

EMPOWERMENT AMONGST WOMEN- A STEP TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT

Harpreet Kaur

Principal, Guru Nanak Khalsa College, Daroli Kalan, Jalandhar

ABSTRACT

Empowerment is an act of giving power. Thus women's empowerment is the act of empowering women i.e, to give them the power or authority. Empowerment is an active multi-dimensional process that enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. Empowerment is a process, which helps people to gain control of their lives through raising awareness, taking action and working in order to exercise greater control. Women Empowerment means Political Rights, Social Rights, Judicial Strength, Economic stability, and all other rights should be given in an equal manner to women with respect to men. Most countries today consider gender equality and women's empowerment to be essential for the development and well-being of families, communities, and nations. No nation, society, and family can flourish and be happy if fifty percent of its population, i.e. women and girls, are not respected, free and happy.

Key Words: Awareness, Beti, Development, Empowerment, Exploitation, Legal, Stability

INTRODUCTION

Why Women Empowerment is needed? The need for women's empowerment is felt because of the status they have in society since the beginning. Women lag behind their men in all indicators of social and human development. There is a need to redefine the status of women in society. The urgent need was felt to empower women because women have been discriminated against, excluded from decision making at all levels, marginalized and disempowered. Some of the needs are as follow:

1. Although the Life expectancy of women is higher than that of men but quality of their life in terms of women's health, nutritional and educational levels are significantly lower than that of men.
2. According to the UN, one out of every three women experiences violence. This means over one billion women and girls experience violence.
3. Women are concentrated in low skilled and low paid jobs, they get lower wages and lower income than men and they hardly own and/or control property and means of production.
4. The participation of women in political and social decision-making is abysmally low. Women's participation in Parliament has never been higher than 10 percent. As on October 2016, out of the total 4,118 MLAs across the country, only 9 percent were women.
5. According to the National Sample Survey Report (2011-12), the workforce participation rates of the male is 54.4% and female is 21.9%.
6. Women have been discriminated in different ways like Sati pratha, the practice of dowry, parda pratha, female infanticide, wife burning, sexual violence, sexual harassment at workplace, and domestic violence.

7. Women suffer from patriarchal structures and ideologies; they experience gender inequalities and subordination.
8. A woman in the Indian Society is never independent. Her father has authority over her in childhood, her husband in youth, and her son in old ages.
9. The National Crime Records Bureau data reflects that incidents of rapes have gone up by 12- 15%, while other crimes have risen by 3-5%.
10. In recent years, the majority of cases categorised as crimes against women were reported under 'cruelty by husband or his relatives' (32.6%), followed by 'assault on woman with intent to outrage her modesty' (25%), 'kidnapping and abduction of woman' (19%) and 'rape' (11.5%).
11. Since 1991, 80% of districts in India have recorded a declining sex ratio with the state of Punjab being the worst and according to the Census of 2011, it was revealed that the population ratio of India is 943 females per 1000 of males.
12. According to a global study conducted by Thomson Reuters, India is the "fourth most dangerous country" in the world for women.
13. India's global rank is 88 in this regard as per the 'Women in Politics Map 2017', published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women.
14. India has been ranked 108th in World Economic Forum (WEF) Gender Gap Index 2018 , measured across four pillars-economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, and health and survival. Status of Women in India.

STATUS OF WOMEN DURING THE ANCIENT, MEDIEVAL, AND MODERN TIME

During the Vedic period, it is noted that women enjoyed equal rights, sometimes better status than men. In ancient times, Indian women used to enjoy equal status with men. Many reformers and social workers protected the rights of women either because of the role of women in the society or their special character as described in Upanishads. During the Medieval time, the rights of women have declined in spite of arguments and support from many reformers and the condition of women got worsened with the advent of Muslim rulers in India. During this time Sati among some communities, child marriages and a ban on widow remarriages became part of social life in India. In Modern India, Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Jyotiba Phule, etc fought for the upliftment and empowerment of women during British rule. During the British time, some acts were passed for women's upliftment are the enactment of the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929, and Widow Remarriage act 1856. During India's freedom struggle women played a significant role. Smt. Sarojini Naidu, an acknowledged poet, and a freedom fighter was the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress. Women's in Independent India, have been holding high-level positions in administration, corporate sector and politics. They held high positions such as President of India, Prime Minister of India, Speaker of Lok Sabha, etc., in Indian Parliament. Despite these facts, women in modern India are exposed to various social problems and issues like Honour Killing, Women harassment in the workplace, and dowry.

PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN

1. **Health Concerns:** Women in India are victims of social prejudices. It reflects on their low health indices. Half of the women in India are suffering from anemia. Malnutrition is higher among girl child as compared to their male counterpart.

Nutritional deprivation is major reason for different ailments in women. Only a small proportion of women in India is consuming a balanced diet.

2. **Lack of Employment:** Women labour force participation in India is lower than global average. It has reduced since 2013. It is accorded to low education qualification, lack of freedom to join workforce and patriarchal mindset of society. Paid maternity leave to women has also affected them adversely as data shows. Since pregnant women have to be given 26 weeks of maternity leave according to recent amendment to Maternity Benefits Act, employers tend to hire male workers. In higher positions, glass ceiling is at work which does not let women to hold higher positions of management where their numbers are very low.
3. **Education and Literacy:** Girl child often become first victim of poverty. They are removed from schools and made to participate in household chores or made victims of child labour. Poor girl children are made to sacrifice their studies for education of their brothers. According to census 2011, literacy rate in women was around 64 percent, that is 18 percent lower than males.
4. **Concerns of Safety and Security:** Women in society are under constant fear due to increasing instances of violation of their dignity. Safety and security of women in society has become matter of concern. According to a global study conducted by Thomson Reuters, India is the "fourth most unsafe country" in the world for women.
5. **Poverty:** Around 70 percent of world's poor are women. Even in India, women living under poverty are higher. It deprives women of their opportunity to participate completely in society while also violating their right to dignified and meaningful life.
6. **Low Political Representation:** Women are underrepresented in Parliament and State Legislatures. Quoting an Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women report -- Women in Politics 2017, the Economic Survey 2018 said Lok Sabha had 64 (11.8 percent of 542 MPs) and Rajya Sabha 27 (11 percent of 245 MPs) women MPs. These figures of political representation is not proportionate to women population in country.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

Some of the constitutional provisions have been adopted in order to bring equality in Indian society and also to increase the participation of women in education, sports, politics, media, art, and culture, service sectors, science, and technology, etc.

- 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.
- The Constitution of India guarantees equality to all Indian Women under Article 14.
- The constitution under Article 15(1) says that state can't discriminate against the women.
- Article 15(3) empowers the State to take affirmative actions in favour of women.
- Equal opportunity for all has been guaranteed under Article 16.
- The constitution under Article 39 (a) provides that the state directs its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- Equal pay for equal work is mentioned under (Article 39(d)).

- Constitution also allows for provisions to be made by the State for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42)
- Under (Article 51(A) (e)) it is mentioned to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

WAYS TO EMPOWER WOMEN IN INDIA

Women's empowerment would require changing patriarchal thinking and structures, giving women control over resources. Some of the ways through which women can be empowered are discussed below:

Political Empowerment: The political empowerment of women and their representation in Political decision making acts as a catalyst in achieving gender equality. Political participation means not only exercising the right to vote but also power-sharing, co-decision making, co-policy making at all levels of governance of the state. In India, the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and the National Commission for Women (NCW) have been working to safeguard the rights and legal entitlement of women. The political participation of women in India is not impressive when compared with men. In India Political participation of women is quite low as compared to other countries like Sweden 42.7%, Denmark 38%, Finland 36%, and Iceland 34.9%. UNICEF has cited the following benefits for the political participation of women:

- Political participation of women has the potential to change societies.
- It can have an impact on outcomes for women and children especially in the distribution of community resources.
- Steps taken by the government for political empowerment of women
 - The 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India have provided some special powers to women for reservation of seats (33%). Women's Reservation Bill [The Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, 2008] must be passed by the government in order to bring equality. Due to the Increased political participation of women in India we have seen women chief ministers, women president, different political parties' leaders, well-established businesswomen, etc. The most notable amongst these are Mrs. Pratibha Devisingh Patil, Sheila Dixit, Mayawati, Sonia Gandhi, Brinda Karat, Najma Heptulla, Indira Nooyi (Pepsico), Sushma Swaraj, 'Narmada Bachao' leader Medha Patkar, Nirmala Sitharaman etc.

Social Empowerment: 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. Under the social empowerment of women steps needs to be taken to improve the health status of women, reduce maternal mortality, especially in the areas which do not have good medical facilities. A programme for checking the spread of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS and infections/communicable diseases, like T.B., need to be launched. Women face high risk of malnutri-tion, hence focussed attention would have to be given to meet the nutritional needs of women at all stages of their life-cycle. Education initiatives therefore cannot rely solely on building educational infrastructure, but also need to address some of the root causes of discrimination against women and girls which affect the decisions made by parents and these needs to be addressed.

Economic Empowerment: Women mainly from the middle class increasingly entering the workforce. Urban centres like Delhi and Bengaluru have seen an influx of young women from semi-urban and rural parts of the country, living alone and redefining themselves. However, the story of economic empowerment for women is not a singular narrative; rather it is located in a complex set of caste, class, religious, and ethnic identities. The Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum in 2018 ranked India 108th out of 144 countries for inequality between men and women in the economy, politics, health, and education.

Women Empowerment through SHGs: Women empowerment in right sense is made possible through SHG movement in India. Self-help groups (SHGs) are a widely practiced model for social and economic mobility by NGOs and the government. SHGs provide women with the opportunity to manage loans and savings that can be used by members for varying needs.

THE MAJOR BENEFITS OF SHGS WOULD BE:

1. Social empowerment and mobilization through better organization.
2. Improved skills to enhance the abilities of the target communities to undertake productive investment and increases earning opportunities.
3. Greater access to productive assets, infrastructure, and social services.
4. Social protection to those who are vulnerable to natural and health related risks.

ACTS FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

- The Special Marriage Act, 1954: This act permits inter-caste and inter-religion marriage.
- The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976: Provides for payment of equal wages to both men and women workers for the same or similar and also prohibits discrimination against women in the matter of recruitment.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961:
- The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956: The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, is the premier legislation for prevention of trafficking for commercial sexual number of women and children in sex work in exploitation.
- The Medical termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.
- The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987.
- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.
- The Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994.
- The Protection of Women from Domestic aspects of women's development. The Violence Act, 2005.
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Protection and) Act, 2013.
- The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017: The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act has increased the duration of paid maternity leave available for women employees from the existing 12 weeks to 26 weeks.

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN:

The National Commission for Women (NCW) was constituted in 1992 as an apex statutory body at the National level under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990 to safeguard and promote the rights and interests of women.

Gender Budgeting The purpose of gender budgeting is to monitor expenditure and public service delivery from a gender perspective, as a means of mainstreaming women's concerns in all activities and improving their access to public resources. Gender Budgeting is an exercise to translate stated gender commitments of the Government into budgetary commitments. This is a strategy for ensuring gender sensitive resource allocation and enables tracking and allocating resources for women empowerment.

Schemes of Finance & Development Corporations

Gender Budgeting Initiatives of NSFDC: NSFDC since its inception, has been laying emphasis on coverage of more and more women beneficiaries under its various schemes. Presently, NSFDC stipulates that minimum coverage of women under its schemes would be 40% both in financial and physical terms.

SCHEMES FOR COVERAGE OF WOMEN BENEFICIARIES

- **Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY):** NSFDC had introduced the Scheme titled 'Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY)' – an exclusive Micro-Credit Scheme for women beneficiaries.
- **Nari Arthik Sashaktikaran Yojana (NASY):** This scheme was launched to provide loans at 4% per annum under any NSFDC Scheme to Single Women/Widows/ Women who are head of their families to take up income generating activities and improve their socio-economic status. Welfare schemes for women in India.

WELFARE SCHEME

- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao:** Its aim is to Prevent gender biased sex selective elimination, Ensuring survival & protection of the girl child, Ensuring education and participation of the girl child
- **Swadhar and Short Stay Homes** to provide relief and rehabilitation to destitute women and women in distress.
- **Working Women Hostels** for ensuring safe accommodation for working women away from their place of residence.
- **Support to Training and Employment Program for Women (STEP)** to ensure sustainable employment and income generation for marginalised and asset-less rural and urban poor women across the country.
- **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)** to provide microfinance services to bring about the socioeconomic upliftment of poor women.
- **National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW)** to strengthen the overall processes that promote all-round development of women
- **Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers** (including single mother) to provide day care facilities for running a crèche of 25 children in the age group 0-6 years from families having monthly income of less than Rs 12,000.

- One Stop Centre to provide integrated support and assistance to women affected by violence.
- Scheme for Universalisation of Women Helpline intended to provide 24 hours immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence.
- Sabla Scheme for holistic development of adolescent girls in the age group of 11-18 years. **International Cooperation of India on Women Empowerment**

India is a part to various international conventions and treaties which are committed to secure equal rights of women. Some of the important cooperation are discussed below:

- Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by India in 1993.
- Other important International instruments for women empowerment are: The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform for Action (1995).
- SDG 5: It is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls and India is committed to the Sustainable development goals.

Justice Verma Committee Report

Justice Verma Committee was constituted to recommend amendments to the Criminal Law so as to provide for quicker trial and enhanced punishment for criminals accused of committing sexual assault against women. In this report Justice verma has suggested some of the measures, that will be very much helpful in women Empowerment.

Recommendations

- Make voyeurism, stalking and intentional touching an offense.
- There is an urgent need to amend rape laws.
- Review security laws in conflict zones: This was recommended, due to the number of reports of alleged sexual offences committed by the armed forces in India's conflict areas such as Kashmir and the North East, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).
- Need to Monitor illegal, patriarchal village councils.
- Review medical examination of rape victims.
- Need Gender sensitization through education.

CONCLUSION

India can become a powerful nation only if it truly empowers its women. We have done so much for women empowerment, However, we are still far behind in achieving the equality and justice which the Preamble of our Constitution talks about. The real problem lies in the patriarchal and male-dominated system of our society which considers women as subordinate to men and creates different types of methods to subjugate them. The need of the hour is to educate and sensitize male members of the society regarding women issues and try to inculcate a feeling of togetherness and equality among them. For this to happen apart from Government, the efforts are needed from various NGOs and from enlightened citizens of the country. And first of all efforts should begin from our homes where we must empower female

members of our family by providing them equal opportunities of education, health, nutrition and decision making without any discrimination.

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