



Empowerment of Women in India: Enhancing Social and Economic Status

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Abstract

The empowerment of women has emerged as one of the foremost issues of the 21st century. Despite the term "empowerment" being widely used, the reality often presents a contradictory picture. Women hold significant roles within families and communities; however, they continue to face discrimination across various critical aspects of life, including education, income, choice of partners, inheritance laws, property rights, decision-making processes, community organization, and access to leadership roles in education, business, and politics. This challenging social landscape underscores the urgent need for women's empowerment, making it a vital contemporary objective. Empowerment encompasses a process of awareness and capacity building that fosters increased participation, enhanced decision-making authority, and transformative actions. It involves creating an environment where women can independently make decisions that benefit both themselves and society at large. Women's empowerment aims to enhance their social, economic, political, and legal strength, ensuring equal rights and instilling confidence to assert and enjoy those rights. It also involves enabling women to control and benefit from resources, assets, income, and their own time, as well as equipping them to manage risks and improve their economic status and overall well-being. The advancement of any nation is intrinsically linked to the social and economic upliftment of women within that society.

Introduction

Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai poignantly stated, "I raise up my voice—not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. We cannot succeed when half of us are held back." This powerful message encapsulates the essence of contemporary women empowerment. Despite being in the 21st century, discrimination against women persists globally. Patriarchal structures in numerous societies continue to exploit and victimize women. Although women make up approximately 50% of the global population, many are still deprived of fundamental rights such as education, freedom of expression, voting rights, and the ability to establish their own identities. Reports of violence against women emerge from every corner of the world. Furthermore, there are ongoing debates regarding the acceptance of women empowerment even in the most developed nations, while developing countries and those facing political turmoil struggle to attain the necessary progress.



Significance and Meaning of Women Empowerment:

A Literature Review "Women Empowerment" signifies the complete liberation of women from the socio-economic constraints of dependency and deprivation. It entails fostering self-reliance among women, promoting economic independence, enhancing self-esteem, building confidence to confront challenges, and encouraging active involvement in various socio-political development initiatives. The empowerment of women is a socio-political concept that aligns with the broader framework of women's rights. It is a transformative process that enables women to realize their full potential and ensures their access to opportunities, resources, and choices, along with the freedom to make decisions both at home and in society. True empowerment is achieved when improvements in women's conditions are coupled with their capacity to influence social change, facilitated by equal opportunities across economic, social, and political domains.

Amartya Sen (1997) emphasized the significance of women's empowerment, which involves transforming the circumstances of individuals who previously had limited influence over their lives. This transformation consists of two key elements: the first pertains to gaining control over resources, including financial, physical, and human assets, while the second relates to the ability to shape ideology, beliefs, values, and attitudes. Hemalata Prasad has thoroughly outlined the criteria for women's empowerment as follows.

1. Promote self-esteem and confidence among women.
2. Foster a positive image of women by acknowledging their contributions to society and the economy.
3. Cultivate critical thinking skills within women.
4. Accelerate decision-making through collaborative processes.
5. Empower women to make informed choices regarding education, employment, and health, particularly in reproductive health.
6. Ensure equal involvement in the development process.
7. Equip women with the knowledge, skills, and information necessary for economic independence.
8. Improve access to legal literacy and information about their rights and entitlements to enhance their participation across all sectors.

Methodology

The significance of women's contributions to human development is now broadly acknowledged across many regions of the world. The emphasis on analyzing women's empowerment has emerged due to the substantial focus that the Government of India has recently placed on this issue. This study examines the roles of both governmental and non-governmental organizations by assessing their strategies and effectiveness in promoting women's empowerment in India. The primary aim of this research is to evaluate women's empowerment, which is essential for the overall progress of the nation.

Anyalasis

Women make up almost half of the global population, yet they earn less than 20 percent of the world's income and possess less than two percent of global property. According to the 2011



census, women account for 48.5 percent of India's population. They face discrimination in various areas, including literacy rates, labour participation, and income levels. The economic empowerment of women has led to advancements in multiple domains, such as socio-economic status, access to opportunities, property rights, political representation, social equality, personal rights, family development, community progress, and ultimately, national development. Consequently, the empowerment of women has become a critical issue in contemporary society. Key strategies for achieving women's empowerment encompass social, economic, and political empowerment, as well as gender and demographic justice.

Empowerment of women through language

1. The establishment of the National Commission for Women through a parliamentary Act in 1990 aimed to protect the rights and legal entitlements of women. 2. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in 1992 were enacted to ensure the reservation of seats for women in local bodies such as Panchayats and Municipalities. 3. In 1993, India ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to promote equal rights for women. 4. As of January 30, 2006, the Department of Women and Child Development was elevated to a Ministry, now under the direct oversight of a Cabinet Minister dedicated to women and child development.

National Policy For Empowerment Of Women 2001

The Government of India has designated the year 2001 as the Year of Women's Empowerment. In line with this initiative, the National Policy for Empowerment of Women (NPEW) was established to promote the advancement, development, and empowerment of women. The NPEW outlines comprehensive measures to ensure that women have equal access to healthcare, quality employment at all levels, career and vocational guidance, fair remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security, and participation in public life. It also emphasizes the importance of equal opportunities for women in decision-making roles and aims to integrate gender considerations into the development process. Furthermore, the NPEW proposes the incorporation of a gender perspective in the budgeting process as a key operational strategy.

National Mission For Employment Of Women

The Government of India's Ministry of Women and Child Development initiated the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) on March 8, 2010. This program aims to enhance women's social, economic, and educational status by ensuring the integration of various schemes and programs from different ministries and departments of the Government of India, as well as state governments.

National Policy For Women 2016- DRAFT

The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, has formulated a new National Policy for Women in 2016, aimed at articulating a vision for the empowerment of women. This policy's mission is to establish a robust framework that facilitates the development of policies, programs, and practices designed to guarantee equal rights and opportunities for women across various spheres, including family, community, workplace, and governance.



Schemes For Social And Economic Upliftment Of Women

The Ministry of Women and Child Development serves as the primary agency responsible for the welfare, development, and empowerment of women. It has developed various schemes and programs aimed at addressing the diverse needs of women. These initiatives encompass a wide range of areas, including shelter, security, safety, legal assistance, justice, information, maternal health, nutrition, and food. Additionally, they focus on providing economic support through skill development, education, and access to credit and marketing opportunities.

Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP)

The IRDP is a program focused on benefiting families whose annual income falls below Rs 11,000, with 30% of the benefits specifically designated for women.

Training For Rural Youth Self- Employment (TRYSEM)

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Development Of Women And Children In Rural Areas (DWCRA)

This initiative, a sub-scheme of the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), was launched in the fiscal year 1983-84. Its primary objective is to promote the welfare of women and children in rural regions by offering a revolving fund of Rs 25,000 to groups of 10 to 15 women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The program supports various economic activities and ancillary services, including nutrition, health care, and adult education.

Shawlamban Programmed

This program was initiated in 1982-83 with support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). Its primary aim is to equip women with training and skills that enable them to secure sustainable employment or pursue self-employment opportunities. The initial beneficiaries of this initiative are disadvantaged women, including those from marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Support to Training And Employment Programmed (STEP)

This initiative aims to equip disadvantaged and assetless women in traditional sectors with essential skills and knowledge. As part of the project, these women are organized into effective and unified groups or cooperatives. In addition to access to credit, a wide range of services is offered, including healthcare, basic education, childcare facilities, and market connections.

Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY)

This initiative was a centrally funded program that allows every rural woman aged 18 and older to establish a MSY savings account. The government would.

Offer an incentive of 25% of the savings. A key element of the program is the engagement of NGOs at every level. NGOs conduct awareness-raising camps in villages, enabling them to encourage women to make informed decisions about saving.

Indira Mahila Yojana(IMY)

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Rastriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)

The Rastriya Mahila Kosh was created by the Department of Women and Child Development to provide financial support through women's development corporations, NGOs, and self-help groups. This initiative aims to assist 200,000 impoverished women from both rural and urban regions, specifically targeting those whose family income is below Rs 11,000 per year in rural areas and Rs 11,800 per year in urban areas.

Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana(SGSY)

SGSY was initiated in April 1999 following the reorganization of the IRDP and related programs. It stands as the sole self-employment initiative currently being executed for the rural impoverished population. The primary aim of SGSY is to elevate the assisted Swarojgar above the poverty threshold by equipping them with income-generating assets through bank credit and government subsidies.

Sw- Shakti

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Rajeev Gandhi Scheme For Empowerment Of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)-SABLA

Adolescent girls aged 11 to 18 in India represent approximately 18 percent of the nation's population and are a vital asset for the country's development. The initiative seeks to enhance their health and nutritional status while providing education on family welfare, health hygiene, and access to information about available services. The primary emphasis of the program is on girls who are not currently enrolled in school.

Indira Gandhi Matritva Shayog Yojana(IGMSY)

The IGMSY scheme aims to enhance the health and nutritional well-being of pregnant and lactating women, as well as their young infants. Under this initiative, a financial incentive of Rs 4000 will be granted to pregnant and lactating women aged 19 and older for their first two live births, provided they meet certain criteria related to maternal and child health and nutrition

Institutional Services State Homes

State Homes are designed to provide support for women who have been released from correctional facilities and are vulnerable to negative social influences, as well as for those who actively seek refuge. Residents receive complimentary accommodation and meals.

Social Upliftment and Empowerment of Women

To achieve social empowerment for women, it is essential to implement measures that enhance their health outcomes and reduce maternal mortality rates, particularly in areas lacking adequate medical facilities. Initiatives aimed at raising awareness about various diseases should be established. Given the high risk of malnutrition among women, it is crucial to address their nutritional requirements throughout all stages of life. Additionally, programs must be developed



to support women who are victims of domestic violence, those who have been abandoned, and individuals involved in sex work. The government must remain vigilant to prevent discrimination against the girl child and ensure the protection of her rights.

Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment serves as a vital avenue for uplifting women. Increasing women's economic productivity is a key strategy for improving the living conditions of the 65 million Indian households that exist below the poverty line. The presence of women in a state of economic, political, social, and educational disempowerment significantly obstructs economic progress. As noted by J. Cooper, the status of women in any society is determined by their recognized rights, responsibilities, freedoms, and opportunities, particularly within the domestic, economic, social, political, and religious domains.

Education and Women's Empowerment

Education serves as a crucial catalyst for social change, making it essential to focus on women's education specifically. The educational system must prioritize increased access for women, fostering an environment of gender sensitivity. It is important to monitor the dropout rates among girls and implement corrective actions to address and reduce these rates.

Elements Affecting Women's Empowerment

- Financial Autonomy.
- Creation of Original Ideas.
- Formation of Personal Identity.
- Pursuit of Excellence.
- Enhancement of Self-Confidence.
- Cultivation of Risk-Taking Skills.
- Equal Standing in Society.
- Trust in Interpersonal Relationships (Maurya & Agarwal, 2013b).
- Supportive Leadership Dynamics (Maurya & Agarwal, 2015).
- Drive and Aspiration to Lead (Maurya & Agarwal, 2013a, 2018).
- Increased Freedom and Mobility.

Constraints In Women Empowerment

It is clear from the study that the women especially rural women are facing some prime constraints in empowerment which are follows-

- Lack of freedom to take decision.
- Lack of education.
- Lack of social mobility.
- Over burdened with dual responsibilities.
- Lack of proper training
- Ego problems of men talk
- Insufficient loans.
- Caste system in the village.



- Family restrictions
- Doubts regarding the women's capabilities.
- Partiality of government officials
- Lack of knowledge and skill.
- Perceived workplace harassment (Maurya & Agarwal, 2014)

The Contribution of NGOs to Women's Empowerment

While governmental organizations play a crucial role in promoting women's empowerment, a comprehensive approach is essential. Consequently, numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emerged, gaining prominence from grassroots to global levels. Their impact is significant, driven by a strong sense of mission and dedication. NGOs operate with transparency and a personal touch, enhancing their effectiveness in this area. They facilitate seminars, conferences, and workshops focused on women's rights and the eradication of discrimination, aiming to raise awareness among the public.

The Function of Self-Help Groups

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are voluntary organizations comprised of individuals sharing similar interests, established and governed democratically, free from political ties. SHGs have become a significant approach to empowering women, with various Government of India initiatives demonstrating that robust women's groups can play a crucial role in enhancing development and integrating services and activities. Across different states in the country, these groups have focused on skill development and raising awareness, fostering economic growth through income-generating activities, including credit management for underprivileged women.

The Role of International Agencies in Women's Empowerment

The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women is a fundamental aspect of the United Nations' mission. The U.N. is dedicated to advancing women's human rights and combating violence against women. Several U.N. agencies are specifically focused on women's empowerment, including the Commission on the Status of Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the United Nations Development Fund for Women. Recently, the establishment of U.N. Women has further streamlined the efforts of these agencies. These international organizations strive to ensure that women can engage equally with men in public discourse and decision-making processes, thereby influencing the choices that shape the future of their families and nations.

Conclusion

The empowerment of women has emerged as a critical issue for policymakers in the nation, attracting significant media attention and international scrutiny. As stated in the Government of India's country report, "Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power." The status, employment, and contributions of women serve as vital indicators of a nation's overall development. While women are often referred to as the "better half" of society, the reality



remains that our society is predominantly male-dominated, and women frequently do not receive equal treatment, both within the home and in broader society. Although women are inherently different from men, this distinction should not be misconstrued as a sign of inferiority. In recent decades, India has experienced some progress regarding the status and roles of women. There has been a notable shift in policy focus—from welfare in the 1970s to development in the 1980s, and growth in the 1990s—culminating in the contemporary emphasis on empowerment. Achieving social, economic, educational, political, and legal empowerment for women will be a formidable challenge. Changing the entrenched belief that women are inferior, dependent, and expendable will not be straightforward. However, this does not imply that change is unattainable. Time is essential for altering perceptions, but with concerted efforts and a commitment to the right direction, this goal is within reach. An organized strategy from the government and law enforcement agencies, aimed at liberating women from all forms of oppression, is crucial. Only by genuinely empowering its women can India aspire to become a truly powerful nation.

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