



GENDER EQUALITY: WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality is a human right which entitles all persons irrespective of their gender to live with dignity and with freedom. Gender equality is also a precondition for all round development and reducing poverty. Empowered women make invaluable contribution to the improvement of health conditions and educational status and productivity of whole families and communities, which in turn improve prospects for the next generation. The Millennium Development Goal also puts emphasis on gender equality and empowerment of women. It is now widely accepted that gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental cornerstones for achieving development results. Keeping the status of women empowerment and its determinants in India, in this paper an attempt is made to present some of the key determinants of inequalities that exist in our country so as to have an idea about to what extent the women are empowered.

KEYWORDS : gender equality, empowerment, women participation,

Introduction

Gender equality will be achieved only when women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. This means sharing equally, power and influence, and having equal opportunities in economic and social spheres. Equal claim on education and career prospects will enable women to realize their personal ambitions. Gender equality demands the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. When women are empowered, the whole family benefit, thus benefiting the society as a whole and these benefits often have a ripple effect on future generations.

According to Census-2011, India has reached the population of 1210 million, as against 301 million in 1951, of which 58,64,69,174 (48.5 %) were females. The population of India accounted for 17.5% of the total world population and occupied second place. The sex ratio was 930 in 1971 and it has increased to 940 according to 2011 Census. The female literacy also increased from 18.3% in 1961 to 74.0% in 2011 and a decrease in male-female literacy gap from 26.6% in 1981 to 16.7 per cent in 2011. Women empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (rural/urban), educational status, social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on women empowerment exist at national, state and local levels in many sectors including health, education, economic opportunities, gender based violence and political participation. The scope and coverage of the schemes launched has been expanding that include initiatives for economic and social empowerment of women and for securing gender equality. The following schemes at present are aiming at women empowerment and gender equality in India:

1. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (1975)
2. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) (2010)
3. The Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers.
4. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) (2009-10)
5. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)
6. Dhanalakshmi (2008)
7. Short Stay Homes
8. Swadhar
9. Ujjawala (2007)
10. Scheme for Gender Budgeting (XI Plan)
11. National Mission for Empowerment of Women
12. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (1993): 3:

In spite of the effective implementation of all the above schemes and programmes, there are significant gaps between policy achievements and actual practice at the community level. The Global Gender Gap Index (2016) observed that India is simply not

doing enough for its women. The ranking of the country has fallen from 105 (out of 135 countries) in 2012 to 87 out of 144 countries in 2016.

2. Objectives of the Present Study

This research paper has the following objectives:

1. To understand the level of equality among girls and boys in primary, secondary and higher education.
2. To know the Gender Equality and Share of women in economic participation and opportunity
3. To Identify the Gender Equality and Women accessibility to resources
4. To examine the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Political Field.

Research methodology

For the purpose of the present study data has been collected from secondary sources. It is collected from Journals, Magazines, including the reports and documents of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India National family health survey report, etc. and various other publications.

Results and Findings

A. Gender Equality in primary, secondary education, tertiary education

Education is the single most important factor to ensure gender equality and empowerment. Enrolment of girls in primary education, survival and transition to higher levels of education lead to achieving gender parity in education. During 2010-11 to 2014-15, substantial progress has been achieved towards gender parity in education as revealed by some important indicators.

I) Gender Parity Index (GPI)

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is the ratio of the number of female students enrolled at primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education to the corresponding number of male student in each level. Thus GPI (based on GER) which is free from the effects of the population structure of the appropriate age group, provides picture of gender equality in education. During 2010-11 to 2014-15, substantial progress has been achieved towards gender parity in education as revealed in the following table.

Gender parity Index

Year	Primary education	Secondary education	Higher education
2010-11	1.01	0.88	0.86
2011-12	1.01	0.93	0.88
2012-13	1.02	0.96	0.89
2013-14	1.03	1.0	0.92
2014-15	1.03	1.01	0.92

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India website

It can be noticed from the above table, in primary education the enrolment is favourable to females as GPI has crossed the level of 1. In Secondary and higher education levels also a rapid progress has been observed during the recent past towards gender parity.

ii) Level wise enrollment of girls

Indicator	Level of education	2010-11	2014-15
Enrolment of girls as percentage of total enrolment	Primary education (Classes I-V)	47	48
	Upper primary education (Classes VI-IX)	47	59
	Secondary (IX-X) and higher secondary (XI-XII) education	44	47
Number of girls per 100 boys Enrolled	Primary education (Classes I-V)	92	93
	Upper primary education	89	95
	Secondary education	82	90
	Senior secondary education (XI-XII)	79	89
	Higher education	77	84

Source: Educational Statistics at a glance 2014, M/o HR

The literacy rate in terms of number of girls per 100 boys enrolled shows that during study period from 2010-11 to 2014-15, a remarkable progress has been identified at all levels of education. It can be said that 8 to 10% growth is recorded in upper primary, secondary and higher education during the study period

Gender Equality and Share of Women in economic participation and opportunity

Women's participation in labour force is seen as a signal of declining discrimination and increasing empowerment of women. It is thought that feminization of the workforce is also a sign of improvement of women's opportunities and position in society. Share of Women in Employment measures the degree to which labour markets are open to women in industry and service sectors, which affects not only equal employment opportunity for women but also economic efficiency through flexibility in the labour market and reflect economic factors in social empowerment of women.

Year	Labour force participation rate	Share of regular wages and salaried workers
2010-11	42.0	8.2
2011-12	42.7	8.4
2012-13	32.6	10.2
2013-14	31.2	12.8
2014-15	31.1	12.1

Source: National family Health Survey-4

The labour force participation rate of women is low and a sizable gender gap persists. Moreover, when women work they tend to end up in marginal jobs. One of the most intense debates in recent years has centred on the declining labour force participation rate of women in India, which dropped from 42.7 percent to 31.1 percent during 2010-11 to 2014-15. In the share of regular wage and salaried workers, female share is increased from 8.4% to 12.1 percent during study period.

Mobility and Decision Making

Other than educational and economic empowerment, changes in women's mobility and social interaction, participation in decision making are also necessary. As per the estimates of NSS 68th Round (2011 – 2012), the proportion of female headed household in rural

and urban areas were 11.5% and 12.4% respectively. Still today a very small percentage of Indian women have the freedom in household decision making, visiting their family and relatives and going outside home. Besides, in most of the Indian communities women do not have the right to decide how many children they will have. Moreover, a woman does not have the freedom to spend her spouse's earnings and even her own earnings as per her choice and need.

Gender equality and Women Empowerment in social and political fields

Greater participation of women in social and political sphere is essential to make the social and political institutions more representative. It serves as a tool for empowerment of women and contributes to gender sensitive decision making. As far as political participation is concerned, women have a poor representation in India's Lok Sabha (Lower House), Rajya Sabha (Upper House) and also in State Assemblies. A total of 62 females have been elected in the General Election 2014 constituting only 11.4% share in the Lok Sabha, while in the Rajya Sabha only 11.9% representatives are women at present. Similarly, women representation in the state assemblies and state councils is also very poor. On an average, in the states, women share is only 8% in assemblies and only 4% in state councils as on 1st August 2014. However, due to the reservation of one-third seats for women in all tiers of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), representation of women in the PRIs has increased to 46.7% as on 1st March 2013. As far as women's participation in the judiciary is concerned, there were only 2 women judges out of 30 judges in the Supreme Court and only 58 women judges out of 609 judges in different High Courts with maximum 25% in Delhi High Court and no women judge in 6 High Courts as on 1st April 2014 (Women and Men in India, 2014).

Gender Equality and Women Access to Resources

Access to resources is important for economic freedom of women as freedom of movement is linked with their economic independence and also infuses with power and expands agency. The National Family Health Survey-3 has identified five important variables namely: knowledge of loan programme, get loan, having bank account, higher educational attainment and working outside as a measure of economic independence.

ISSUES TO BE TACKLED FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND GENDEREQUALITY

The above discussion shows that in India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, economic opportunity and economic participation, political participation, access to education or access to resources etc. Majority of Women in India are poor, uneducated and insufficiently trained. They often end up in the daily struggle of managing an ill equipped family and are not in a position to propel out themselves of the oppressive and regressive socio-economic conditions. Although lots of things are happening and large amount of resources are being spent in the name of women empowerment in India, the actual situation however, just remains the same and in many instances worsens further. Deep-rooted systemic challenges still remain to be addressed. The following are some of the important issues to be tackled for women's empowerment and gender equality in India.

- Eliminating gender differences in access to education and educational attainment are key elements on the path to attaining gender equality and reducing the disempowerment of women. Education, particularly higher education of women, is a key enabler of demographic change, family welfare, and better health and nutrition of women and their families. Special measures should be taken to create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrollment 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.

- Child marriage, which is still prevalent in our society, must be stopped. This is because an early age at marriage of women is an indicator of the low status of women in society and also curtails women's access to education.
- A woman needs to be physically healthy so that she is able to take challenges of equality. Women must have access to comprehensive, affordable and quality health care.
- The programmes for training women in agriculture and other allied occupations should be expanded to benefit women workers in the agriculture sector.
- Employment, particularly for cash and in the formal sector, can empower women by providing financial independence. Women should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so as to elevate their status in the society.
- Violence against women must be eradicated from the society. Apart from strict laws and legislations, the violence against women can only be tackled through a change in attitude that needs to take place in the family, in the society and the female members of the society as well. Gender sensitization and gender training programmes are also important.
- Women's political participation has been considered a major measure of women's empowerment. Women's representation in the legislature is very poor in India. Hence, necessary measures should be taken to increase women's representation in Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, State Assemblies and State Councils.
- Moreover, women's empowerment cannot take place unless women come together and decide to self-empower themselves. Women should come together as a unifying force and initiate self-empowering actions at the ground level.

Conclusion

As women constitute almost one-half of India's population, without their engagement and empowerment, rapid economic progress is out of the question. For economic growth to be really inclusive, women empowerment is of utmost value. It is crucial for achieving sustainable economic development of our country and even beyond. Still a large part of women do not have sufficient autonomy regarding the value choices for their own life. The data also revealed that there is a necessity to look beyond economic resources or material prosperity and into cultural and social influences, which are playing a significant role in shaping the women's autonomy and empowerment.

Along with government, civil society organisations and all other stake holders must come forward and involve in the women empowerment process is the need of the hour.

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