



A study on issues and challenges of women empowerment in India

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Abstract

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. More than of the women believe wife beating to be justified for one reason or the other. At earlier time they were getting equal status with men. But they had faced some difficulties during post – Vedic and epic ages. Many a time they were treated as slave. From early twenty century (national movement) their statuses have been changed slowly and gradually. Today we have seen the women occupied the respectable positions in all walks of the fields. Yet, they have not absolutely free some discrimination and harassment of the society. A few number of women have been able to establish their potentialities. Therefore, women have to fight the traditional Indian male – dominated society to emerge as stronger and independent entities. While all these are positive developments, cases of rape, harassment at workplace and dowry deaths are rampant. Illiteracy and ignorance about their rights are still prevalent among a majority of the women. Today the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. But practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. We observed in our day to day life how women become victimized by various social evils. Women empowerment is the vital instrument to express women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, they traditionally under privileged ones, in the society. The study concludes by an observation that access to Education, employment and Change in Social Structure are only the enabling factors to Women Empowerment.

Keywords: women empowerment, education, socio-economic, challenges

Introduction

It was 1848 AD when India got its first woman educator in the form of "Savitribai Phule". This year marks the rise of women's empowerment in India as Savitribai Phule busted the social norm that a woman cannot be educated. The impact of this movement was so profound that 100 years later, India, as a nation accepted the leadership of a woman and Indira Gandhi, was sworn as the first female prime minister of India. It is said that sky is the limit, but the term "women's empowerment" broke that thought and Kalpana Chawla became the first Indian woman to travel in space. All these activities are the fruits of women's empowerment.

Women's empowerment as a concept was introduced at the UN's Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, which defined it as a redistribution of social and economic powers and control of resources in favour of women. After various new revolutions and social reforms during the modern era, women are now redefined by their strengths, skills and their abilities. Today, the woman is a pilot, a doctor, an engineer, a politician, an artist, an author, a leader, a president and much more; she is a homemaker, a complete administrator. It is the fruits of women's struggle that we have got personalities like Oprah Winfrey, Mother Teresa, J K Rowling, Benazir Bhutto, Malala Yosufzai and Phoolan Devi. Moreover, women are joining the field of science and technology. In fact, there is no sphere of activity in which

women are unsuitable or incompetent.

Women's empowerment has now become an international agenda. The United Nations' charter significantly projected discrimination against woman as a problem of universal alarm. This shows the kind of concern of international community shows with regard to women's rights in general and their right to equality with men in particular. The declaration provides that all the rights and fundamental freedoms are available equally to both men and women without any exception. Therefore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) also played a very important role in protecting the rights of women

The concept of women empowerment originated from the Brazilian educationist Paulo Frerie. Women in India now participate in all activities such as education, politics, media, art and culture, services sectors, science and technology, etc. Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban / rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender based violence and political participation. Empowerment of women is essentially

the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal rights and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today.

Objectives

1. To analysis the necessity of Women Empowerment
2. To assess the Awareness of Women Empowerment in India
3. To analyze the Factors influencing the Economic Empowerment of women
4. To offer useful Suggestions in the light of Findings

Methodology

Study is based on descriptive research and qualitative analysis. The secondary data from the journals, references books has been utilized to provide concrete base to the findings. This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. In this paper an attempt has been taken to analyze the empowerment in India.

India has traditionally been a patriarchal society with low participation of women in the economy. Promoting women entrepreneurs in economy an increasingly large number of women in India are engaged in the informal economy and operating in the small scale sector and cottage industries. Study the actors of encourage women to increase their participation in the Indian economy and suggestions to improve women empowerment in India.

What is women empowerment

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

Human Rights or Individual Rights

Social Women Empowerment

Educational Women Empowerment

Economic and occupational empowerment

Legal Women Empowerment

Political Women Empowerment

Concept of women empowerment

Empowerment is a multi-faced, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. As such, it is not this or that, but is the action and interaction of various factors-physical, socioeconomic, political, mental, psychological, and attitudinal and so on. Women's empowerment could be described as a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources-material, human and intellectual like knowledge, information,

ideas, and financial resources like money and access to money and control over decision making in the home, community, society and nation, and to gain power. The term "women's empowerment" has come to be associated with women's struggle for social justice and equality

Women empowerment - challenges

The most widespread and dehumanizing discriminations against women are on the basis of the biased perspective. The discrimination against the girl child begins from the birth itself. Boys are preferred over girls; hence, female infanticide is a common practice in India. The ordeal that an Indian girl faces at birth is only the beginning of a lifelong struggle to be seen and heard.

Patriarchate Bottlenecks

The traditional Indian society is a patriarchal society ruled by the diktats of self-proclaimed caste lords who are the guardians of archaic and unjust traditions. They put the burden of traditions, culture, and honor on the shoulders of women and mark their growth. The incidences of "honor killing" reveal the distorted social fiber in the male-dominated society.

Economic Backwardness

Women constitute only 29% of the workforce but forms majority of the destitute in the country. There has been a failure in transforming the available women base into human resource. This, in turn, has hampered not only the economic development of women but also of the country' as a whole.

Implementation Gaps

Through all these years, the attention is only on developing and devising new schemes, policies and programmes and have paid less attention to the proper monitoring system and implementation short-sightedness, for e.g. despite the presence of The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technologies Act and various health programmes like Janani Suraksha Yojana and National Rural Health Mission (NHRM), our country has a skewed sex ratio and a high maternal mortality rate (MMR).

Loopholes in the legal structure

Although there are a number of laws to protect women against all sorts of violence yet there has been the significant increase in the episodes of rapes, extortions, acid, attacks etc. This is due to delay in legal procedures and the presence of several loopholes in the functioning of a judicial system.

Lack of Political Will: The still- pending Women's Reservation Bill underscores the lack of political will to empower women politically. The male dominance prevails in the politics of India and women are forced to remain mute spectators.

Way Ahead

Starts with bridging the deep-rooted biases through sustained reconditioning. It is only possible by promoting the idea of gender equality and uprooting social ideology of male child preferability. This concept of equality should be first developed in each and every household and from there, it should be taken to the society. This can be achieved by

running sustained awareness programs with the help of Nukkad Natak or dramas, radio, television, Internet, etc. across the country.

Replacing 'patriarchy' with parity

A strong patriarchy society with deep-rooted socio-cultural values continues to affect women's empowerment. The Government should identify and eliminate such forces that work to keep alive the tradition of male dominance over its female counterpart by issuing inhumane and unlawful diktats. Education is the most important and indispensable tool for women empowerment. It makes women aware of their rights and responsibilities. Educational achievements of a woman can have ripple effects for the family and across generations. Most of the girls drop out of schools due to the unavailability of separate toilets for them. They recently launched 'Swachh Bharat Mission' focusing on improving sanitation facilities in schools and every rural household by 2019, can prove to be very significant in bringing down the rate of girls dropping out of school.

Political Will

Women should have access to resources, rights, and entitlements. They should be given decision-making powers and due position in governance. Thus, the Women Reservation Bill should be passed as soon as possible to increase the effective participation of women in the politics of India.

Bridging implementation gaps

Government or community-based bodies must be set up to monitor the programs devised for the welfare of the society. Due importance should be given for their proper implementation and their monitoring and evaluation through social audits.

Reasons for the empowerment of women

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. 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. Other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. Thus, increasing education among women is of very important in empowering them. 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. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

Characteristics of women empowerment

- Women empowerment is giving power to women. It is

making women better off. It enables a greater degree of self-confidence and sense of independence among women.

- Women empowerment is a process of acquiring power for women in order to understand their rights and to perform her responsibilities towards oneself and others in a most effective way. It gives the capacity or power to resist discrimination imposed by the male dominated society.
- Women empowerment enables women to organize themselves increase their self-reliance and it provides greater autonomy. Women empowerment means women's control over material assets intellectual resources and ideology. It challenges traditional power equations and relations.
- Women empowerment abolishes all gender base discrimination in all institutions and structures of society. It ensures participation of women in policy and decision-making the process at domestic and public levels. Women empowerment means exposing the oppressive powers of existing gender social relations.
- Women empowerment makes women more powerful to face the challenges of life, to overcome to the disabilities, handicaps, and inequalities. It enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.
- Empowerment also means equal status to women. It provides greater access to knowledge and resources greater autonomy in decision making greater ability to plan their and freedom from the shackles imposed on them by custom belief and practice.
- Women empowerment occurs within sociology, psychological, political cultural, familial and economic spheres and at various levels such as individual, group and community. Women empowerment is an ongoing dynamic process which enhances women's abilities to change the structure and ideologies that keep them subordinate. Women empowerment is a process of creating awareness and capacity building.

Current scenario on women empowerment

Based on the ideas championed by our founding fathers for women empowerment, many social, economic and political provisions were incorporated in the Indian Constitution. Women in India now participate in areas such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sector and science and technology. But due to the deep-rooted patriarchal mentality in the Indian society, women are still victimized, humiliated, tortured and exploited. Even after almost seven decades of Independence, women are still subjected to discrimination in the social, economic and educational field.

Suggestions

The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights. 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. Strict implementation of

Programmes and Acts should be there to curb the mal-practices prevalent in the society.

Conclusion

“When women move forward the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves”. It is essential as their thought and their value systems lead the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation. The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the mainstream of development. Women empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed income and property so that they may stand on their feet and build up their identity in the society. 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.

Facilitating that women’s direct participation in decision-making capacity and income generation activities can make significant contributions towards women empowerment. This will enable women to take the initiative for their development into their own hands. And entrepreneurship can help women to gain economic development and improve their social status. Once they attain development of women entrepreneurship enables society to understand and appreciate their abilities. It enhances their status and leads to the integration of women in nation building and economic, to create their enhanced identity in society.

Gender inequality and caste discrimination still remain major issues which hinder women’s empowerment. These are the major challenges that we need to fight. Both men and women are a part of society; both are entitled to have a good life by respecting each other.

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