



**AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGES AND ISSUES SURROUNDING
WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA**

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the current state of Women Empowerment in India, focusing on the associated issues and challenges. In the 21st century, the empowerment of women has emerged as a critical concern; however, in practice, it often remains an elusive goal. Daily experiences reveal that women frequently fall victim to various social injustices. Women Empowerment serves as a crucial mechanism for enhancing women's access to resources and enabling them to make informed life choices. This process aims to elevate the economic, social, and political standing of women, particularly those who have been historically marginalized. It also involves protecting them from all forms of violence. The research is based solely on secondary sources and indicates that Indian women are relatively disempowered, holding a lower status compared to men despite numerous governmental initiatives. The findings suggest that societal acceptance of unequal gender norms persists among women. The study concludes that access to education, employment opportunities, and shifts in social structures are essential factors that facilitate Women Empowerment.

Keywords

Empowerment of Women, Educational Opportunities, Health Care, Socio-Economic Conditions, Violence Against Women, Policy Considerations.

Introduction

Women empowerment encompasses the enhancement of spiritual, political, social, educational, gender, and economic strength among individuals and communities of women. In India, the empowerment of women is significantly influenced by various factors, including geographical location. Educational status, social status (including caste and class), and age vary significantly between urban and rural areas. Various policies aimed at women's empowerment are implemented at national, state, and local (Panchayat) levels across multiple sectors, such as health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation. Nevertheless, there remains a considerable gap between these policy advancements and their practical application within communities. The empowerment of women fundamentally involves enhancing the economic, social, and political standing of women, particularly those who have been historically marginalized. This process also includes protecting them from all forms of violence. Women's empowerment seeks to create a societal and political framework where women can exist free from oppression, exploitation, fear, discrimination, and the pervasive sense of persecution that often accompanies their roles in a traditionally male-dominated society. Although women make up nearly half of the global population, India faces a skewed sex ratio, with a significantly lower female population compared to males. Socially, women are often not regarded as equals to men in many contexts. In contrast, Western societies have achieved greater gender equality, granting



women equal rights and status across various domains. However, gender-based discrimination and inequalities persist in India to this day. This paradox is evident in the dual perception of women, who are sometimes revered as goddesses and at other times treated as subservient.

Literature Review

H. Subrahmanyam (2011) examines the current state of women's education in India compared to the past. The author emphasizes significant advancements in the enrollment of female students in schools. The concept of empowerment refers to granting legal authority or power to act, which involves enhancing women's participation in various activities. M. BhavaniSankara Rao (2011) notes that the health of women in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) has improved markedly. This improvement indicates that these women engage in discussions about health issues affecting themselves and their children, while also raising awareness about various government initiatives designed for their benefit. Doepke M. and Tertilt M. (2011) investigate whether female empowerment fosters economic development. Their empirical analysis suggests that when mothers have financial resources, it positively impacts their children's well-being. The study employs a series of non-cooperative family bargaining models to explore the frictions that may lead to the observed empirical relationships. Duflo E. (2011) discusses the connection between women's empowerment and economic development in a report for the National Bureau of Economic Research in Cambridge. The study posits that the links between empowerment and development may be too fragile to sustain themselves, indicating that ongoing policy commitment to gender equality is essential for achieving true parity between men and women. Sethuraman K. (2008) investigates the interplay between women's empowerment, domestic violence, and child growth and undernutrition in a tribal and rural community in South India. This research paper delves into how these factors are interconnected, particularly focusing on maternal nutritional status. The nutritional status and growth of children aged 6 to 24 months were assessed over a six-month period within a rural and tribal community. This longitudinal observational study was conducted in rural Karnataka, India, involving participants from both tribal and rural backgrounds. Venkata Ravi and Venkatraman (2005) examined the impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) on women's involvement and their ability to influence decision-making in both family and community activities.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the necessity of Women Empowerment.
2. To evaluate the level of awareness regarding Women Empowerment in India.
3. To examine the factors that affect the Economic Empowerment of Women.
4. To investigate the Government initiatives aimed at promoting Women Empowerment.
5. To pinpoint the obstacles faced in achieving Women Empowerment.
6. To provide practical recommendations based on the findings.

Research Methodology

This study is fundamentally descriptive and analytical. It aims to examine the empowerment of women in India, utilizing data exclusively from secondary sources relevant to the research objectives. Crimes against women pose a significant challenge to the advancement of women's empowerment in India. A report from the National Crime Records



Bureau highlights concerning statistics regarding these crimes. The report provides a breakdown of reported incidents from 2009 to 2013. In 2012, there were 244,270 reported incidents of crimes against women (encompassing both IPC and SLL), an increase from 228,649 incidents in 2011, marking a rise of 6.4%. The data indicates a consistent upward trend in such crimes from 2008 to 2012, with recorded cases of 195,856 in 2008, 203,804 in 2009, 213,585 in 2010, 228,650 in 2011, and 244,270 in 2012. Furthermore, the share of IPC crimes against women as a percentage of total IPC crimes has risen over the past five years, from 9.2% in 2009 to 11.2% in 2013.

The Importance of Women Empowerment.

In the context of Indian culture, as illustrated in the "Vedas Purana," women are revered figures, exemplified by deities such as LAXMI MAA, the goddess of wealth; SARASWATI MAA, the embodiment of wisdom; and DURGA MAA, representing strength. However, the status of women, particularly in rural regions, highlights a pressing need for empowerment initiatives. Approximately 66% of the female population in these areas remains underutilized, largely due to entrenched social customs. In sectors like agriculture and animal husbandry, women account for 90% of the workforce. Despite making up nearly half of the population and contributing about two-thirds of total work hours, women earn only 10% of global income and possess less than 1% of the world's property. Among the 900 million illiterate individuals worldwide, women outnumber men by a ratio of two to one, and 70% of those living in poverty are women. The low sex ratio of 933 indicates that women, even within the same socioeconomic class, tend to be less healthy than their male counterparts. Furthermore, women represent less than one-seventh of administrators and managers in developing nations, holding only 10% of seats in the World Parliament and 6% in national cabinets. The barriers to women's empowerment include various challenges that have persisted historically and continue to affect women today.

1. Gender inequality
2. Insufficient education
3. Female infanticide
4. Economic limitations
5. Domestic obligations
6. Limited mobility
7. Reduced risk tolerance
8. Minimal drive for success
9. Lack of aspiration for social advancement
10. Dowry practices
11. Endogamous marriage and the persistence of child marriage
12. Violence against women (including rape, assault, murder, oppression, and daily humiliation)

The Importance of Women Empowerment

Women often face limitations in decision-making authority, freedom of movement, access to education, employment opportunities, media representation, and are vulnerable to domestic violence. Strategies for Empowering Women To empower women, it is essential to enhance their mobility and social interactions, transform labour patterns, improve access to and control over resources, and increase their involvement in decision-making processes.



This can be achieved through education, promoting self-employment, and establishing self-help groups. Additionally, addressing basic needs such as nutrition, health, sanitation, and housing is crucial. Society must also shift its mindset regarding women, encouraging them to excel in their chosen fields and pursue careers.

Government Initiatives for Women Empowerment In India,

government initiatives aimed at women's development date back to 1954, although significant participation began in 1974. Currently, the Government of India continues to implement various programs to support women's empowerment.

There are over 34 initiatives aimed at supporting women, managed by various departments and ministries. Some of these initiatives include:

1. Rastria Mahila Kosh (RMK) established in 1992-1993
2. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) launched in October 1993
3. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) introduced in 1995
4. Women Entrepreneur Development Programme prioritized in 1997-98
5. Mahila Samakhya implemented in approximately 9,000 villages
6. Swayasjdha
7. Swa Shakti Group
8. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)
9. Swalamban
10. Crèches/Day Care Centers for children of working and ill mothers
11. Hostels for working women
12. Swadhar
13. National Mission for Empowerment of Women
14. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) initiated in 1975
15. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) launched in 2010
16. Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers
17. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) established in 2009-2010
18. Dhanalakshmi introduced in 2008
19. Short Stay Homes
20. Ujjawala launched in 2007
21. Scheme for Gender Budgeting (XI Plan)
22. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)
23. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM)
24. Prime Minister's Rojgar Yojana (PMRY)
25. Women's Development Corporation Scheme (WDCS)
26. Working Women's Forum
27. Indira Mahila Kendra
28. Mahila Samiti Yojana
29. Khadi and Village Industries Commission
30. Indira Priyadarshini Yojana
31. SBI's Sree Shakti Scheme
32. SIDBI's Mahila Udyam Nidhi and Mahila Vikas Nidhi
33. NGO Credit Schemes



34. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development's Schemes

The government's initiatives are effectively complemented by the efforts of non-governmental organizations, which play a crucial role in facilitating these programs.

Women Empowerment Despite the dedicated efforts of governments and non-governmental organizations, there remain significant gaps in the empowerment of women. While progress has been made, the path ahead is challenging and requires sustained commitment.

Status of Women Empowerment

The status of women empowerment cannot be understood through a singular lens; rather, it necessitates a multidimensional evaluation that encompasses various aspects of women's lives. This paper aims to provide an overview of women's conditions and status concerning employment, education, health, and social standing. Before delving into these areas in detail, it is essential to briefly examine the overall status of women as reflected in the Gender Gap Index published by the World Economic Forum in 2012. Challenges Numerous obstacles hinder the advancement of women empowerment in India. Social norms and family structures in developing nations, such as India, often reinforce and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. A prevalent norm is the enduring preference for male children over female ones, which is evident across various societies and communities. This bias extends to education, nutrition, and other opportunities, with a prevailing belief that male children are the rightful heirs to family legacies, except in regions like Meghalaya. Women frequently internalize traditional roles, which can lead to self-imposed limitations. Additionally, poverty remains a harsh reality for a significant number of women in India, further complicating the pursuit of empowerment. Addressing these challenges is crucial for advancing women's rights in India. Education is one area where progress has been made since independence; however, the disparity between men and women remains stark. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are literate.

Professional Inequality

This form of inequality manifests in hiring practices and advancement opportunities. Women encounter numerous obstacles in male-oriented and dominated environments within both government offices and private companies. Gender bias in health and nutrition contributes to an alarmingly high mortality rate among women, further diminishing their population, particularly in Asia, Africa and China.

Household Inequality:

Gender bias in household relations manifests in subtle yet significant ways globally, particularly in India. This includes the unequal distribution of responsibilities such as housework, childcare, and other domestic tasks, often justified by a so-called division of labor. Constitutional Provisions India's Constitution includes several provisions aimed at empowering women. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law for all individuals. Article 15 prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, while allowing for special provisions in favor of women and children under Article 15(3). Article 16 ensures equal opportunity for all citizens in employment and appointments to state offices. Article 39(a) directs state policy to secure adequate means of livelihood for both men and women, and Article 39(d) mandates equal pay for equal work. Additionally, Article 42 calls for the state to provide just and humane working conditions and maternity relief. Article



51A(e) encourages all citizens to promote harmony and reject practices that undermine women's dignity. Furthermore, Articles 343(d) and 343(T) reserve at least one-third of the total seats for women in direct elections to local bodies, such as Panchayats and Municipalities.

Findings of the Study

1. Globalization, liberalization, and various socio-economic factors have provided some relief to a significant segment of the population. Nevertheless, there remain numerous areas where women's empowerment in India is still insufficient.
2. A fundamental shift in the mindset of the populace is essential. It is crucial for both women and men to recognize and adapt to a society that is progressing towards equality and equity. Embracing this change sooner rather than later will benefit everyone.
3. Despite the presence of numerous government initiatives and NGOs in the country, a considerable disparity persists between those who receive support and those who do not.
4. The challenges of poverty and illiteracy exacerbate these issues. Women's empowerment must start with ensuring their health and safety.
5. Achieving women's empowerment is contingent upon enhancing their economic and social standing. This can only be realized through the implementation of targeted social and economic policies aimed at the comprehensive development of women, helping them understand their potential as strong individuals.
6. To foster a sustainable future, it is imperative that we prioritize the empowerment of women.

Suggestions

1. The primary focus must be on women's education, as it is a fundamental issue. Therefore, it is essential to prioritize educational initiatives specifically aimed at women.
2. It is important to conduct awareness programs to inform women, particularly those from marginalized communities, about their rights.
3. Women must have the opportunity to work, accompanied by adequate safety measures and support. They should receive fair wages and have equal working conditions as men to enhance their societal status.
4. There should be rigorous enforcement of programs and legislation aimed at addressing and eliminating the malpractices that exist within society.

Conclusion

In summary, the progress in income, employment, and education for women indicates a relatively inadequate state of empowerment. It is crucial to identify the gaps and barriers that hinder the realization of women's empowerment, with initiatives originating from women themselves, alongside essential policy measures from both the state and society. We must commit to fostering an egalitarian society where all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to enhance their own well-being and that of the community at large. Women's empowerment is not merely a concept of the Global North; women worldwide, including those in the Global South, have been actively confronting and transforming gender inequalities throughout history. These efforts have often been bolstered by men who stand



against injustices faced by women. Representing half of the global population, women experience gender inequality in every country. Until women are afforded the same opportunities as men, societies will continue to underachieve relative to their potential. A fundamental shift in societal attitudes towards women is urgently needed. "When women advance, families thrive, communities prosper, and nations progress." Their perspectives and values are vital for nurturing strong families, cohesive societies, and ultimately, a prosperous nation. A key strategy for empowerment lies in integrating women into the core of developmental efforts. True and effective empowerment will only be realized when women have access to income and property, enabling them to establish their independence and identity within society. The empowerment of women has emerged as a critical issue in the 21st century, both nationally and internationally. However, government actions alone will not suffice; society must also take proactive steps to cultivate an environment conducive to this change.

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