

Women Empowerment- A Tool of National development

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Full paper

*“To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened.
Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves”
- Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru*

Women's empowerment means that women are free to make and own their choices. They are not bound by conforming to what society, customs, protocol or individuals feel, but driven by what each woman defines for herself at every stage of her life. It could range from a young girl wearing what she wants - to choosing a career, irrespective of 'suitable for women or not'. Or the choices a woman in her late twenties / thirties makes about her marital and motherhood status. Or the choices a woman in her late 50's makes to lead her life. And the common factor that unites all these is that each woman should be free to own her choice and not be questioned or shamed for it.

If the women of a nation are developed, then the development of that nation is a must. So to achieve this thing, we need to destroy the demons killing the rights of women and ethics and values from the society such as *honour killing, illiteracy, dowry, rape, female infanticide, inequality, domestic violence, sexual harassment, illegal trafficking, prostitution* and many other issues. **Discrimination** on the basis of gender is something which will bring cultural, social, economic and educational differences in the society, that will push back the growth of the nation.

The most effective remedy to this problem is by providing proper **education** and providing exact **information** to them. And making women empowered by ensuring the **Right to Equality** mentioned in the Constitution of India. So to promote the goal of women empowerment, it should be promoted from childhood in each and every family.

Women's empowerment is the process in which women elaborate and recreate what it is that they can be, do, and accomplish in a circumstance that they previously were denied. Empowerment can be defined in many ways, however, when talking about women's empowerment, empowerment means accepting and allowing people (women) who are on the outside of the decision-making process into it. "This puts a strong emphasis on participation in political structures and formal decision-making and in the economic sphere, on the ability to obtain an income that enables participation in economic decision-making." Empowerment is the process that creates power in individuals over their own lives, society, and in their communities. People are empowered when they are able to access the opportunities available to them without limitations and restrictions. Feeling entitled to make your own decisions creates a sense of empowerment. Empowerment includes the action of raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment is all about equipping and allowing women to make life-determining decisions through the different problems in society.

Importance of Women Empowerment in Societies

Empowerment of women is a necessity for the very development of a society, since it enhances both the quality and the quantity of human resources available for national development. Empowerment is one of the main procedural concerns when addressing human rights and development. Women's empowerment and achieving gender equality is essential for our society to ensure the **sustainable development** of the country. Many world leaders and scholars have argued that sustainable development is impossible without women's empowerment. Without the equal inclusion of women in development, women would not be able to benefit or contribute to the development of the country.

Economic empowerment

Women's economic empowerment refers to the ability for women to enjoy their right to control and benefit from the resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and well being.

Economic empowerment increases women's agency, access to formal government programs, mobility outside the home, economic independence, and purchasing power. Strengthening women's access to property inheritance and land rights is another method used to economically empower women. This would allow them better means of asset accumulation, capital, and bargaining power needed to address gender inequalities. Often, women in developing and underdeveloped nations are legally restricted from their land on the sole basis of gender. Having a right to their land gives women a sort of bargaining power that they wouldn't normally have; in turn, they gain more opportunities for economic independence and formal financial institutions.

Another popular methodology for women's economic empowerment also includes microcredit. Microfinance institutions aim to empower women in their community by giving them access to loans that have low interest rates without the requirement of collateral. More specifically, they aim to give microcredit to women who want to be entrepreneurs. The success and efficiency of microcredit and microloans is controversial and constantly debated. Some critiques claim that microcredit alone doesn't guarantee women have control over the way it is used. Microfinance institutions don't address cultural barriers that allow men to still control household finances; as a result, microcredit may simply be transferred to the husband. Microcredit doesn't relieve women of household obligations, and even if women have credit, they don't have the time to be as active in the market as men.

Barriers

Many of the barriers to women's empowerment and equity lie ingrained in cultural norms. Many women feel these pressures, while others have become accustomed to being treated inferior to men. Even if legislators, NGOs, etc. are aware of the benefits women's empowerment and participation can have, many are scared of disrupting the status of the women and continue to let societal norms get in the way of development.

Recent studies also show that women face more barriers in the workplace than do men. Gender-related barriers involve sexual harassment; unfair hiring practices, career progression, and unequal pay where women are paid less than men are for performing the same job. While much of the public discussion of the "wage gap" has focused around women getting equal pay for the same work as their male peers, many women struggle with what is called the "pregnancy penalty". The main problem is that it is difficult to measure, but some experts say that the possibility of having a baby can be enough for employers to push women back from their line. Therefore, women are put in a position where they need to make the decision of whether to maintain in the workforce or have children. This new industry is paving a way for other companies to do the same. However, this industry also struggles to employ women in executive positions. This is partially due to the barrier of sexual harassment and pregnancy that was aforementioned. Such barriers make it difficult for women to advance in their workplace or receive fair compensation for the work they provide.

Role of Education

It is said that education increases "people's self-confidence and also enables them to find better jobs and they can work shoulder to shoulder with men" They engage in public debate and make demands on government for health care, social security and other entitlements". In particular, education empowers women to make choices that improve their children's health, their well-being, and chances of survival. Education informs others of preventing and containing the disease, and it is an essential element of efforts to reduce malnutrition. Furthermore, it empowers women to make choices that can improve their welfare, including marrying beyond childhood and having fewer children. Crucially, education can increase women's awareness of their rights, boost their self-esteem, and provide them the opportunity to assert their rights.

Despite significant improvements in recent decades, education is not universally available and gender inequalities persist. A major concern in many countries is not only the limited numbers of girls going to school but also the limited educational pathways for those that step into the classroom. More specifically, there should be more efforts to address the lower participation and learning achievement of girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics education.

E- Learning as a Tool of Empowerment

The growing access of the web in the late 20th century has allowed women to empower themselves by using various tools on the Internet. With the introduction of the World Wide Web, women have begun to use social networking sites like Face book and Twitter for online activism. Through online activism, women are able to empower themselves by organizing campaigns and voicing their opinions for equality rights without feeling oppressed by members of society.

With the easy accessibility and affordability of e-learning (electronic learning), women can now study from the comfort of their homes. By empowering themselves educationally through new technologies like e-learning, women are also learning new skills that will come in handy in today's advancing globalized world. Women's economic empowerment begins at home. Mothers, fathers, have a major role to play when it comes to women empowerment. The first step for empowering women starts at home when parents give equal opportunities to their sons and daughters to pursue education and the freedom to take decisions. Women have to shed the notion, and hesitation, that they might not be able to work on a par with men. **"Women empowerment is empowering India"**. Constitution gave equal rights to men and women and women should take up any challenging role. Women must give their best in whichever field they work and that would truly empower them. Educated women who were aware of their rights should spread that awareness as there were millions of women in the country who were not even aware of their basic rights.

Empowering girls and women is powerful. Today, we know it is the key to economic growth, political stability, *and* social transformation. World leaders, experts and scholars alike are giving their voice to this critical endeavor. It refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as:

- *freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity.
- *have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace, to make their own choices and decisions.
- *have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities,
- *have equal social status in the society,
- *have equal rights for social and economic justice, determine financial and economic choices, and get equal opportunity for education.

By giving her a voice and choice to do what she wants to and to be able to put herself before others. If it is to be elucidated beyond the two self-explanatory words, 'Women Empowerment' refers to complete emancipation of women from socio-economic shackles of

dependency and deprivations. Often made synonymous to gender equality, the term women empowerment encompasses a much larger set of principles that needs whole-hearted attention. The concept of empowerment flows from the word power. Empowerment of women would mean encouraging women to be self-reliant, economically independent, have positive self-esteem, generate confidence to face any difficult situation and incite active participation in various socio-political development endeavors. The growing conscience is to accept women as individuals capable of making rational and educated decisions about them as well as the society, increasing and improving the economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right as men, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for their families and communities.

Need for Women Empowerment

A strong patriarchal society with deep-rooted socio-cultural values continues to affect the progress of women's empowerment in the country. The need of the hour is an egalitarian society, where there should be no place for gender superiority. Aim of Government policies should be to identify and eliminate forces that are directed towards keeping the tradition of male dominance over its female counterpart alive.

Women constitute roughly 50% of the nation's population and a majority of them remain economically dependent, without employment. Many of them are even unaware of the fact that they are eligible for positions that men enjoy. The result is that the economy of the country is skewed due to under utilization of available human resources. Women are generally considered less competent, both intellectually as well as physically as compared with men. As a result the opportunities extended towards them become biased and obtrusive without actual evaluation of their competencies. While scientific data proclaims women to be more adept at multi-tasking than men, they still remain the second choice for employers in the country. In major parts of India as well as the world, women are still denied basic education and are never allowed to pursue higher education despite possessing the acumen needed. This colossal waste of talent is definitely holding economies backward.

Women empowerment in its actuality is synonymous with complete development of the society. An educated woman, with knowledge about health, hygiene, cleanliness is capable of creating a better disease-free environment for her family. A self-employed woman is capable of contributing not only to her family's finances, but also contributes towards increment of the country's overall GDP. A shared source of income is much more likely to uplift the quality of life than a single income household and more often than not helps the family come out of poverty trap. Women aware of their legal rights are less likely to be victims of domestic violence or other forms of exploitations. Their inherent aptitude towards organization and well-rounded maintenance of home makes them uniquely suited for political and civil leadership roles. The 73rd & 74th Amendments (1993) to the constitution of India have provided some special powers to women – reservation of seats(33%) and the 'New Panchayati Raj' – to empower women at least at the village level, is a prime example of the point in discussion. Participation of women in political and social positions of power has seen marked reduction in corruption in those specific areas which adds another advantageous point in favor of women empowerment.

Women empowerment is currently a burning issue on the minds of nation's policymakers as it commands a lot of media attention and international focus lately. It is a fact that women are built different than men by nature yet this difference cannot be translated to mean inferiority. In the few last decades, India has witnessed some changes in the status and role of women in our society. There has been shift in policy approaches – what was focused on 'welfare' in the seventies, 'development' in the eighties and 'growth' in the nineties, has now been tagged with the contemporary term of 'empowerment'. Empowering women socially, economically, educationally, politically and legally is going to be a Herculean task. It will not be easy changing the deep-rooted perception that women are inferior, dependent and dispensable, resulting in a culture of disregard for women in Indian society. But it does not mean that change is

implausible. Time is needed to eradicate the perception. But with the push towards the right direction and a lot of effort directed, this task might just be achievable. All we need is an organized approach from the Government and law enforcement agencies of the country focused in the right direction that would rest only with the liberation of women from all forms of evil.

Conclusion

Women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. In this context, education, training, awareness raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources, and actions to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality are important tools for empowering women and girls to claim their rights which leads to national development.

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