affairs. Work is either seen as a temporary evil for women whose husbands do not earn enough, or the domain of women who do not “know their place.” As a result, Indian working women do not get the respect they require from their male colleagues in the workplace. Balancing Work-Family Life No matter how high their position or designation is in the office, women in India are still viewed as the family manager back home. They are expected to return home at a certain time, cook, clean and take care of family affairs. In fact, men who help out around their house are often the butt of jokes by their male friends. This makes life extremely stressful for women who have little help around the house and have to do it all. Crimes against women Police records show high incidence of crimes against women in India. The National Crime Records Bureau reported in 1998 that the growth rate of crimes against women would be higher than the population growth rate by 2010. Earlier; many cases were not registered with the police due to the social stigma attached to rape and molestation cases. Official statistics show that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of reported crimes against women. The wage gap one of the raging topics of debate in the context of problems faced by working women (not only in India but also in many other nations) is that of equal pay. Legally, a woman is entitled to get the same salary as her male colleagues for the same kind of work done by them. However, gender discrimination is rampant as many companies still do not adhere to these guidelines and pay women less than their male colleagues. Studies show that in any professional field, there is a significant gap between the paycheck a woman receives at the end of the month. Women represent around 51% of the global workforce. However, in 2014, they were active within full-time jobs, yet they earned on average only 79% of men’s annual income.

The uncaring employer

In Indian society, a married woman is expected to bear children at some point in time. Most women get maternity leave in their workplace and also rejoin work after their baby’s birth. India has one of the most progressive laws for maternity benefits since the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017, increased the duration of paid maternity leave for women employees from 12 weeks to 26 weeks. It also introduced an enabling provision relating to “work from home” for women, which may be exercised after the 26-weeks’ leave period, depending upon the nature of work and agreement with

their employer. It also gave maternity leave to adoptive and commissioning mothers (those opting for surrogacy) and made a crèche facility mandatory for every establishment employing 50 or more employees. However, research has revealed that less than half of working women feel that they are treated the same way as their male colleagues in similar roles.

Skill Development Initiatives of Women

Women have shown their ability in community development. Hence, it is important that women be a part of skill development. In India, women are now participating in various areas like: education, art and culture, service sector, sports, politics, media, and science and technology. They form a substantial part of the workforce, but the working percentage rate of women in the total labor force is declining. A large number of them are working in the informal sectors. This represents lack of employment opportunities and skills for women workforce. Currently, a majority of the female workforce in India is unskilled. They can be motivated to develop their life skills – that will give them high paying jobs with better livelihood & confidence to earn for their family. It will develop their ability & quality to move ahead and be self-dependent. It is observed, that the concept of training and skill development needs to move beyond imparting technical and managerial skills, with more focus on literacy, numeracy, political & life skills. Some skills that training institutes must impart to women empowerment are:

- Communication skills
- Business etiquettes
- Language development
- Personality development
- Leadership skill
- Management skills
- Entrepreneurship skills
- Basic accounting skills
- Basic computer skills

The Government of India has passed the national policy for ‘women empowerment’ which aims to ensure overall development of women within the country. They seek to impart skills to women so that they can stand & support for themselves and gain status within society. On the other side, Maharashtra Government has launched ‘Skill Sakhi’ for women empowerment. Their main aim is not only to create employment opportunities for women but also to empower them. They are giving skill training which involves tailoring, embroidery, knitting, and the making of home decoration items. The missions: ‘Skill India’ & ‘make in India’ shall succeed only when the women work hand-in-hand. Problems Still Faced by Women after Getting Proper Skills Even after proper training, it is not easy for them to get a job – due to following reasons:

- Too much competition for gender bias, family issues & long working hours.
- Traditional protocols, do not allow them to stand independently in their career path. Even after getting a job, many women are paid less as compared to males.
- Along with this, women safety is again continuous issue which pulls women back.
- Indian women are no longer “passive recipients” of the state’s welfare schemes, but active agents of change. Real development is only possible with their economic empowerment.

Government Initiatives for Welfare of Women

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojna: It was launched on January 22 in the year 2015 from Panipat, Haryana on the occasion of International Day of the Girl Child to generate awareness and also improve the efficiency of welfare services meant for girl child. This scheme is to prevent gender-biased sex-

selective elimination and ensure the education, survival, and protection of the girl child. It also aims to celebrate the girl child.

- **The Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP)** Scheme was originally introduced to address the issue of declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR). The scheme is being implemented by the joint initiative of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Ministry of Human Resource Development through a national campaign. The campaign focused on multi-sectoral action in 100 selected districts which have low CSR. It covers all the States and Union Territories.
- **Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme:** Launched in 2012, this scheme was revamped in 2016 in which assistance is provided to NGO's for running creches. This scheme supports those women who go outside of their homes to work. A nursery is provided to the babies and young children of working women where they are taken care off during the daytime. So, the women who don't have relatives to rely on can procure benefits under this scheme.
- **Mahila E-Haat:** To support women and also 'Make in India' through online marketing platform this bilingual online portal is a blessing. Launched on March 7, 2016, by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Mahila E-Haat is an initiative for meeting needs of women entrepreneurs. It provides a unique and direct marketing platform and also leverages technology for supporting women entrepreneurs, SHGs, and NGOs. It provides continuous sustenance and support to their creativity and strengthens financial inclusion of Women Entrepreneurs in the economy. The main objective of this platform is to act as a catalyst by providing a web-based marketing platform to the women entrepreneurs to directly sell their products.
- **Working Women Hostel:** This scheme envisages provision of safe and affordable hostel accommodation to women who are working, single, and living away from homes. It carries salient features and possesses the objective of providing safe and convenient accommodation for working women with daycare facility for their children wherever possible in urban, semi-urban or even rural areas at a locality where employment opportunity for women exist. Since the inception of this scheme, around 890 hostels have been sanctioned and over 66,000 women have benefited.
- **One Stop Centre Scheme:** The aim of launching this scheme is to provide support and assistance to women who are affected by violence in public and private spaces. Through this scheme, the women who are facing physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse, irrespective of age, class, caste, education status, marital status, race, and culture will be supported. One Stop Centre provides specialized services to women who face any kind of violence due to attempted sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, honour-related crimes, acid attacks or witch-hunting. The OSCs are set up in each state to provide integrated medical, legal, and psychological support to women across the country.
- The modern woman of today has a lot of potentials. From managing the household to serving in the armed forces, or managing business women are excelling in every field. Thus, the Government of India is also taking various steps such as launching the above-mentioned schemes which would further empower them.
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development is administering following schemes for gender equality/socio-economic development/empowerment of women.

Women Empowerment An Agent for change

The world today sees women excelling in a variety of fields, from exploring the universe as astronauts to even leading nations; there are few areas that are left uncharted. Women are believed to

be the largest untapped reservoir of talent in the world. With perseverance and determination, women around the world strive to prove themselves in order to reach the pinnacle of success. In the SDG era of today, women's empowerment has progressed from viewing women as recipients of welfare benefits to partners and active agents of change for sustainable development and peace building. We are moving from a women-centric to women-led development paradigm. A little noticed fact has been that while the global North tries to position itself as a leader of gender equality, there have been only three women who have served as the President of the General Assembly. All three have been from the global South. The first one to be elected was an Indian: Ms Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, as early as 1953. The other two have been Ms Angie Elizabeth Brooks from Liberia in 1969 and Ms Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa from Bahrain in 2006. However, as women scale new heights and expand their horizons, they must constantly struggle to overcome the shackles of inequality and discrimination. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton rightly said, "the status of the world's women is not only a matter of morality and justice. It is also a political, economic, and social imperative. Put simply, the world cannot make lasting progress if women and girls in the 21st century are denied their rights and left behind." It is commonly believed that the suffering and denial of the rights of women and the instability of countries go hand in hand.

The Road Ahead

Empowerment of women would mean equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, and having positive esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation. The empowered women should be able to participate in the process of decision-making. Women in India make up 7.5% of the world's total population. While certain development indicators show their quality of life is improving – maternal mortality rates declining; literacy rates increasing; more women gaining access to healthcare and education – the pace of change is heartbreakingly slow. India ranks 113 out of 135 on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index. According to India's 2011 census, the sex ratio for children under six was 914 females to 1,000 males, a disturbing decline from 927 in 2001. The ranking of Indian women in economic empowerment is 0.3, where 1.0 means equality. Empowerment which means "becoming powerful" is a process by which individuals, groups and communities are able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their goals. It enables them to work towards helping themselves towards empowerment such as educational, economic, psychological, social and political which are all interlinked. Women's empowerment begins with the awareness about their rights and capabilities and the understanding as to how the socio-economic and political forces affect them. Empowerment as a concept encompasses their social upliftment, political decision making and economic independence. Thus, the process of empowerment of women enables them to realize their full potential and empowers them in all spheres of life.

CONCLUSION

The conservatives define empowerment as women's capacity to make the best of their own lives. From this point of view, a woman is empowered when she is literate, educated and has productive skills, access to capital, and also has confidence in herself. From the radical point of view, this view of empowerment especially, economic empowerment or self-reliance is woefully limited. According to this view, empowerment of women is not only concerned with the present society but beyond this. Women's participation in the developmental process (which is concerned with the process of social change) provides the opportunities for increased empowerment. This entails women increasing their level of control over the allocation of resources by identifying and avoiding the discriminatory practices, which stand in their way. Today we have noticed different Acts and Schemes of the central Government as well as state Government to empower the women of India. But 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. On the other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. According to 2001 Census, rate of literacy among men in India is found to be 76% whereas it is only 54% among women. Thus, increasing education among women is of very important in empowering them. It has also noticed that some of the women are too weak to work. They consume less food but work more. Another problem is that of workplace harassment of women. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girls, 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. To sum up, women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with 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.

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