

A STUDY ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT OF INDIA-AN OVERVIEW;

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ABSTRACT

Today the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. Women empowerment is the vital instrument to express women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. It is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women; they traditionally under privileged ones, in the society. Women empowerment is giving power to women. It is making women better off. It enables a greater degree of self-confidence and sense of independence among women. But women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by government. Today we have noticed different Acts and Schemes of the central government as well as state government to empower the women of India. But, in India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. For these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. Hence this paper attempts to analyze the status

of Women Empowerment in India, to identify the problems of Women Empowerment and to study the government schemes for women empowerment.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Status, Obstacles, Govt Schemes, Problems, Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

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 means women must exercise full participation in decision-making process in all walks of life, and full participation with men in all walks of life, and fully participating with men in finding equitable and practical solutions to issues in family and in society. Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban / rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender based violence and political participation.

It was 1848 AD when India got its first woman educator in the form of "SavitribaiPhule". This year marks the rise of women's empowerment in India as SavitribaiPhule busted the social norm that a woman cannot be educated. The impact of this movement was so profound that 100 years later, India, as a nation accepted the leadership of a woman and Indira Gandhi, was sworn as the first female prime minister of India. It is said that sky is the limit, but the term "women's empowerment" broke that thought and Kalpana Chawla became the first Indian woman to travel in space. All these activities are the fruits of women's empowerment. Women's empowerment as a concept was introduced at the UN's Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, which defined it as a redistribution of social and economic powers and control of resources in favour of women. After various new revolutions and social reforms during the modern era, women are now redefined by their strengths, skills and their abilities. Today, the woman is a pilot, a doctor, an engineer, a politician, an artist, an author, a leader, a president and much more; she is a homemaker, a complete administrator. It is the fruits of women's struggle that we have

got personalities like Oprah Winfrey, Mother Teresa, J K Rowling, Benazir Bhutto, Malala Yousufzai and Phoolan Devi. Moreover, women are joining the field of science and technology. In fact, there is no sphere of activity in which Women are unsuitable or incompetent.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the status of women empowerment and crimes against women in India
2. To study the Government Schemes For Women Empowerment.
3. To identify the Hindrances in the Path of Women Empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

The study is mainly based on secondary data. Data has been collected from different sources like articles, annual reports banks, newspapers, and various web sites.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN IN INDIA

1. Equality before law for all persons (Article-14).
2. Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15(I)).
3. However, special provisions may be made by the state in favors of women and children Article 15(3).
4. Equality of opportunity for all citizens relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state (Article 16).
5. State policy to be directed to securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a); (v)
6. Equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d).
7. Provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42).

8. Promotion of harmony by every citizen of India and renouncement of such practices which are derogatory to the dignity of women Article 51A(e).

9. Reservation of not less than one-third of total seats for women in direct election to local bodies, viz; Panchayats and Municipalities (Articles 343(d) and 343 (T).

Law related women empowerment

1. The Maternity Benefit Act 1961

2. The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961

3. Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986

4. The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987

5. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005

6. Equal Remuneration Act 1976 • The Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948

7. Relevant provisions of Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973

8. Family Courts Act, 1984

9. The Indian Succession Act, 1925

10. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act 1971

11. The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929

12. The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 •

13. The Indian Divorce Act, 1969

TYPES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Social Women Empowerment: A critical aspect of social empowerment of women is the promotion of gender equality. Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life.

Educational Women Empowerment: It means empowering women with the knowledge, skills, and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. It means making women aware of their rights and developing a confidence to claim them.

Economic and occupational empowerment: It implies a better quality of material life through sustainable livelihoods owned and managed by women. It means reducing their financial dependence on their male counterparts by making them a significant part of the human resource.

Legal Women Empowerment: It suggests the provision of an effective legal structure which is supportive of women empowerment. It means addressing the gaps between what the law prescribes and what actually occurs.

Political Women Empowerment: It means the existence of a political system favoring the participation in and control by the women of the political decision-making process and in governance.

CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA

Acid throwing: A Thomas Reuters Foundation survey says that India is the fourth most dangerous place in the world for women to live in. In India, acid attacks on women who dared to refuse a man's proposal of marriage or asked for a divorce are a form of revenge. Acid is cheap, easily available, and the quickest way to destroy a woman's life. The numbers of acid attacks have been rising.

Child marriage: According to UNICEF's "State of the World's Children-2009" report, 47% of India's women aged 20–24 were married before the legal age of 18, rising to 56% in rural areas. The report also showed that 40% of the world's child marriages occur in India.

Domestic violence: Many studies have reported about the prevalence of the violence and have taken a criminal-justice approach, but most women refuse to report it. These women are guaranteed constitutional justice, dignity and equality but continue to refuse based on their sociocultural contexts. As the women refuse to speak of the violence and help, they are also not receiving the proper treatment.

Dowry: In 2011, the National Crime Records Bureau reported 8,618 dowry deaths. Unofficial estimates claim the deaths are at least three times as high.

Female infanticide and sex-selective abortion: Female infanticide (killing of girl infants) is still prevalent in some rural areas. Sometimes this is infanticide by neglect, for example families may not spend money on critical medicines or withhold care from a sick girl. Continuing abuse of the dowry tradition has been one of the main reasons for sex-selective abortions and female infanticides in India.

Honor killings: people marrying without their family's acceptance, and sometimes for marrying outside their caste or religion. Haryana is notorious for incidents of honour killings, In 2010, the Supreme Court of India issued notice in regard to honor killings to the states of Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

Rape: New Delhi has the highest rate of rape-reports among Indian cities. Sources show that rape cases in India have doubled between 1990 and 2008.

Sexual harassment: The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act came into force in December 2013, to prevent harassment of women at workplace.

A study by Action Aid UK found that 80% of women in India had experienced sexual harassment ranging from unwanted comments, being groped or assaulted. Many incidents go unreported as the victims fear being shunned by their families.

STATUS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

2014: A record 7 female ministers are appointed in the Modi ministry, of whom 6 hold Cabinet rank, the highest number of female Cabinet ministers in any Indian government in history.

2017: On 25 March, Tanushree Pareek became the first female combat officer commissioned by the Border Security Force.

The literacy rate is lower for women compared to men: the literacy rate is 60.6% for females, while for males it is 81.3%. The 2011 census, however, indicated a 2001–2011 decadal literacy growth of 9.2%, which is slower than the growth seen during the previous decade. There is a wide gender disparity in the literacy rate in India: effective literacy rates (age 7 and above) in 2011 were 82.14% for men and 65.46% for women. (Population aged 15 or older, data from

2015). Official statistics show a dramatic increase in the number of reported crimes against women.

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. At present, the Government of India has over 34 schemes for women operated by different department and ministries.

1. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence (PWDV) Act, 2005.

2. National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW).

3. Projects of One Stop Crisis Centres (OSCCs) in urban areas.

4. Schemes for Economic Empowerment

- Swa-Shakti

- Swayamsiddha

- Swawlamban Programme

5. Support to Training and Employment Programme (STEP) Support Service

- Construction of Working Women Hostels

- Creches

- Relief, Protection and Rehabilitation to Women in Difficult Circumstances

- Swadhar, Compensation to Rape Victims. Institutional Services - State Homes - Service Homes - Working Women's Hostels - Vocational Training Centres - Regional Tailoring Centres - Craft Training Centres - District Crafts including Tailoring Centres - Women Technical Training Institute (WTTI) - Centrally Sponsored Schemes

1. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)

2. Training for Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM)

3. Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) - Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP) - Training for Rural Youth Self-Employment (TRYSEM) - Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) - Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) - Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) - Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) - Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) - The Velugu Programme - Indira Kranti Patham

6. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls (RGSEAG) (2010). 7. The Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers. 8. Integrated Child Protection scheme (ICPS) (2009-2010). 9. Dhanalakshmi (2008). 10. Short Stay Homes. 11. Ujjawala (2007). 12. Scheme for Gender Budgeting (XI Plan). 13. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). 14. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM). 15. Prime Minister's Rojgar Yojana (PMRY). 16. Women's Development Corporation Scheme (WDCS). 17. Working Women's Forum. 18. Indira Mahila Kendra. 19. Mahila Samiti Yojana. 20. Khadi and Village Industries Commission. 21. Indira Priyadarshini Yojana. 22. SBI's Sree Shakti Scheme. 23. SIDBI's Mahila Udyam Nidhi Mahila Vikas Nidhi. 24. NGO's Credit Schemes. 25. National Banks for Agriculture and Rural Development's Schemes

The efforts of government and its different agencies are ably supplemented by nongovernmental organizations that are playing an equally important role in facilitating women empowerment. Despite concerted efforts of governments and NGOs there are certain gaps. Of course we have come a long way in empowering women yet the future journey is difficult and demanding.

Government is pushing for women's empowerment in India

A slew of schemes has been launched in recent years to empower women to be independent in their lives. Here are a few that are breaking new ground and improving the lives of women, and encouraging them to think big, both in urban and rural areas.

1. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana

Launched on January 22, 2015, in Panipat, Haryana, it aims to generate awareness and also improve the efficiency of welfare services for the girl child. The initial aim of the campaign was to address the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) but has come to include gender-biased sex-selective eliminations, and propagating education, survival, and protection of the girl child.

2. Mahila-E-Haat

Under the purview of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the government launched Mahila-E-Haat in 2016. It is a bilingual online marketing platform that leverages technology to help aspiring women entrepreneurs, self-help groups, and NGOs to showcase their products and services. Open to all Indian women above the age of 18, this platform offers an easy sign-in process and convenient payment modes. Everything can be handled on a mobile with no other intervention required.

3. Mahila Shakti Kendra

The government launched the Mahila Shakti Kendra in 2017 to empower rural women with opportunities for skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition. The Mahila Shakti Kendras will work through community engagement through student volunteers in the 115 most backward districts.

4. Working Women Hostel

The government launched the Working Women Hostels to ensure availability of safe, convenient accommodation for working family, along with daycare facilities for their children, wherever possible in urban, semi-urban and rural areas. Under the scheme, assistance is provided for construction of new hostels and expansion of existing ones.

HINDRANCES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

1. Where education is concerned. The gap between women and men is severe. The gender bias is in higher education, specialized professional trainings which hit women very hard in employment and attaining top leadership in any field.

2. Household relations show gender bias in infinitesimally small but significant manners all across the globe, more so, in India e.g. sharing burden of housework, childcare and menial works by so called division of work.

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 is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradication of poverty should be a national goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy. Due to this, women are exploited as domestic helps.

5. 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.

6. The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country and are an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned.

7. Today, almost all working women are prone to sexual harassment irrespective of their status, personal characteristics and the types of their employment. They face sexual harassment on way on transports, at working places, educational institutions and hospitals, at home and even in police stations when they go to file complaints. It is shocking that the law protectors are violating and outraging modesty of women.

8. It is an age old convention that women are less capable and inefficient in working as compared to men. The attitude which considers women unfit for certain jobs holds back women. In spite of the constitutional provisions, gender bias creates obstacles in their recruitment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights. Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work.

2. Tackling Violence against Women through techno-solution approaches such as safety-apps may tend to promote simplistic and individual interventions to complex, social realities. There needs to be adequate investment in systemic solutions to enhance institutional capacities to ensure public safety. Data systems for a coordinated response to women's safety can promote effective policing, inter-agency coordination and women-friendly law enforcement.

3. In order to enhance women's access to credit for consumption and production, the establishment of new, and strengthening of existing micro-credit mechanisms and micro-finance institution should be undertaken so that the outreach of credit is enhanced. Other supportive measures would be taken to ensure adequate flow of credit through extant financial institutions and banks, so that all women below poverty line have easy access to credit.
4. Women's perspectives should be included in designing and implementing macro-economic and social policies by institutionalizing their participation in such processes. Their contribution to socio-economic development as producers and workers should be recognized in the formal and informal sectors and appropriate policies relating to employment and to her working conditions will be drawn up.
5. In view of the critical role of women in the agriculture and allied sectors, as producers, concentrated efforts should be made to ensure that benefits of training, extension and various programmes should reach them in proportion to their numbers. The programmes for training women in soil conservation, social forestry, dairy development and other occupations allied to agriculture like horticulture, livestock including small animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries etc. should be expanded to benefit women workers in the agriculture sector.
6. The important role played by women in electronics, information technology and food processing and agro industry and textiles has been crucial to the development of these sectors. They should be given comprehensive support in terms of labour legislation, social security and other support services to participate in various industrial sectors.
7. Equal access to education for women and girls should be ensured. Special measures should be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupation/vocation/technical skills by women. Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education should be a focus area.
8. Women should be involved and their perspectives reflected in the policies and programmes for environment, conservation and restoration. Considering the impact of environmental factors on their livelihoods, women's participation should be ensured in the conservation of the environment and control of environmental degradation.

9. All forms of violence against women, physical and mental, whether at domestic or societal levels, including those arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices should be dealt with effectively with a view to eliminate its incidence. Institutions and mechanisms/schemes for assistance will be created and strengthened for prevention of such violence, including sexual harassment at work place and customs like dowry; for the rehabilitation of the victims of violence and for taking effective action against the perpetrators of such violence. A special emphasis should also be laid on programmes and measures to deal with trafficking in women and girls.

10. Measures to prevent and punish sexual harassment at the place of work, protection for women workers in the organized/ unorganized sector and strict enforcement of relevant laws such as Equal Remuneration Act and Minimum Wages Act should be undertaken.

11. Women's Cells in Police Stations, Encourage Women Police Stations Family Courts, Mahila Courts, Counselling Centers, Legal Aid Centers and Nyaya Panchayats should be strengthened and expanded to eliminate violence and atrocities against women.

CONCLUSION

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, tortured and exploited. Even after almost seven decades of Independence, women are still subjected to discrimination in the social, economic and educational field. Although there are a number of laws to protect women against all sorts of violence yet there has been the significant increase in the episodes of rapes, extortions, acid, attacks etc. This is due to delay in legal procedures and the presence of several loopholes in the functioning of a judicial system. Though the women occupied the respectable positions in all walks of the fields. Yet, they have not absolutely free some discrimination and harassment of the society. A few numbers of women have been able to establish their potentialities. Hence they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. They have to fight the traditional Indian male – dominated society to emerge as stronger and independent entities. Women empowerment will be real and effective only when they are

endowed income and property so that they may stand on their feet and build up their identity in the society. The most important measure of their success should be the extent to which they enable women to interpret, apply and enforce laws of their own making, incorporating their own voices, values and concerns. Empowerment of Women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved. This could be possible only by 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. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

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