

STATE INITIATIVES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. 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. By taking into consideration of importance of women empowerment, this paper studies state's initiatives for women development and empowerment. India's Constitution makers were very determined to provide equal rights to both women and men. The Constitution of India is one of finest equality documents in the world. It provides provisions to secure equality in general and gender equality in particular.

1.Introduction

Women empowerment means their capacity to participate as equal partners in cultural, social, economic and political systems of a society. Even though the world economy has developed into global economy, in both developed and developing countries women have been suppressed in all walks of life for generations. Women empowerment is far easier said than done. This in a certain respect demands a revolutionary change in the socio cultural values of the society. In USA and western countries the education and health of a woman is much higher comparatively with developing countries. Still gender bias and beliefs are playing as chief obstacles for the growth of women empowerment worldwide. In India also, in spite of various laws that protect women's rights, the gender inequalities are one of the highest in the world.

Coming back to women empowerment, in the simple words it is the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society. Women want to be treated as equals so much so that if a woman rises to the top of her field it should be a commonplace occurrence that draws nothing more than a raised eyebrow at the gender. This can only happen if there is a channelized route for the empowerment of women.

2. Need of Women Empowerment

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 no 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 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. In the present write-up we will try to describe and understand the concept of Women Empowerment in India in all its dimensions.

3. Review of Literature

Sathiabama (2010), in her study highlighted the empowerment of rural women through entrepreneurship and the advantages of entrepreneurship among the rural women. She felt that the economic empowerment of women led to development of family and community and the same is proved by a collective Micro Entrepreneurship in Tamilnadu.

Manisha Raj (2014) studied that despite significant problems in a male dominated society, Indian women have found their way out for growth and empowerment either through self-help groups, NGOs, banks, government assistance and micro finance institutions or through private sectors.

Mohammad BadruzzamanBhuiyan and Rubab Abdullah (2007) concluded in their study that in order to encourage women entrepreneurship, all banks and financial institutions should be asked to provide one fifth of their investment for women-owned enterprises and special training course for women entrepreneurs to improve skills.

4. Status of Women in India

Indian cultural history has a very old and long roots, it can be traced back to thousands of years. Sociologists have analyzed the status of women from these early ages to the present day by different methods. Scholars have believed that women of ancient India enjoyed equal status with men in all aspects of life. The influence of women is marked in every page of Hindu history, right from the most remote periods. What led to the epic wars? Whether it is the abduction of Sita or the insult of Draupadi always the causes which overturned kingdoms committed to the scepter and the pilgrim's staff and formed the ground work of all the grand epics, were women.

It is evident from all available accounts that in early Vedic society, women occupied the same position as men. Reference to complete gender equality is found in all parts of Vedic literature. Women reached a very high standard of learning and culture, and made all round progress. They could move freely with their husbands or lover, and were employed in a number of professions. Literary women scholars like Gargi, Maitrayi, Godha, Vishwashra were well known and acknowledged for their intellectual and literary abilities. The practice of allowing women to select a husband out of a chosen group ruled out the possibility of child marriages. A man could not undertake any social or religious duty without his wife. Divorce was not permitted infact marriage is considered as "Saat janmo ka bandhan". There are evidences to show that widow marriages prevailed and Sati Pratha did not exist in Vedic period. Women had absolute control over their gifts and property received at the time of marriage (it was called "Parinaya")

and it was considered a sin if relatives took away any sort of property belonging to the wife (Stridhana). But the status of women starts declining during the period of Smritis (period of codification of social laws). During this period women were denied the right to study the Vedas. Marriage or domestic lives become compulsory for women. The Moguls, during their rule, allowed a sudden fall in the dignified position occupied by Indian women. Education for women was stopped and they became victims of evil practices like early child marriage. The Purdah system came into existence. Some social scientists have described the Mogul era as the dark age of women. The atmosphere was so vitiated that even the horrid acts like female infanticide had to be performed for self preservation and even a marriage had to be celebrated secretly to prevent the abduction of new bride. But worst scenario was about to come, Indian women's position in society further deteriorated during the medieval period when Sati, child marriages and a ban on remarriage by widows became part of social life in some communities in India. Among the Rajputs of Rajasthan, the Jauhar was practiced. In some parts of India, the Devadasis or temple women were sexually exploited.

Swami Dayanand and they enacted several laws to improve the position of women, to bring back the dignity and glory of women. Some of these enactments were:

1. Act prohibiting the practice of sati (in 1850)
2. Cast disabilities removal act, 1850
3. The Hindu widow remarriage act, 1856
4. The special marriage act III of 1872
5. The married women's property act, 1874
6. The child marriage act, 1929
7. The Hindu gains of earning act, 1930
8. The Hindu women's right to property, 1937
9. The Christian marriage act, 1872
10. The Parsee marriage and divorce act, 1936
11. The dissolution of the Muslim marriage act 1939

These acts in themselves were very good but, since there was no matching enforcement, they were largely on paper and were not reflected in the actual society. But these acts gave a spark, a chance to various reformers and social workers like Ishwar Chandra, Vidya Sagar, Ranade, and Annie Besant. And the inclination of status of women starts from this period.

In emerging India as far as women is concerned this factual inequality is expected to be taken care of by the paternalistic role which the state is expected to play. Legal paternalism is

inherent in the directive principles of the Indian Constitution. The preamble of Indian constitution goes one step further and expresses the people's resolve to secure, among other things, the dignity of the individual. Then, of course, the fundamental rights, clearly reflecting the egalitarian concept, proclaim manifestly the power of the state to take affirmative action for the benefit of women of India. So, at least, since independence it would seem that women in India are no more prisoners of tradition, culture and history, but their destination is governed by moral, natural and written laws, and also by the abiding creed built into our constitution.

5. Schemes and Strategies for Women Empowerment in India

CONSTITUTION OF INDIA AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

India's Constitution makers and our founding fathers were very determined to provide equal rights to both women and men. The Constitution of India is one of the finest equality documents in the world. It provides provisions to secure equality in general and gender equality in particular. Various articles in the Constitution safeguard women's rights by putting them at par with men socially, politically and economically. The Preamble, the Fundamental Rights, DPSPs and other constitutional provisions provide several general and special safeguards to secure women's human rights.

Preamble:

The Preamble to the Constitution of India assures justice, social, economic and political; equality of status and opportunity and dignity to the individual. Thus it treats both men and women equal.

Fundamental Rights:

The policy of women empowerment is well entrenched in the Fundamental Rights enshrined in our Constitution. For instance:

- Article 14 ensures to women the right to equality.
- Article 15(1) specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.
- Article 15(3) empowers the State to take affirmative actions in favour of women.
- Article 16 provides for equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office

These rights being fundamental rights are justiciable in court and the Government is obliged to follow the same.

Fundamental Duties:

Fundamental duties are enshrined in Part IV-A of the Constitution and are positive duties for the people of India to follow. It also contains a duty related to women's rights:

Article 51 (A) (e) expects from the citizen of the country to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Thus it can be seen that these Constitutional provisions are very empowering for women and the State is duty bound to apply these principles in taking policy decisions as well as in enacting laws.

The Indian government has also recognized women issues and their contribution to the country's economy. Some of the women empowerment initiatives are Mahila E-haat:

It is a direct online marketing platform launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to support women entrepreneurs, Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to showcase products made and services rendered by them.

STEP:

The support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) Scheme aims to provide skills that give employability to women and to provide competencies and skills that enable women to become self-employed/entrepreneurs.

There are number of schemes running under the women empowerment mission we will discuss the major schemes here:-

- Poverty Alleviation and Economic Empowerment of Women
 1. Schemes of Department of Animal Husbandry Dairying Fisheries
 2. Scheme on Development of Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture
 3. Scheme on Development of Marine Fisheries, Infrastructure and Post harvest Operations
 4. Scheme on Fisheries Training and Extension
 5. Assistance to Cooperatives
 6. National Bamboo Mission
 7. Central Poultry Development Organisation
 8. Development of Commercial Horticulture through Production and Post-Harvest Management
 9. Promotion and Strengthening of Agricultural Mechanization through Training, Testing & Demonstration
 10. Gramin Bhandaran Yojna

11. Capacity Building to enhance Competitiveness of Indian Agriculture and Registration of Organic Products
12. Technology Development and Transfer for Promotion of Horticulture
13. Marketing Assistance Scheme
14. Scheme of Support to Voluntary Agencies for Adult Education and Skill Development
15. Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI)

- Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme
- Short Stay Home For Women and Girls(SSH)
- Mid Day Meal

6. Conclusion

Women Empowerment is the process of treating the women with same status with that of men in all the fields of the society. This paper discussed about women empowerment, need of women empowerment, status of women in India and schemes and strategies for women empowerment in India.

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