



Women Empowerment in 21st Century - A Study on Women Empowerment & Gender Equality

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Abstract

This paper attempts to identify the status of 'Women Empowerment' in India with respect to the initiatives taken by the government and other private organization. Today the empowerment of women has become one among the foremost concerns in 21st century. However, women empowerment remains an illusion. We observe in our day to day life how women become victimized by various social issues. Women Empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to possess resources and to form strategic life choices. Empowerment of women is actually the method of uplifting the educational, economic, social and political status of women especially the traditionally underprivileged ones, within the society. It is the method of guarding them against all sorts of violence. The study is based purely on the secondary data. The study reveals that Indian women are relatively disempowered and that they have accepted the inferiority than that of men in spite of the many efforts undertaken by Government. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing within the society. The study is being concluded by an observation that the access to Education, Employment and alter in social organization are only the enabling factors to Women Empowerment.

Key Words: Education, Health, Socio-Economic Status, Women Empowerment.

Introduction

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Women empowerment in India is heavily dependent on several variables that include geographical location (urban/rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exists at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors including health, education, economic opportunities, gender based violence and political participation.

However, there is a significant gap between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, especially the underprivileged ones in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Women empowerment involves building up of a society and a political environment wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave. It is commonly understood that women empowerment is limited to giving women the freedom to vote, study, to work and to become self-sufficient. While gender equality is often taken for considering women equal to men and providing them with the same rights as men. The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important end in itself. In addition, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development.

Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Approximately, 40 years ago the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserted that "everyone has the right to education". In 1990, Governments meeting at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand committed themselves to the goal of universal access to basic education. But despite notable efforts by countries around the globe that have appreciably expanded access to basic education, there are approximately 960 million illiterate adults in the world where two thirds are women. More than one third of the world's adults are women who have no access to printed knowledge, to new skills or to technologies that would improve the quality of their lives and help them shape and adapt the radical social and economic change. There are 130 million children who are not enrolled in primary school and 70 per cent of them are girls. (<https://www.unfpa.org/resources/issue-7-women-empowerment>)

Review of Literature

H. Subrahmanyam (2011) compares women education in India of past and at present. The author has highlighted that there has been a good progress in overall enrolment of girl students in schools. The term 'empower' means to give lawful power or authority to act. It is the process of acquiring some activities of women.

M. Bhavani Sankara Rao (2011) has highlighted that the health of women members of SHG (Self Help Groups) have certainly turned better. It shows how the discussion related to women's health related problems or issues among themselves (with the SHG members) and their children make them aware of various Government schemes specially meant for them.

Doepke M. Tertilt M. (2011) Does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development? This study is an empirical analysis suggesting that money in the hands of mother benefits children. This study developed a series of non-cooperative family bargaining models to understand what kind of frictions it can give rise to the observed empirical relationship. A Study on Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment in India DOI: 10.9790/487X-17411319 www.iosrjournals.org 14 | Page Duflo E. (2011) Women's Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge The study argues that the inter relationships of the Empowerment and Development are probably too weak to be self-sustaining and that continuous policy commitment to equality for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women.

Sethuraman K. (2008) The Role of Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence in a child's Growth and Under nutrition in a Tribal and Rural Community in South India. This research paper explores the relationship between Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence, maternal nutritional status and the nutritional status and growth over six months in children aged 6 to 24 months in a rural and tribal community. This longitudinal observational study has been undertaken in rural Karnataka.

Objectives of the Study

1. To know the need of Women Empowerment.
2. To study the Government Schemes For Women Empowerment
3. To study the role of NGO in empowering women.
4. To identify the Path of Women Empowerment.
5. To offer useful Suggestions in the light of Findings.

Research Methodology

This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. An attempt has been made to analyze the empowerment of women in India. The data used is purely from secondary sources.

Issues Faced by Women

Many government and private organisations have been working towards the upliftment of the women in our society. However, there have been a huge gap with the policies, laws and other benefits on the paper and the ground reality. In many rural and interior part of our country women are not even provided a basis right to education and are always treated unfairly.

The situation is worse because we do believe that in cities and urban areas the women are enjoying the privilege of being educated and are allowed to work. However, many women irrespective of being educated aren't aware of their rights and are often become victim of domestic violence which is not really highlighted most of the times.

The issues which the women faced in past and still prevails in present are provided below:

1. Gender discrimination
2. Lack of Education
3. Female Infanticide
4. Financial Constraints

5. Family Responsibility
6. Low Mobility
7. Lack of ability to bear Risk
8. Less need of Achievement
9. Lack of ambition for the achievement Social status, Dowry system and child marriage (still existing)
Atrocities on Women (Raped, Kicked, Killed, Subdued, humiliated almost daily).

Need for Women Empowerment

We often talk about upliftment and empowering the women in our society. But we do not really understand what empowerment really stands for? Women are often deprived of 'Decision Making', 'Freedom of Movement', 'Access to Education', 'Access to Employment', 'Exposure to Media'. Domestic Violence control over resources and impacts women's control over decision making, providing education, self-employment, and SHG providing minimum needs like Nutrition, Health, Sanitation, Housing Other than this society should change the mentality towards the word women Encouraging women to develop in their fields they are good at and make a career. To ensure that the women has a 'Right to educate, Freedom to Express, Right to Work, 'Right to enjoy the Financial Freedom' and to be her own hero', is what empowerment stands for.

Government Schemes for Women Empowerment

The Government programmes for women development began as early as 1954 in India but the actual participation began only in 1974.

Women Empowerment scheme	Launch Year	Objectives
Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme	2015	To prevent gender-biased sex selective elimination
		To ensure survival & protection of the girl child
		To ensure education and participation of the girl child
One-Stop Centre Scheme	2015	To provide support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces.
		To Facilitate/Assist in filing First Information Report (FIR/NCR)
		To provide psycho-social support and counselling to women/girl
Women Helpline Scheme	2016	To provide toll-free 24-hours telecom service to women affected by violence.
		To facilitate crisis and non-crisis intervention through referral to the appropriate agencies such as police/Hospitals/Ambulance services/District Legal Service Authority (DLSA)/Protection Officer (PO)/OSC.
		To provide information about the appropriate support services, government schemes, and programs available to the woman affected by violence, in her particular situation within the local area in which she resides or is employed.

UJJAWALA	2016	To prevent the trafficking of women and children for commercial sexual exploitation.
		To facilitate the rescue of victims from the place of their exploitation and place them in safe custody.
		To provide rehabilitation services with both immediate and long-term to the victims by providing basic amenities/needs such as shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment including counseling, legal aid and guidance, and vocational training.
Working Women Hostel	1972-73	To promote the availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women.
		To provide accommodation to children of working women, up to the age of 18 years for girls and up to the age of 5 years for boys.
SWADHAR Greh	2018	To cater to the primary need for shelter, food, clothing, medical treatment, and care of women in distress.
		To provide women with legal aid and guidance.
Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)	1986-87	To provide skills that give employability to women.
		To benefit women in the age group of 16 and above in the country.
Nari Shakti Puraskar	2016	To strengthen the place of women in society.
		To facilitate institutions that work towards the progress and development of women in society.
Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK)	2017	To create an environment for women where they have access to healthcare, quality, education, guidance, employment, etc.
		To facilitate these opportunities at the block and district level in the country.
NIRBHAYA	2012	To facilitate safety and security for women at various levels.
		To ensure strict privacy and confidentiality of women's identity and information.
		Provision for real-time intervention as far as possible
Mahila Police Volunteers	2016	An MPV will serve as a public-police interface in order to fight crime against women.
		The broad mandate of MPVs is to report incidences of violence against women such as domestic violence, child marriage, dowry harassment and violence faced by women in public spaces.

Source: Bijus.com

The gender population gap starts at birth. For every 100 boys born nationally, 91 girls are born (World Economic Forum, "[Data Explorer: India](#)," *The Global Gender Gap Report 2020* (2019). Women constitute 48.1% of the population. Catalyst, *Quick Take: Women in the Workforce – India* (October 28, 2020). As of 2020, there are 50,337,879 fewer women than men across India. Catalyst, *Quick Take: Women in the Workforce – India* (October 28, 2020)

Women Are Closing the Higher Education Gap

(Manash Pratim Gohain, “Women in Higher Education Show Steady Rise, Enrolment in Top Institutions Not Growing,” *Times of India*, September 24, 2019). Among graduates in 2018-2019, women represented: Catalyst, *Quick Take: Women in the Workforce – India* (October 28, 2020). Undergraduate degrees: 53.0%, MPhil degrees: 69.6%, Ph Ds: 41.8%

	2006		2020	
Global Gender Gap Index	98	0.601	112	0.668
Economic participation and opportunity	110	0.397	149	0.354
Educational attainment	102	0.819	112	0.962
Health and survival	103	0.962	150	0.944
Political empowerment	20	0.227	18	0.411

Source: global-gender-gap-report-2020

Work participation and leadership	Female	Male	Value
Boards of listed companies,% board members	13.8	86.2	0.16
Firms with female majority ownership, % firms	2.8	97.2	0.03
Firms with female top managers, % firms	8.9	91.1	0.1

Source: global-gender-gap-report-2020

Education and skills	female	Male
STEMS, attainment %	26.93	36.61
Agri., Forestry, Fisheries & Veterinary, attainment %	0.4	1.07
Arts & Humanities, attainment %	6.23	4.93
Business, Admin. & Law, attainment %	16.52	19.05
Education, attainment %	11.07	7.16
Engineering, Manuf. & Construction, attainment %	7.19	16.35
Health & Welfare, attainment %	3.96	2.51
Information & Comm. Technologies, attainment %	6	7.05
Natural Sci., Mathematics & Statistics, attainment %	13.75	13.2
Services, attainment %	0.47	0.24
Social Sci., Journalism & Information, attainment %	34.42	28.44

Source: global-gender-gap-report-2020

NGOs and Women Empowerment

Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) have been recognized as an effective strategy for the empowerment of women in rural as well as urban areas as they bring together women from all walks of life to fight for their cause. SHGs work on a variety of issues like health, nutrition, agriculture, forestry, income generation activities, seeking micro credit and so on. Since the overall empowerment of women is vitally dependent on economic empowerment, NGOs are involved in the following activities to empower women:

- Educating and creating awareness among women especially the rural women;

- Supplements efforts of government in women empowerment;
- Promotes the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for empowering women;
- Instils leadership qualities among women and ensures their participation in their empowerment.
- Represents the problems faced by rural women to the concerned authorities and carries out impact assessment of the policy decisions affecting women.
- Mobilizes optimum resources and plans and implements the projects that have bearing upon women empowerment.

Self Defence training is given periodically to help women protect themselves. Participation of women in NGOs gave them an opportunity to foray into the social and political spheres which were not easily granted by the for-profit and public sectors. Many NGOs that work to alleviate poverty among women also focuses on advocating the women's rights. These have brought important changes in the lives of women. NGOs play a major role in enforcing rights provided by legislation in India.

Promotion of self-employment NGOs also play a significant and meaningful role towards promoting self-employment of women by the following ways:

Training & Skill Development NGOs train poor women and provide them opportunities of self-employment to improve their social and economic status. They also cultivate the habit of thrift and credit among the poor women to improve their quality of life.

Legal Awareness and Property Rights NGOs are working with women to generate awareness regarding their legal rights. They also provide loan facilities to buy land in groups.

Fair Trade Fair trade is a relative term and is about giving poor people power. NGOs help to cut down on the middlemen and ensure producers get a fair price for their work. They act as facilitators in this process.

Credit / Micro Credit / Self-Help Groups (SHG) Provision of credit paves way for social justice and empowerment. NGOs target and help women by providing credits as they have a history of being better re-payers of loan.

Capacity building Keeping in view of the present state of economic liberalization, NGOs are also involved in equipping self-employed women with information, knowledge, technology, training and managerial techniques.

List of NGO's

- **Shanti Sahyog** Funded by **Azim Premji Foundation – THE PHILANTHROPY** – (since F/Y 2020-21)
- **Nai Roshni** is a project under Ministry of Minority Affairs for minority women. In this program underprivileged women from minority section have been taught about Legal Rights of Women, Hygiene, Marriage & Divorce Laws, Domestic Violence, Employability etc. NGO Working for Women Empowerment in Delhi.
- **CARE** is a not-for-profit organisation working in India for over 65 years. CARE has been working in India for 70 years, focusing on alleviating poverty and social exclusion.

- **Jagori:** Jagori undertakes capacity building workshops, documentation, grassroots action research, advocacy and campaigning in partnership with stakeholders including individual women and their partners, community members, civil society representatives, and other state/ institutional actors.
- The Federation of Indian Women Entrepreneurs (FIWE) which is a National-level Organization brings the businesswomen on a common platform and ensures that their opinions, ideas and visions are collectively and effectively taken up with policy makers and various other agencies respectively for the development of Entrepreneurship amongst Women.

Issues and Reality

Despite efforts of NGOs in the area of women empowerment the ground reality is still not encouraging as many women are not yet empowered and have no or lack of power or freedom to take decisions spend their own money in the way they wanted. Still lot more needs to be done on this front. In this respect, government's contribution has to be significant. NGOs can only supplement the government's efforts. Government must focus more on providing education and empower underdeveloped and vulnerable women especially in rural areas. Furthermore, those involved in social work and in volunteering should be given publicly available resources like training programmes and mentoring services to support the establishment of NGOs. Establishment of more NGOs will help in effectively fight against the issues faced by women.

Overall, NGOs seem to have significant role in bringing drastic changes in the life style of women. They are quite successful in making women to become independent and self-motivated and take their own decisions in matters concerning them. They have also contributed in increasing the literacy level and health of women. In order to make gender equality a reality, NGOs should continue their work in furthering women's cause in all walks of life like social, educational, economic, household etc. Unless meaningful changes are achieved in these fronts, holistic women empowerment will continue to remain elusive. NGOs have the necessary capacity to be the vehicle of change in these fronts.

Women Empowerment in India – Recent News

1. Speaking on the 25th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Union Minister for Women and Child Development Smriti Irani said at the United Nations that India recognises the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment in all aspects of developmental agenda. The minister for Women and Child Development Smriti Irani highlighted that more than 200 million women have been brought into the formal banking system through the Government's Financial Inclusion Initiative. Innovative use of digital technologies has provided equal opportunity for women to access insurance, loans, and social assistance.
2. Microsoft on Wednesday announced recently it has collaborated with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to impart digital skills to more than one lakh underserved women in India. This initiative is an extension of Microsoft's partnership with NSDC to provide digital skills to over 1 lakh youth in the country. The programme will curate a series of live training sessions and digital skilling drives to help create opportunities for young girls and women, particularly first time job seekers and those whose jobs may have been impacted by COVID-19, to join the future workforce

3. Women's empowerment in India has received more attention in recent years, and one NGO is working to help disadvantaged Indian women achieve financial independence with one specific method: an all-women cab company. The Azad Foundation's Women on Wheels program empowers impoverished women in India by providing them with a stable source of income and a safe environment where women can travel without fear of being harassed.

Findings of the Study

1. Globalization, Liberalization and other Socio - Economic forces have given some respite to a large proportion of the population. However, there are still quite a few areas where women empowerment in India is largely lacking.
2. There needs to be a sea – change in the mind-set of the people in the country. It can't be just the women themselves, but the men have to wake up to a world that is moving towards equality and equity. It is better that this is embraced earlier than later for our own good.
3. There are several Government programmes and NGOs in the Country, there is still a wide gap that exists between those under protection and those not.
4. Poverty and illiteracy add to these complications, The Empowerment of Women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety.
5. Empowerment of Women can be achieved when their economic and social status is improved. And, the only possible way to do so is via adopting definite social and economic policies with a view of total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings.
6. In order to create a sustainable world, we must begin to Empower Women

Suggestions

The first and foremost priority should be given to the women's education, illiteracy is the grassroots problem. Therefore, education for women has to be given special attention. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness about their rights among women especially belonging to weaker sections. Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. A fair wage policy at par with men so that their status can be elevated in the society. Strict implementation of Programmes and Acts to curb the malpractices prevalent in the society. A general suggestion to all NGOs is that they can function effectively if they have a particular area of focus. This is because, an NGO that simply focuses on all aspects of the society cannot be at expertise in any of those aspects. All women centric NGOs must have a strategic approach that will expand their scope towards reaching women and empowering them. Only a strategic approach will lead to faster results. There is a significant gap between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level. Government and NGO's should do more awareness program to make women to make aware of available schemes

Conclusion

Hence, the attainment in the field of income, employment and in educational front, the scenario of women empowerment seems to be comparatively poor. The need of the hour is to spot those loopholes or limitations which are observing the realization of empowerment of women and this initiative must be started from the women itself as well as more importantly policy initiative undertaken by the state and

society. Let us take the oath that we shall work towards an egalitarian society where everybody irrespective of their gender gets an equal opportunity to express and uplift one's well-being and of the society as a whole. Women's empowerment is not a Northern concept women all over the world, including countries in South, have been challenging and changing gender inequalities since the beginning of the history.

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