



Empowerment of Women in India: A Reality or a Myth

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Abstract

Empowerment is one of the terms that have been extensively used, especially over the last two decades. It reveals the development and has become a popular tool for analysis. Empowerment of Women can be defined as a multidimensional process which encourages women to realise and achieve their goals in all the spheres of life. It can also be defined as the ability of women to tackle problems and handle responsibilities, to secure their future and to overcome the obstacles.

Women in India, who constitute almost 50 percent of India's population are becoming the most vulnerable section as far as crime against them is concerned and their safety and security is a matter of concern nowadays. Every day in newspapers we can read about the crimes done against women. The headlines reporting molestation, sexual assault, rapes and trafficking can be seen almost on a daily basis in newspapers. It's hard to imagine the pain and agony that women go through who are the sufferers of such crimes. It has a negative impact on their confidence. They question the safety environment prevailing in our country and their faith in judicial system is also shattered. Apart from this, the effect of

such crime is so deep that it affects her life for a very long time period. The Present paper tries to dwell deep into the aspects of Women Empowerment through literacy, Women Security and crimes against women. As responsible citizens of India, it is imperative on our part to contribute towards bringing equality between the status of men and women in India. We must ensure that a woman too can enjoy her human rights and fundamental rights with sense of pride, freedom and confidence. The paper is concluded by highlighting the role of literacy for women empowerment and issues of violence and crime against women in India. The researchers try to analyze the present scenario in Indian society with respect to safety and security of women and the major safety steps taken by the government for Women safety. The paper has been prepared on the basis of available literatures. The present research paper reveals that, on one hand, the literacy rate of females have increased considerably over the years but on the other hand, crime against women is increasing every year.

Keywords: Women Empowerment; Women Security; Crime; Indian Society; Women Protection

INTRODUCTION

Almost half of the population of the world is constituted by women but the dominance of men and their masculine ideology that they belong to a superior race has denied equal opportunities to

women in the various spheres of life. However, in the recent times, with the rise of feminist ideas, there has been a tremendous improvement in the status of women throughout the world and they



have started contributing in all the fields along with their male counterparts.

Empowerment is one of the terms that have been extensively used, especially over the last two decades. It reveals the development and has become a popular tool for analysis. Empowerment of Women can be defined as a multidimensional process which encourages women to realise and achieve their goals in all the spheres of life. It can also be defined as the ability of women to tackle problems and handle responsibilities, to secure their future and to overcome the obstacles.

Although the participation of women in the paid labour force and female enrolment in education has increased considerably over the last years, gender disparities still exist in almost all the countries in the world. Urban working women all over India have proved that they can not only match but also excel men in various skills, if equal opportunities are available to them without any discrimination.

India is all set to emerge as one of the superpowers by 2020. It is expected to be more literate, knowledgeable and economically sound at all the fronts. There is no doubt that the role of women would be a major one for realising the dream of becoming a superpower nation. Women's contribution and women power plays a vital role for economic development of any nation. In India, the contribution of women is still in its infancy and a chain of strong reforms is the need of the hour to bring a considerable change in the status of women and its imperative for the overall development of the nation.

A higher women literacy rate improves the quality of life both at home and outside home, by encouraging and promoting education of children, especially female children, and helps in reducing the infant mortality rate. It is true that empowerment can be gained with the help of education

because it gives the knowledge of right and wrong, truth and lie.

Women constitute almost half the human race. Education has been recognized as an essential agent of social change and development in any society of any country. Education is considered as a potential instrument through which processes of modernization and social change come to existence. Education exposes people to new thoughts and ideas which provide necessary skills.

Violence against women is partly a result of gender relations that assumes men to be superior to women. Given the subordinate status of women, much of gender violence is considered normal and enjoys social sanction. Manifestations of violence include physical aggression, such as blows of varying intensity, burns, attempted hanging, sexual abuse and rape, psychological violence through insults, humiliation, coercion, blackmail, economic or emotional threats, and control over speech and actions. In extreme, but not unknown cases, death is the result. These expressions of violence take place in a man-woman relationship within the family, state and society. Usually, domestic aggression towards women and girls, due to various reasons remain hidden.

Violence strikes women from all kinds of backgrounds and of all ages. It can happen at work, on the street, or at home. The abuse of women is effectively condoned in almost every society of the world. A female child since birth is considered a liability for her parents. She is made to realize that she is weak and needs protection. Protection in all sense, whether it is physical, social or economic. She is constantly made aware about the fact that she is helpless and is dependent on the male members. This has led to her exploitation at almost every stage of her life.



The rate of sexual crime against women is on rise all over the country. Rape, molestation, disregard for dignity to live the way a women wants is not respected by the society or by certain people. It is essential that there should be more stringency in the law and a quick and speedy procedure to deal and immediacy in rendering justice to the public in case of sexual offence to reduce the pains and

agony of the victims. Advancement in technology has also brought about new forms of violence against women. Early detection of sex of the child has given rise to increasing instances of female foeticide. Easy access to new forms of information and communication technologies has given rise to new forms of harassment and violence such as cyber or phone stalking and increase in demand for pornography.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Coomaraswamy (1996) stressed on the fact that many incidences of violence are not reported because of the shame and fear associated with being a victim. Rates of sex trafficking, sexual violence in armed conflict situations, female infanticide, and violence in schools and the workplace, for example, are thought to be significantly under-documented, particularly in developing countries.

Heise (1998) describe the different forms of violence that women experience throughout their lifespan. Gender-based violence against women takes many forms and occurs throughout a woman's life cycle. He proposed a clearer and interrelated ecological framework for understanding violent behaviour among individuals. This framework includes a range of physical, social, emotional and psychological factors at the personal, community and societal levels.

Ahuja (1998) highlighted that, a common approach in some of the theories has been to focus on individual aggressors. There are two kinds of explanations focusing on individuals. One includes psycho-pathological explanations that focus on personality characteristics of victims and offenders. These theories provide pathological explanations for violent behaviour focusing on brain structures, chemical imbalances, dietary deficiencies, hormonal factors as well as evolutionary

theories and genetic characteristics to explain violent behaviour. The socio-psychological model on the other hand argues that violent behaviour can be understood by careful examination of the external environmental factors that have an impact on the behaviour of individuals leading to stressful situations or family interactional patterns.

Anderson and Eswaran (2009) concluded that a woman's access to employment outside the house increases her household bargaining power. They also highlighted that the ownership of assets, in particular, is one important way through which access to employment helps empower women in developing countries. In addition, their study focussed on the fact that, access to credit programs whether through micro-finance organizations or rotating savings and credit associations has a positive effect on female empowerment. They found a positive link between empowerment and contraceptive use, as well as between the woman's influence on resource allocation and her family's social status.

Malika and Courtney (2011) studied that how higher education offers empowerment to women. The economic independence and increased standing with the family were the benefits of higher education. It also enabled the women to impact the discriminatory practices.



Noreen and Khalid (2012) explored the possibilities and opportunities for women empowerment and how the participants in the study understand the role of higher education in empowerment of women at home and at work. They found out that the women should continue higher education and career by strategizing and acknowledging the support of their family members.

Banerjee (2012) analyzed the empowerment of women through higher education. She concluded that the empowered women challenged the man in their workplace and were seen in the powerful corporate positions.

Kandpal et al. (2012) stressed on the fact that the participation in community level female empowerment program in India leads to physical mobility, increases

METHODOLOGY

The study is primarily based on qualitative literature survey method. It facilitates in depth analysis of the issues related to Women Empowerment in India and the crime against women in India. Extensive review of the literature provided useful insight about the various factors that are responsible for the empowerment of Indian women. The present study is exclusively based on secondary data which has been collected from the various issues of Annual Census Report, Handbook of

political participation and employment opportunities.

Murtaza (2012) examined the current status of women in higher education in Gilgit Baltistan. He examined the challenges faced by the women were harassment at work places and work load. The parents didn't spend similar amount in educating their daughters as compare to their sons.

Sonowal (2013) highlighted the status of the SC and ST women in the rural areas of Sonitpur district. He stressed on the various problems that women face in our society such as attitude of parents and guardians towards girl education.

Taxak (2013) studied the disparity in education across the socio economic spectrum in India.

Statistics on the Indian Economy and National Crime Record Bureau Reports.

OBJECTIVES

- To highlight the issue of present status of women and the factors contributing towards women empowerment in India
- To evaluate the status of crime committed against women in India


TABLE-1 : LITERACY RATE IN INDIA (In percentage)

Year	Persons	Males	Females
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8
1931	9.5	15.6	2.9
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
1951	16.7	24.9	7.3
1961	24.0	34.4	13.0
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	65.38	76.0	54.0
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: Census of India (2011)

Education

When we talk about education, India has come a long way since independence but still a gap between men and women in terms of education is severe. Table-1 clearly shows that approximately 82.14% of males are literate as compared to only 65.46% of females. Illiteracy is one of the prime causes for inequality among the status of men and women in India. Illiterate women are on the mercy of their husband or father. She is completely unaware about the various fundamental rights that constitution has bestowed her as a free citizen of India.

India has a culture where generally man is considered as the head of the family and his decision is considered as the final one. This culture is making the status and condition of women more miserable.

Table-1 highlights that the literacy rate of women was very low as compared to their male counterparts before independence. It can be judged by the fact that the literacy rate of women has risen from 0.7% to 7.3% during the first five decades of the 20th century, while the literacy rate of men have risen from 9.8% to 24.9% during the first five decades of the 20th century. After India attained independence, the literacy rate rose substantially for men as well as women. Post

independence the literacy rate for men has increased almost three and half times, from 25% in 1951 to 82% in 2011 whereas for women it has increased by almost four times, from 16% in 1951 to 65% in 2011. From the above table, it can be concluded that, still there is a significant difference between the literacy rate of men and women in India we need to change our mindset to bring equality in education for men and women. The higher rate of illiteracy is leading to dependence of women on men and because of this they take a back seat in the family. The lack of education opportunities is the prime cause for women's exploitation as they are not even aware about their fundamental rights bestowed by the constitution of India. Only literacy can help women to understand the constitutional and legislative provisions of India that are made to strengthen them.

Thus, it is extremely vital to provide education to women and encourage them to handle the responsibilities in the family along with men on all the forefronts. There is an important role of education in empowering women and helping them in accomplishing their goals in all the spheres of life.


TABLE-2 STATE WISE FEMALE LITERACY RATE IN INDIA (In percentage)

Sl. No.	Name of the State	Female Literacy
1	Andhra Pradesh	59.7%
2	Arunachal Pradesh	59.6%
3	Assam	67.3%
4	Bihar	53.3%
5	Chattisgarh	60.6%
6	Delhi	80.9%
7	Goa	81.8%
8	Gujarat	70.7%
9	Haryana	66.8%
10	Himachal Pradesh	76.6%
11	Jammu and Kashmir	58.0%
12	Jharkhand	56.2%
13	Karnataka	68.1%
14	Kerala	92.0%
15	Madhya Pradesh	60.0%
16	Maharashtra	75.5%
17	Manipur	73.2%
18	Meghalaya	73.8%
19	Mizoram	89.4%
20	Nagaland	76.7%
21	Orissa	64.4%
22	Punjab	71.3%
23	Rajasthan	52.7%
24	Sikkim	76.4%
25	Tamil Nadu	73.9%
26	Tripura	83.1%
27	Uttar Pradesh	59.3%
28	Uttarakhand	70.7%
29	West Bengal	71.2%

Union Territories

1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	81.8%
2	Chandigarh	81.4%
3	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	65.9%
4	Daman & Diu	79.6%
5	Lakshadweep	88.2%
6	Pondicherry	81.2%
All India		65.46%

Source: Census of India (2011)

According to the Table-2 the state wise female literacy rate had an average of 65.46% in all India census conducted in 2011. The highest literacy rate was 92.0%

found in Kerala and least literacy rate was 52.7% found in Rajasthan in 2011 census. While comparing literacy rate of female over the last decade it was observed that



there was an 11% increase in the literacy rate over the last ten 10 years. It increased from 54.16% in 2001 to 65.46% in 2011. Women's literacy rate has shown a sharp

increase over the last ten years. Government of India has taken various initiatives especially for women regarding literacy of women in India.

TABLE-3

FORMS OF VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN THROUGHOUT THEIR LIFESPAN

Forms of Violence experienced by Women throughout their Lifespan Phase	Type of Violence Present
Pre-Birth	Sex-selective abortion; battering during pregnancy; coerced pregnancy.
Infancy	Female infanticide; emotional and physical abuse; differential access to food and medical care.
Girlhood	Child marriage; genital mutilation; sexual abuse by family members and strangers; differential access to food, medical care and education.
Adolescence	Violence during courtship; economically coerced sex (e.g. for school fees); sexual abuse in the workplace; rape; sexual harassment; arranged marriage; trafficking.
Reproductive age	Physical, psychological and sexual abuse by intimate male partners and relatives; forced pregnancies by partner; sexual abuse in the workplace; sexual harassment; rape; abuse of widows, including property grabbing and sexual cleansing practices.
Elderly	Abuse of widows, including property grabbing; accusations of witchcraft; physical and psychological violence by younger family members; differential access to food and medical care.

Source: Heise, Pitanguay and Germain (1994). Violence Against Women: The Hidden Health Burden. World Bank, Discussion Paper. Washington. D.C. The World Bank.

**TABLE-4****RAPE VICTIM AND ACCUSED RELATIONSHIP-2012**

Serial Number	Accused Relationship	No. of Rape Victim	Percentage of Rape Victim
1	Neighbours	207	29.32%
2	Friends	200	28.32%
3	Relatives	59	08.35%
4	Employers/co-workers	17	02.41%
5	Other Known persons	197	27.90%
6	Unknown/stranger	26	03.68%
	Total	706	99.98%

Source: Delhi Police (The Hindu news Staff Reporter NEW DELHI, January 19, 2013)

Table-4 shows that maximum number of rapes was committed by the known persons such as Neighbours, friends, relatives, co-workers and other known

persons. Only 3.68% cases were committed by the unknown persons. This table shows women are not safe even inside their home.

TABLE-5**TYPE OF VIOLENCE COMMITTED AGAINST WOMEN**

Type of Violence	Cases Registered on Crimes against Women during the Years				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Rape	19348	20737	21467	21397	22172
Kidnapping and Abduction	17414	20416	22939	25741	29795
Dowry Death	7618	8093	8172	8383	8391
Torture	63128	75930	81344	89546	94041
Molestation	36617	38734	40413	38711	40613
Sexual Harassment	9956	10950	12214	11009	9961
Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1956	4541	3568	2659	2474	2499
Indecent Representation of Women Prohibition Act, 1986	1562	1200	1025	845	895
Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	4504	5623	5555	5650	5182
Total	164765	185312	195856	203804	213585

(Source: Crime in India, National Crime Records Bureau Report 2011)



Conclusions

The status of women in modern India is a sort of a paradox, on one hand she is at the peak of ladder of success; on the other hand she is mutely suffering the violence afflicted on her. Two Indian women Kalpana Chawla and Sunita Williams have made their mark in the whole universe by flying to space; still women education receives little attention in India, especially in rural areas. As compared with past women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality they have to still travel a long way. Women have left the secured domain of their home and are now in the battlefield of life, fully armoured with their talent. They had proven themselves, but as 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. An illiterate women is at the mercy of her husband or father, she also does not know that this is not the way of life for women across the world.

Violence against women in its various forms is a violation of human rights, the very nature of which deprives women of their ability to enjoy fundamental freedoms. It is a serious obstacle to equality between women and men and perpetuates inequality. Violence against women intersects with multiple forms of discrimination. While violence against women is universal, its manifestations and women's personal experiences of it are shaped by factors such as economic status, race, class, religion, etc. Violence against women remains hidden in the culture of silence. Thus, it can be concluded that, though there has been a substantial increase in the literacy rate of women post independence but still there is a huge gap between the literacy rate of men and women in India and it's all because of the mindset that we have for a girl child in our society. As far as safety of Women is concerned the data over the years shows that all the crimes are on an increasing

trend and strict laws need to be put into immediate action for making India a safe place for women.

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