

Issues Concerning Women Empowerment in the Contemporary Indian Social Environment - An Overview

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Abstract : Empowerment is an active multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their identity, position, and power in all spheres of life. Empowerment provides greater making the process at home and in the matters autonomy in the decision-making the process at home and in the matters concerning society and freedom from customs, beliefs, and practices. Women empowerment is not only to be known topic but it is that one should bring in practice. The term empowerment indicates a process of giving to developing conditions for generating power within. Therefore, conceptually the term empowerment has multi-dimensional focus and can be described as a process wherein a group or individuals are able to enhance their status in the society on the hand and overall participation and growth in the other.

IndexTerms – Women Empowerment, Social Environment, Support and training.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment a much raised and discussed topic around the globe? But why is it necessary? Why are we trying to fill this gender gap? What is gender gap? Why are women not given that equality level and trust in the society! It is 21st century and women still have to run for their rights? If we ourselves could try to get balance, then there would be no need for this whole campaign for women empowerment. A house maker can anytime be a corporate leader! And we have series of example in our country itself! Then why do we yet need this women empowerment concept? Well is this gender gap filled in all states? Are women in the country getting their deserved rights? And are they educated till the age boys are? Are they forced to get married at a young age? Well staying in urban areas we have forgotten this topic! But the reality check says that this topic needs much more attention than it is getting. 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, grouted and exploited. Even after almost seven decades of Independence, women are still subjected to discrimination in the social, economic and educational field. Major landmark steps taken for women empowerment: Provisions made under the Constitution of India such as: Right to equality under Article 14 of the Indian Constitution guarantees to all Indian women equality before law; Equal pay for equal work under Article 39(d), guards the economic rights of women by guaranteeing equal pay for equal work; and Maternity Relief under Article 42, allows provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane condition of work and maternity relief for women.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To Understand the Concept of Women Empowerment
- To Analyse the Present Status of Women in India
- To Examine the Ways and Means of Women Empowerment
- To Conclude and Offer Suggestions for Achieving Empowerment of Women

III. THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN INDIA:

The position enjoyed by women in the Rig- Vedic period deteriorated in the later Vedic civilization. Women were denied the right to education and widow remarriage. They were denied the right to inheritance and ownership of property. Many social evils like child marriage and dowry system surfaced and started to engulf women. During Gupta period, the status of women immensely deteriorated. Dowry became an institution and Sati Pratha became prominent. During the British Raj, many social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Jyotirao Phule started agitations for the empowerment of women. Their efforts led to the abolition of Sati and formulation of the Widow Remarriage Act. Later, stalwarts like Mahatma Gandhi and Pt. Nehru advocated women rights. As a result of their concentrated efforts, the status of women in social, economic and political life began to elevate in the Indian society.

IV. CURRENT SCENARIO ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Legislations/Laws: Like the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, prohibits the request, payment or acceptance of a dowry. Asking or giving dowry can be punished by imprisonment as well as fine; Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, provides for a more effective protection of the rights of women who are victims of domestic violence. A breach of this Act is punishable with both fine and imprisonment, Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, helps to create a conducive environment at the workplace for women where they are not subjected to any sort of sexual harassment. Panchayati Raj Institutions: As per the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, all the local elected bodies reserve one-third of their seats for women. Such a provision was made to increase the effective participation of women in politics.

Women's Reservation Bill: It is a pending Bill in India which proposes to reserve 33% of all seats in the Lok Sabha and in all State Legislative Assemblies for women. If passed, this Bill will give a significant boost to the position of women in politics. Various Government Policies and Schemes: The Government of India is running various welfare schemes and policies, both at State and Central levels for the empowerment of woman. Some of the major programs and measures include Swadhar (1995), Swayam Siddha (2001), Support to Training and Employment Program for Women (STEP-2003), Sabla Scheme (2010), National Mission for Empowerment of Women (2010) etc. All such policies and programs focus on social, economic and educational empowerment of women across various age groups. Thus, there has been no dearth of social, economic, political, legal and Constitutional efforts made for the empowerment of women both prior to and post-Independence. However, women in India continue to face atrocities such as rape, dowry killings, acid attacks, human trafficking, etc.

Rural-urban divide: Situation of women in rural areas is more miserable than their counterparts living in urban spaces. It has been widely prevalent that the women are mostly deprived of an equal status vis-a-vis men and thus they remain as passive beneficiaries in the societies in these countries. They remain powerless, due to their less participation and involvement in the generation of resources critical for development. Therefore, women must become active partners with men, if the goal of women empowerment is desired to be achieved in totality. To make the efforts leading to modernization of any society successful, it is urgent to bring the women in the mainstream of development. We need to strike a perfect balance between male and female contributors in rural societies by providing equal opportunities to women without being biased towards men.

Women Empowerment is Urgent for Integrated Development: Women empowerment is a must for the betterment of any country's future as they play dual responsibilities of managing their families while simultaneously juggling to earn to contribute in fulfilling the material needs of their families. No one can ever ignore the importance of the role of a mother, sister, or a daughter in their families. At the same time, women have also established themselves as equal contributors in managing the financial requirements of their houses. On international level as well, women have successfully created their unbeatable position, but they are just a handful in comparison to their not so fortunate counterparts.

Remarkable Performance in sports: On various international platforms, women have successfully proved that if given a chance they can perform no less than their male counterparts and the recently concluded RIO Olympics bears a testimony to this fact. No one can ever forget the names of RIO stars - Sakshi Malik, PV Sindhu and Dipa Kharadia who became successful in breaking the barriers of gender to raise India's national flag high in front of the whole world.

A Long Way to go: In rural areas, the condition of women is far from satisfactory and their contribution to the economy is also negligible. Though they make for almost 50% of the population of the country, they have not been empowered enough to get equal opportunities in realizing their fullest potential. In such condition, we can say that our country cannot become a developed nation unless we empower women in the true sense of the term. It is very necessary to pay proper attention to their development by providing them equal opportunities in all areas of human activity.

Winds of Change: Governments have implemented various constitutional and legal rights to help women lead purposeful and meaningful lives. There is an increasing awareness about women's rights which is evident in the emergence of several NGOs and self-help groups. At the individual level too, women are now breaking the shackles of suppression and making their voices heard for their rights.

The Parliament of India too has passed various legislations to safeguard the interest of the women from various forms of injustice and discrimination. Following are some of these laws to empower women: Equal Remuneration Act-1976; Dowry Prohibition Act-1961, Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act-1956, Medical termination of Pregnancy Act-1971; Maternity Benefit Act-1961; Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act-1987; Prohibition of Child Marriage Act-2006; Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act-1994; and Sexual Harassment of Women at Work Place (Prevention, Protection and) Act-2013. More recently, in the wake of Nirbhaya case involving the rape and brutal murder of paramedical student in Delhi, the government has passed the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill, 2015. This Act makes a significant departure from the earlier Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, as the juvenile age inviting punishment for offence now stands reduced from 18 to 16 years.

Necessity of Women's Empowerment

- Without women's empowerment, we cannot remove injustice and gender bias and inequalities.
- It also provide them a safe working environment.
- Empowerment acts as a powerful tool against exploitation and harassment of women.
- It is a great means to get adequate legal protection for women.
- If not socially and economically empowered, women cannot develop their own identity.

- Women are highly creative and intelligent which makes it imperative to receive their contributions in socio- economic activities.
- For a just and progressive society, women need to be provided equal opportunities for work.

V. CONCLUSION

Women need to be given equal opportunities for education and employment without any sense of discrimination Unless there is attitudinal change in society towards women, merely arming them with legal and constitutional rights will be simply inadequate. By extending equal opportunity and extending conducive environment the objective of achievement of Women empowerment is possible. In this direction, the Individuals, Institutions, Government, NGO, Women Organizations and various other agencies should take up effective action plans and design strategies to achieve Women Empowerment.

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