

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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Abstract

Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that affect them. Present article discusses about various initiatives taken by Government of India for empowering women by analyzing position of India in Gender Inequality Index and Global Gender Gap Index of United Nations. Article concludes with the note that due recognition must be given to women and society should come forward to ensure equal status for women in all spheres of life.

Key Words: empowerment, equal, gender, relations, society, status, women

Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that affect them. Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International women Conference in 1985 at Nairobi, which defined it as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women.

Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) includes the following factors in its definition of women empowerment:

1. Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the way in which these relations may be changed.
2. Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.

Batliwala (1974) defines empowerment as "the process of challenging existing power relation and of gaining greater control over the source of power". Women's empowerment is seen as the process and the result of the process of:

1. Challenging the ideology of male domination and women's subordinations.
2. Enabling women to gain equal access to and control over the resources (material, human and intellectual).

Empowered Women's Characteristics

Empowered women define their attitude, values and behaviours in relation to their own real interest. They have autonomy because they claim their freedom from existing male hierarchies, whether they live in traditional societies or modern industrial societies.

Empowered women maintain equal mindedness. They act out roles that challenge male dominance. They respond as equals and co-operate to work towards the common good.

Empowered women use their talent to live fulfilling lives. They not only survive the harshness of their own subjugation but also transcend their subjugation.

Empowered women maintain their strength on the face of pressures from the religion and work and contribute towards the empowerment of all women.

Empowered women define their values and formulate their beliefs themselves, they do not derive their sense of being from male authorities nor do they live vicariously through men.

Dimensions and Parameters of Women Empowerment

The process of empowerment has five dimensions, viz. Cognitive, psychological, economic, political and physical:

(i)The cognitive dimension refers to women having an understanding of the conditions and causes of their subordination at the micro and macro levels. It involves making choices that may go against cultural expectations and norms;

(ii)The psychological dimension includes the belief that women can act at personal and societal levels to improve their individual realities and the society in which they live;

(iii)The economic component requires that women have access to, and control over, productive resources, thus ensuring some degree of financial autonomy. However she notes that changes in the economic balance of power do not necessarily alter traditional gender roles or norms;

(iv)The political element entails that women have the capability to analyse, organise and mobilise for social change; and

(v)There is a physical element of gaining control over one's body and sexuality and the ability to protect oneself against sexual violence to the empowerment process.

The parameters of women empowerment are:

Raising self-esteem and self-confidence of women.

Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girl child.

Building and strengthening partnership with civil society particularly women's organisations.

Enforcement of constitutional and legal provisions and safeguarding rights of women.

Building a positive image of women in the society and recognising their contributions in social, economic and political sphere.

Developing ability among women to think critically.

Fostering decision-making and collective action.

Enabling women to make informed choices.

Ensuring women's participation in all walks of life.

Providing information, knowledge, skills for self-employment.

Elimination of discrimination against women's participation in the areas of:

–Access to food

–Equal wages

–Property rights

–Family resources

–Freedom of movement and travel

–Access to credit

–Control over savings, earnings and resources

Gender sensitisation training in schools, colleges and other professional institutions for bringing about institutional changes.

Women have to swim against the stream that requires mere strength. Such strength comes from the process of empowerment. The women empowerment can be done through providing proper education, health and nutrition facilities.

Indicators of Women Empowerment

Beijing Conference 1995 had identified certain quantitative and qualitative indicators of women empowerment. These indicators are discussed below:

Qualitative Indicators:

- (i) increase in self-esteem, individual and collective confidence;
- (ii) increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness on health, nutrition reproductive rights, law and literacy;
- (iii) increase in personal leisure time and time for child care;
- (iv) increase on decrease of workloads in new programmes;
- (v) change in roles and responsibility in family and community;
- (vi) visible increase on decrease in violence on women and girls;
- (vii) responses to, changes in social customs like child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows;
- (viii) visible changes in women's participation level attending meetings, participating and demanding participation;
- (ix) increase in bargaining and negotiating power at home, in community and the collective;

Components of Women Empowerment: Four components of women's empowerment are identified:

- (i) Acquiring knowledge and an understanding of gender/power relations and ways in which these relations may be changed;
- (ii) Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life;
- (iii) Gaining the ability to generate choices and thereby acquiring leverage and bargaining power; and
- (iv) Developing the ability to generate, organise or influence the direction of social change to create more just social and economic orders nationally and internationally.

Objectives Of Women Empowerment

To identify gaps in the empowerment of women, development of children and adolescents;

Create a national network of public, private and NGO centres for delivering reproductive and child health services free to any client;

To create an enabling environment through convergence with other programmes;

To open more child care centres for working women and expand the availability of safe abortion care;

To use energy saving devices to reduce drudgery of women;

To identify the ways in which the effects of policies and programmatic interventions to promote women's empowerment have been measured;

To improve access to sanitation, drinking water, fuel, wood and fodder for women;

To develop health management and health package at all levels;

To improve accessibility and quality of maternal and child health care services;

To identify the evidence on how women's empowerment affects important development outcomes such as health, education, fertility behaviour, income levels, etc.

Supporting community activities package for women;

To improve and increase clinical and contraception delivery services;

To organise educational and empowerment programmes for girls and women;

To train resource persons, animators and trainers for activities visualised;

To conduct and promote experimentations and innovations and research in the problems and programmes of empowerment of rural women;

To increase awareness in women, for their development to use their talent optimally not only for themselves, but also for the society as a whole;

To develop the skills for self-decision- taking capabilities in women and to allow them to present their point of view effectively in society;

To create awareness among women to be truly ambitious and to dream for betterment;
 To make efforts in organising the women for fighting against the problems and difficulties related to them; and
 To integrate socio-economic activities with concern for health and environment protection in the light of the rural women culture.

Women Empowerment in India

The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and Programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. From the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78 onwards there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development and then from Eighth Five Year Plan emphasis was shifted from development to empowerment. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognised as the central issue in determining the status of women. India has also ratified various International conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women.

The Cairo conference in 1994 organised by UN on Population and Development called attention to women's empowerment as a central focus and UNDP developed the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which focuses on the three variables that reflect women's participation in society— political power or decision-making, education and health. 1995 UNDP report was devoted to women's empowerment and it declared that if human development is not engendered it is endangered. The Government of India declared 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti). The National Policy for the Empowerment of Women was passed in 2001.

Women Empowerment Policy 2001 Goal and Objectives

The goal of this Policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The Policy will be widely disseminated so as to encourage active participation of all stakeholders for achieving its goals. Specifically, the objectives of this Policy include:

Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.

The *de jure* and *de facto* enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedom by women on equal basis with men in all spheres—political, economic, social, cultural and civil.

Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation.

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 office, etc.

Initiatives taken for Empowerment of Vulnerable and Marginalised Groups and Women in Difficult Circumstances

Schemes of National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation

Integrated Child Development Scheme

National Rural Health Mission

Janani Suraksha Yojana

Integrated Child Protection Scheme

Swadhar—A scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances

Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS)

Antyodaya Anna Yojna (AAY)

Ujjawala—A Scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana(RSBY)

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)—A Conditional Maternity Benefit Scheme
 Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)—Sabla
 Swayam Siddha
 Scheme for Working Women Hostel
 STEP (Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women)
 Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana
 Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY)
 Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

Gender Budgeting in India

As the nodal Ministry for women, the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) has been undertaking several initiatives for the empowerment of women. In this context, Gender Budgeting (GB) has been adopted by the Government as a tool for ensuring that adequate budgetary commitments are made for women. To build capacities of functionaries and stakeholders at all levels, a Gender Budget Scheme was launched in the XI Plan. As part of this Scheme, the Ministry sponsored training programmes and workshops at the Centre and in the States, developed training material, undertook direct interactive sessions with identified Ministries and provided technical support on GB in training courses organised by other organisations.

Checklists for implementing Gender Budgeting by the various Ministries have been laid down and this Ministry is continuously taking up with the other Ministries as well as the state governments to carry forward this exercise. The Scheme also had a component for setting up a Gender Budgeting Cell (GBC) in the MWCD. In view of the growing GB awareness in both the Central Ministries as well as state governments, the demand for capacity building and technical support has been rising. Further, while detailed training manuals have been prepared for the use of the trainers for Central Ministries, the same need to be developed for state governments. Gender Audit is another emerging area which needs to be focused. To start with, appropriate training modules /manuals are required to be developed and capacities built in gender auditing. The GBC of the Ministry needs to be set up fully to provide support to the growing GB activities.

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW)

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) was launched by the Government of India (GoI) on International Women's Day in 2010 with the aim to strengthen overall processes that promote all-round development of women. It has the mandate to strengthen the inter-sector convergence; facilitate the process of coordinating all the women's welfare and socio-economic development programmes across ministries and departments. The Mission aims to provide a single window service for all programmes run by the Government for women under aegis of various Central Ministries. In light with its mandate, the Mission has been named Mission *Poorna Shakti*, implying a vision for holistic empowerment of women. The National Resource Centre for Women has been set up which functions as a national convergence centre for all schemes and programmes for women. It acts as a central repository of knowledge, information, research and data on all gender related issues and is the main body servicing the National and State Mission Authority.

Mission Statement

To strengthen the processes which promote holistic development and empowerment of women, gender equality and gender justice through inter-sectoral convergence of programmes that impact women, forge synergy among various stakeholders and create an enabling environment conducive to social change.

Key Strategies

Inter-sectoral convergence of schemes for women; monitoring and review of progress;
 Strengthening institutional framework for greater efficiency in support to women;
 Focused research, review of schemes, programmes and legislations, and gender audits for evidence based policy-making;
 Investment in skill and entrepreneurship development, micro-credit, vocational training and SHG development for economic empowerment of women; and

Support to Panchayati Raj Institutions; women's movements and community representatives for strengthening of local bodies;
360 degree approach on media and communication for behaviour change and social mobilisation for gender equality.

High Level Committee on the Status of Women

In order to analyse the state of women in a country various methods were designed from time-to-time. The introduction in 1995 of the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) coincided with growing international recognition of the importance of monitoring progress in the elimination of gender gaps in all aspects of life.

While the GDI and the GEM have contributed immensely to the gender debate, they have conceptual and methodological limitations. Therefore the Gender Inequality Index was introduced as an experimental index in 2010 as part of the 20th anniversary edition of the Human Development Report.

State of Gender Inequality in India

The Gender Inequality Index (GII) is a new index for measurement of gender disparity that was introduced in the 2010 Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). According to the UNDP, this index is a composite measure which captures the loss of achievement, within a country, due to gender inequality, and uses three dimensions to do so: reproductive health, empowerment, and labour market participation. The new index was introduced as an experimental measure to remedy the shortcomings of the previous indicators, the GDI and the GEM, both of which were introduced in the 1995 Human Development Report.

Overall, India has made significant economic progress, improvements are slow on the human development front. On the human development index, India ranks 136th out of 187 countries. In India huge income disparities, gender inequality and the caste divide remain major issues.

State of Gender Gap in India

The Global Gender Gap Index introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006, is a framework for capturing the magnitude and scope of gender-based disparities and tracking their progress. The Index benchmarks national gender gaps on economic, political, education and health-based criteria, and provides country rankings that allow for effective comparisons across regions and income groups, and over time. The rankings are designed to create greater awareness among a global audience of the challenges posed by gender gaps and the opportunities created by reducing them. The methodology and quantitative analysis behind the rankings are intended to serve as a basis for designing effective measures for reducing gender gaps.

The Global Gender Gap Index tries to measure the 'relative gaps between women and men across countries in four key areas—health, education, economics and politics. The rankings are based on four of sub-indices that measure economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment.

The World Economic Forum has placed India in the 101st position among 136 countries in the 2013 edition of an annual report that makes a global assessment of the progress made in bridging the gender gap. But India has fared better in terms of the political empowerment of women. India's gender gap index was 0.655 on a zero to one scale, with zero denoting inequality and one equality. India's position has improved marginally in recent years; after hovering between positions 114 and 112 between 2007 and 2011 it has now shot to the 101st position. But its best position so far was in 2006 - when it stood 98th. It was ranked 105th in 2012.

It is in the political empowerment arena that India has scored strong, being ranked 9th. The political sub-index measures the gap between men and women at the apex of the political decision-making hierarchy in terms of the ratio of women to men in minister-level positions and in Parliament. The ratio of women to men in terms of years in executive office (Prime Minister or President) for the past 50 years is also taken into consideration.

But in the other three, India has not been ranked particularly high—124 in terms of economic participation and equality, 120 for educational attainment and 135 for health and survival.

Political Participation of Women in India

At the grassroots level 50 per cent reservation given to women in local self-government institutions has improved political participation of women in India yet political participation of women in Legislative Assemblies and Parliament is still quite low in India. Women have adorned the position of President, Prime Minister, Speaker, and Leader of Opposition in politics of India and have proved their worth.

Women Representation in 16th Lok Sabha

The 16th Lok Sabha has 61 women members, the highest in history. speaker of 16th Lok Sabha is again a woman, Sumitra Mahajan. The present Rajya Sabha has 29 women members. The seven women ministers in the 46-member Council of Ministers have reinforced the new government's agenda of women empowerment. Six of the 23 Cabinet ministers are women, claiming almost a 25 per cent share. Three of them — Smriti Irani (HRD), Nirmala Sitharaman (Commerce and Industry) and Harsimrat Kaur Badal (Food Processing) — are going to hold their maiden portfolios as ministers. The age profile of these ministers - the youngest Smriti Irani at 38 and the oldest minister of the Cabinet Najma Heptullah at 74 — adds to the spectrum. Sushma Swaraj has got the key position of External Affairs Minister and is also the first woman after three decades to be a member of the all powerful Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS). This may raise expectations of India's female population to break the glass ceiling in many other bastions so far dominated by men.

Conclusion

The road map for women empowerment is there but still we have miles to go on this path of empowerment. We hope that in coming years ahead women empowerment will prove its worth. Women are an integral part of a society. They play an important role in determining the destiny of a nation. It has been rightly said by Swami Vivekanand, "The Best thermometer to the progress of nation is its treatment of women". Therefore, due recognition to them in the society and their greater involvement in socio-economic and political affairs becomes all the more important. Every person should come forward to ensure equal status for women in all spheres of life.

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