



Factors Affecting Women Empowerment in India

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Abstract

From ancient to modern period, women's condition socially, politically and economically has not remained same and it kept changing with times. In ancient India, women were having equal status with men. 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. India is now a leading country in the field of women education. History of India is never blank of brave women and philosophers women All the famous women historical women in India are inspiration for the women of this age. We never forget their contribution to the society and country. This study was designed to assess the status & factors that affect the performance of women empowerment in India. The appearance & enhancement of women empowerment depends various factors such on socio-economic, political, cultural & psychological. Female education in India has been an urgent need of the new era because women are first teacher of their teacher and future of the child depends on the love and care of the mother means a woman. A woman performs the role of many characters through-out her life such as a daughter, sister, wife and mother. Extensive illiteracy, lack of basic education, training and experience remain serious obstacles in women's empowerment. In conclusion, it can be said that women in India, through their own unrelenting effort and with the help of Constitutional and other legal provisions and also with the aid of Government's various welfare schemes, are trying to find their own place under the sun.

INTRODUCTION

“Is powerful the Empowered Women beyond measure and beyond description.”

Need for empowerment arose due to centuries of domination and discrimination done by men over women; women are the suppressed lot. They are the target of varied types of violence and discriminatory practices done by men all over the world. India is not different.

India is a complex country. We have, through centuries, developed various types of customs, traditions and practices. These customs and traditions, good as well as bad, have become a part of our society's collective consciousness.

We worship female goddesses; we also give great importance to our mothers, daughters, sisters, wives and other female relatives or friends. But at the same time, Indians are also famous for treating their women badly both inside and outside their homes.

Indian society consists of people belonging to almost all kinds of religious beliefs. In every religion women are given a special place and every religion teaches us to treat women with respect and dignity. But somehow the society has so developed that various types of ill practices, both physical and mental, against women have become a norm since ages. For instance, *sati pratha*, practice of dowry, *parda pratha*, female infanticide, wife burning, sexual violence, sexual

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harassment at work place, domestic violence and other varied kinds of discriminatory practices; all such acts consists of physical as well as mental element.

The reasons for such behaviour against women are many but the most important one are the male superiority complex and patriarchal system of society. Though to eliminate these ill practices and discrimination against women, various constitutional and legal rights are there but in reality there are a lot to be done. Several self-help groups and NGOs are working in this direction; also women themselves are breaking the societal barriers and achieving great heights in all dimensions: political, social and economic. But society as a whole has still not accepted women as being equal to men and crimes or abuses against women are still on the rise. For that to change, the society's age-old deep-rooted mind set needs to be changed through social conditioning and sensitization programmes.

Therefore, the concept of women empowerment not only focuses on giving women strength and skills to rise above from their miserable situation but at the same time it also stresses on the need to educate men regarding women issues and inculcating a sense of respect and duty towards women as equals.

WHAT IS WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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:

1. Generating women's sense of self-worth.

2. Women's right to have and to determine their choices.
3. Women's right to have access to equal opportunities and all kinds of resources.
4. Women's right to have the power to regulate and control their own lives, within and outside the home.
5. 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.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From ancient to modern period, women's condition-socially, politically and economically-has not remained same and it kept changing with times. In ancient India, women were having equal status with men; in early Vedic period they were very educated and there are references of women sages such as *Maitrayi* in our ancient texts. But with the coming of famous treatise of Manu i.e. *Manusmriti*, the status of women was relegated to a subordinate position to men.

All kinds of discriminatory practices started to take from such as child marriage, *devadashi pratha*, *nagar vadhu system*, *sati pratha* etc. Women's socio-political rights were curtailed and they were made fully dependent upon the male members of family. Their right to education, right to work and right to decide for themselves were taken away.

During medieval period the condition of women got worsened with the advent of Muslim rulers in India; as also during the British period. But the British rule also brought western ideas into the country.

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A few enlightened Indians such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy influenced by the modern concept of freedom, liberty, equality and justice started to question the prevailing discriminatory practices against women. Through his unrelenting efforts, the British were forced to abolish the ill-practice of Sati. Similarly several other social reformers such as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, Acharya Vinoba Bhave etc. worked for the upliftment of women in India. For instance, the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 was the result of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's movement for improving the conditions of widows.

Indian National Congress supported the first women's delegation which met the Secretary of State to demand women's political rights in 1917. The Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929 was passed due to the efforts of Mahommad Ali Jinna, Mahatma Gandhi called upon the young men to marry the child widows and urged people to boycott child marriages.

FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

There are various issues and problems which women generally face in the society in India. Some of the problems are mentioned and described below:

Selective abortion and female infanticide: It is the most common practice for years in India in which abortion of female foetus is performed in the womb of mother after the foetal sex determination and sex selective abortion by the medical professionals.

- a. **Sexual harassment:** It is the form of sexual exploitation of a girl child at

home, streets, public places, transports, offices, etc by the family members, neighbours, friends or relatives.

- b. **Dowry and Bride burning:** It is another problem generally faced by women of low or middle class family during or after the marriage. Parents of boy's demand a lot of money from the bride's family to be rich in one time. Groom's family perform bride burning in case of lack of fulfilled dowry demand. In 2005, around 6787 dowry death cases were registered in India according to the Indian National Crime Bureau reports.
- c. **Disparity in education:** The level of women education is less than men still in the modern age. Female illiteracy is higher in the rural areas. Where over 63% or more women remain unlettered.
- d. **Domestic violence:** it is like endemic and widespread disease affects almost 70% of Indian women according to the women and child development official. It is performed by the husband, relative or other family member. Girls have no property rights like boys forever.
- e. **Child Marriages:** Early marriage of the girls by their parents in order to be escaped from dowry. It is highly practiced in the rural India.
- f. **Inadequate Nutrition:** Inadequate nutrition in the childhood affects women in their later life especially women belonging to the lower middle class and poor families.
- g. **Domestic violence and status in the family:** It is the abuse or violence

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against women. Women are considered as inferior to men so they are not allowed to join military services.

- h. **Status of widows:** Widows are considered as worthless in the Indian society. They are treated poorly and forced to wear white clothes.

PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

The constitution of India has given special attention to the needs of women to enable them to exercise their rights on equal footing with men and participate in national development. It aims at creation of an entirely new social order where, all citizens are given equal opportunities for growth and development and that no discrimination takes place on the basis of race, religion, caste, sex, etc.,

Framing of the five year plans was the first major step taken in the direction of welfare state: Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India and the pioneer of five year plans, stressed on welfare of women, children and tribal in our country.

The First Five Year Plan (1951–56) contemplated welfare measures for women. To implement welfare measures for the benefit of poor women, the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was established to deal with the problems of women. The CSWB recognized and realized the need for organising women into *Mahila Mandals* or women's club as an approach to community development.

The Second Five Year Plan (1956 – 61) intimately concentrated overall intensive agricultural development. However, the welfare

approach to women's issues was determined recognizing women as workers. Further protection against injuries at work, maternity benefits and crèches for their children, it also suggested immediate implementation of the principal of equal pay for equal work and provision for training to enable women to compete for higher jobs.

The Third Five Year Plan (1961 – 66) sincerely recognized the greater importance of education for women which has been a major welfare strategy for women. This plan allocated the largest share for expending social welfare services and condensed courses of education. As regards to wealth, maternal and child welfare programmes were proclaimed in terms of maternal and child welfare, health education, nutrition and family planning.

Thus the emphasis on women education was continued during the Fourth Five Year Plan also (1969 – 1974). The basic policy was to promote women's welfare as the base of operation. The outlay on family planning was stepped upto reduce the birth rate through education, immunization of pre-school children and supplemental feeding, expectant and nursing mothers.

Need for training women in respect of income generating activities and their protection was stressed in the Fifth Five Year Plan. Further, the fifth plan also recommended a strategic programme of functional literacy to equip women with skills and knowledge to perform the functions as a good housewife. Under the health programmes, the primary objective was to provide minimum public health facilities integrated with family planning and nutrition for



vulnerable groups, children, pregnant and lactating mothers.

The Sixth Five Year Plan stressed the need of economic independence educational advance and access to health care and family planning as essential for women's development. So the strategy was threefold: of education, employment and health. They are independent and dependent on the total developmental process.

The Seventh Five Year Plan sought to generate awareness among women about their rights and privileges. The long term objectives of developmental 295 programmes in the Seventh plan were to raise women's economic and social status in order to bring them into the mainstream of national development and recognized the importance of women in contributing to the various socio-economic, political and cultural activities. The seventh plan emphasized the need to open new avenues of work for women and perceive them as crucial resource for the development of the country. Another salient and crucial recognition was the need for organisation of women workers and unionization.

The strategy in the Eighth Plan was to ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors did not bypass women and special programmes were implemented to complement the general programmes. The main objective of Eighth Plan was to extend the reach of services to women both qualitatively and quantitatively. *Panchayati Raj* institutions are involved in the designing and implementation of women's programmes.

The Ninth Five Year Plan came into effect from April 1, 1997. An approach paper had been developed by the Planning Commission and

accepted by the National Development Council, which had become basis for developing Ninth Five Year Plan. In this approach paper focus was laid on empowerment of women and people's participation in planning and implementation of strategies.

The Tenth Plan aims at empowering women through translating the recently adopted National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) into action and ensuring 'survival' protection and development of children through rights based approach.

The Eleventh Plan Approach paper aimed to raise the sex ratio for the age group 0 – 6 to 935 by 2011 – 12 and to 950 by 2016 – 17. Further, this plan intends to ensure 33 percent of the direct and indirect beneficiaries of all government schemes are women and girl children. It also proposes to ensure that all children enjoy a safe childhood without any compulsion to work.

THE NATIONAL POLICY FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

The Government of India has declared 2001 as Women's Empowerment year. The national policy of empowerment of women has set certain clear-cut goals and objectives. The policy aims at upliftment, development and empowerment in socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects, by creating in them awareness on various issues in relation to their empowerment.

The following are the specific objectives of National Policies particularly of rural folk on Empowerment of women in India.

- a) Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full

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development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.

- b) The de-jure and de-facto enjoyments of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all political, economic, social, cultural and civil spheres.
- c) Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social political and economic life of the nation.
- d) Equal access to women to health care, quality education at all levels, career and vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public life etc.,
- e) Strengthening legal systems aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
- f) Changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.
- g) Ministering a gender perspective in the development process.
- h) Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and the girl child.
- i) Building and strengthening partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations.

The National policy for empowerment of women envisaged introduction of a gender perspective in the budgeting process as an operational strategy. A few laws and legislations are enforced strictly for effective and proper implementation of this policy.

SCHEMES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

1. Swa-Shakti
2. Swayamsiddha
3. Swawlamban Programme.
4. Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP)
5. Swadhar
 - a) Construction of Working Women Hostels
 - b) Creches
 - c) Relief, Protection and Rehabilitation to Women in Difficult Circumstances
 - d) Compensation to Rape Victims
7. Institutional Services
 - a) State Homes
 - b) Service Homes
 - c) Working Women's Hostels
 - d) Vocational Training Centres
 - e) Craft Training Centres
 - f) District Craft including Tailoring Centres
 - g) Women Technical Training Institute (WTTI)
 - h) Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP)
 - i) Training for Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM)
 - j) Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA)
 - k) Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY)
 - l) Indira Mahila Yojna(IMY)
 - m) Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)
 - n) Swarnajayanthi Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY)



CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS:

“No matter where you are in life, Inspire and empower. The women around you. Success is never reached alone and wisdom and wealth is sweater shared.”

Women in India, through their own unrelenting efforts and with the help of Constitutional and other legal provisions and also with the aid of Government's various welfare schemes, are trying to find their own place under the sun. And it is a heartening sign that their participation in employment- government as well as private, in socio-political activities of the nation and also their presence at the highest decision making bodies is improving day by day.

However, we are still far behind in achieving the equality and justice which the Preamble of our Constitution talks about. The real problem lies in the patriarchal and male-dominated system of our society which considers women as subordinate to men and creates different types of methods to subjugate them.

The need of us is to educate and sensitize male members of the society regarding women issues and try to inculcate a feeling of togetherness and equality among them so that they would stop their discriminatory practices towards the fairer sex.

For this to happen apart from Government, the efforts are needed from various NGOs and from enlightened citizens of the country. And first of all efforts should begin from our homes where we must empower female members of our family by providing them equal opportunities of education, health, nutrition and decision making without any discrimination.

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