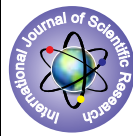


WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA-A CHANGING SCENARIO



Economics

KEYWORDS: Women Economic Empowerment, status, awareness, crimes against women, programmes, policy implications, Gender equality, Women right, Education, Independence, laws, participation, discrimination, conclusions.

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ABSTRACT

India with its diversity and rich heritage has an ugly side to it. If women have been worshipped as Goddess, there has been "sati" too. A silent witness, the oppressed women have come a long way. Though the situation has improved some facts (education rate, sexual harassment among others) are daunting. Many women have broken the barriers and we would still witness a lot more. To help women is to help society. And through this journey of women empowerment our nation will achieve its dream. The dream of reviving its past glory. To become the "golden peacock" again. Since 1911, the March 8th is celebrated around the world as International Women's Day. Many groups around the world choose different themes each year relevant to global and local gender issues. The UN declared an International Women's Day theme for 2013 and it is "A promise is a promise: Time for action to end violence against women". And this is very crucial for India.

Women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development and pro-poor growth. Achieving women's economic empowerment requires sound public policies, a holistic approach and long-term commitment and gender-specific perspectives must be integrated at the design stage of policy and programming. Women must have more equitable access to assets and services; infrastructure programmes should be designed to benefit the poor; both men and women, and employment opportunities must be improved while increasing recognition of women's vast unpaid work. Innovative approaches and partnerships include increased dialogue among development actors, improved co-ordination amongst donors and support for women organising at the national and global level.

INTRODUCTION;

"You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women" - Jawaharlal Nehru.

levels of productivity and earn less than men for work of equal value and are poorly represented in We might be listening to news, reading in newspapers or magazines, would have gone through incidents and accidents with women in India. While any other article on women's empowerment in India will take a look at our rich heritage and enlightened societies of the past where women were treated as equals, the concept of "India" itself evolved quite recently, relative to the sum of its parts' histories. But the TRUTH is that in the modern India, the woman has always been a second grade citizen, no matter what its esteemed leaders have said or done.

Women constitute half of humankind and 40% of the global workforce. They are a growing proportion of the overseas migrant labour force. As workers, entrepreneurs and service providers they contribute actively to social and economic development. Yet women's economic and human rights, their contributions and priorities have been largely overlooked. They are more likely to be unemployed than men, dominate the unprotected informal sector, are more likely than men to be in part-time formal employment in most high income regions, spend more time than men in unpaid care-work globally, have lower public and corporate economic decision-making.

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 levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation. However, there are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level.

One key factor for the gap in implementation of laws and policies¹ to address discrimination, economic disadvantages, and violence against women at the community level is the largely patriarchal structure that governs the community and households in much of India. As such, women and girls have

restricted mobility, access to education, access to health facilities, and lower decision-making power, and experience higher rates of violence.

Women workers in rural and urban areas have also been hard hit by the current financial and economic crisis, volatile food prices, the energy crisis, export driven agriculture and subsidized imports. Women need to be fully engaged in efforts to shape responses to these interfacing crises, both in terms of influencing the design and assessing the impacts of recovery packages from a gender perspective, and have an equal voice with men at all levels of economic decision-making. Empowering women economically and making them central to solutions is a moral imperative. But it also makes good economic sense. A growing body of research shows that enhancing women's economic participation improves national economies, increases household productivity and living standards, enhances the well being of children with positive long term impacts and can increase women's agency and overall empowerment.

RE-VIEW OF LITERATURE;

Venkata Ravi and Venkataraman (2005)

focused on the effects of SHGs on women participation and exercising control over decision making both in family matters and in group activities.

Juhi Gupta (2009)

suggested that for recognizing and tracing economic, social, cultural roots of violence against women. It is essential not only to mobilize policies that shape the state and societal response to individual acts of violence but also to change the processes of liberalization and corporate globalization that have indirectly aided such violence in general.

K. Geetanjali et.al (2011)

has compared the status of women in India with those of other countries. Women in Europe were almost at par with men and have equal participation in public sphere.

M. Bhavani Sankara Rao (2011)

has highlighted that health of women members of SHG have

certainly taken a turn to better. It clearly shows that women members discuss among themselves about health related problems of other members and their children and make them aware of various governmental provisions specially meant for them.

H. Subrahmanyam (2011)

compares women education in India at present and past. Author highlighted that there has a good progress in overall enrolment of girl students in schools. The term 'empower' means to give lawful power or authority to act. It is the process of acquiring some activities of women.

Employment and status of women, in the country is far behind the developed nations of the world. The census figures indicate that majority of women in India are illiterate, ill fed, unemployed, low paid occupying a very poor status in the society. The concept of "Employment" for women and thereby their empowerment deserves a special emphasis in this context.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY;

The following are the specific objectives:

- To know the need of women empowerment.
- To analyse the factors influencing the economic empowerment of women.
- To assess the awareness of women empowerment in India.
- To Study the constitutional laws which are beneficial to the empowerment of the women
- To identify the constraints of economic empowerment of women.
- To offer useful suggestions in the light of findings.

CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN

The crimes against women fly directly against orchestrating women empowerment in India. A report on the crimes against women by the National Crime Records Bureau comes up with some alarming statistics:-

Sl No.	Crime Head	Year 2006	Year 2007	Year 2008	Year 2009	Year 2010	Year 2011	Year 2012	Percentage Variation in 2012 over 2011
1	Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)	19,348	20,737	21,467	21,397	22,172	24,206	24,923	3.0
2	Kidnapping & Abduction (Sec. 363 to 373 IPC)	17,414	20,416	22,939	25,741	29,795	35,565	38,262	7.6
3	Dowry Death (Sec 302/304 IPC)	7,618	8,093	8,172	8,383	8,391	8,618	8,233	-4.5
4	Torture (Sec. 498-A IPC)	63,128	75,930	81,344	89,546	94,041	99,135	1,06,527	7.5
5	Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC)	36,617	38,734	40,413	38,711	40,613	42,968	45,351	5.5
6	Sexual Harassment (Sec. 509 IPC)	9,966	10,950	12,214	11,009	9,961	8,570	9,173	7.0
7	Importation of Girls (Sec. 366-B IPC)	67	61	67	48	36	80	59	-26.3
8	Sati Prevention Act, 1987	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	-100.0
9	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956	4,541	3,568	2,659	2,474	2,499	2,435	2,563	5.3
10	Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986	1,562	1,200	1,025	845	895	453	141	-68.9
11	Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	4,504	5,623	5,555	5,650	5,182	6,619	9,038	36.5
	Total	1,64,765	1,85,312	1,95,856	2,03,804	2,13,585	2,28,650	2,44,270	6.8

NEED FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

1. In this competitive world, women need to gain the amount of power that men have. Now, it is time to forget that men are the only holders of power. In India, women are still facing different obstacles in male-dominated cultures. The things are related to women's status and their future. However, now a day's Indian women are slowly getting empowerment in the sectors like education, politics, the work force and even more power within their own households. Today, women are busy running in the political campaign. The work force is covered with intellectual women who currently hold the higher positions at large companies which were never held by Indian women in long ago. In our country, women have reached a long way eventually and have discovered a new path for them to come. Women rights are human rights. The concept of feminism is very vogue. Feminist usually deals out balking attention. Women's right and changes effort to win equality for women have containing women's suffrage, feminism, women's property rights, equal opportunity in work and education, and equal pay.

2. Clearly, there is an excellent amount of reason for the girls to be more confident than boys and this is because of their remarkable academic feat around the nation. The empowerment is an aid to help women to achieve equality with men or, at least, to reduce gender gap considerably. Without empowerment certain social roles cannot be performed. Women play a distinct role in the economic development. She is the chief architect of family, the first teacher; supplier of labour power and by playing main role in the development of agriculture, industry, service sector, socio-culture etc. creates a civilized society. In the visible and invisible form women contribute for economic development.

A total of 2,44,270 incidents of crime against women (both under IPC and SLL) were reported in the country during the year 2012 as compared to 2,28,650 in the year 2011 recording an increase of 6.4% during the year 2012. These crimes have continuously increased during 2008 – 2012 with 1,95,856 cases in the year 2008, 2,03,804 cases in 2009 and 2,13,585 cases in 2010 and 2,28,650 cases in 2011 and 2,44,270 cases in the year 2012. West Bengal with 7.5% share of country's female population has accounted for nearly 12.7% of total crime against women by reporting 30,942 cases during the year 2012.

CHALLENGES

There are several challenges that are currently plaguing the issues of women's rights in India. A few of these challenges are presented below. While a lot of these are redundant and quite basic issues faced across the country, these are contributory causes to the overarching status of women in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India.

• Poverty in the Country

Poverty Headcount Ratio (2010)	
Poverty Trend	World Bank
Live less than \$1.25 a day	32.7% (400 million)
Live less than \$2 a day	68.7% (841 million)
Live less than \$2.5 a day	81.1% (992 million)
Live less than \$4 a day	93.7% (1,148 million)
Live less than \$5 a day	96.9% (1,179 million)

Data Source: Wikipedia

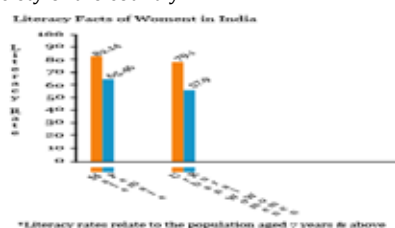
About a third of the country's population lives on less than 1.25USD per day. The GINI index keeps rising slowly over the years, indicating that the inequality in the distribution of wealth in the country is increasing, currently hovering a little close to 33.9.

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 abject poverty, women are exploited as domestic helps and wives whose incomes are usurped by the man of the house. Additionally, sex slaves are a direct outcome of poverty, as unearthed by Davinder Kumar:-

If poverty were not a concern, then the girl child will be able to follow her dreams without concerns of sexual exploitation, domestic abuse and no education or work.

• Education

While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since its independence where education is concerned, the gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India. Not only is an illiterate women at the mercy of her husband or father, she also does not know that this is not the way of life for women across the world. Additionally, the norms of culture that state that the man of the family is the be-all and end-all of family decisions is slowly spoiling the society of the country.



Data Source: Census of India 2011

As said in a study conducted by the Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism,

In spite of the UN Charter of Human Rights and the provisions of the Indian Constitution, women continue to be victims of exploitation. The view that the future generation of a family is carried on and preserved by boys-only has degraded the position of women in society. Similarly, it is noticed that majority of the women are lacking in the spirit of rebellion. If careful attention is not paid and major steps are not taken, the situation will become extremely critical.

Eradicating this gap and educating women about their real place in the world is a step that will largely set this entire movement rolling down the hill to crash and break the wall of intolerance, negligence and exploitation.

• Health & Safety

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

In its 2009 report, UNICEF came up with shocking figures on the status of new mothers in India. The maternal mortality report of India stands at 301 per 1000, with as many as 78,000 women in India dying of childbirth complications in that year. Today, due to the burgeoning population of the country, that number is sure to have multiplied considerably. The main causes of maternal mortality are:-

- Haemorrhage: 30%
- Anaemia: 19%
- Sepsis: 16%
- Obstructed Labour: 10%
- Abortion: 8%
- Toxaemia: 8%

THE ROAD AHEAD

India as a country is still recovering from years of abuse. It is only now that globalisation, liberalisation 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.

To truly understand what women empowerment is, there needs to be a sea-change in the mind-set of the people in the country. Not just the women themselves, but the men have to wake up to a world that is moving towards equality and equity. It is better that this is embraced earlier rather than later, for our own good.

While there are several programmes that have been set into motion by the Government and several NGOs in the country, there is still a wide gap that exists between those under protection and those not.

Poverty and illiteracy add to these complications with local quacks giving ineffective and downright harmful remedies to problems that women have. The empowerment of women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety.

Millennium Development Goal

The United Nations Development Programme constituted eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for ensuring equity and peace across the world. The third MDG is directly related to the empowerment of women in India. The MDGs are agreed-upon goals to reduce certain indicators of disparity across the world by the year 2015.

The third MDG is centred towards promoting gender equality and empowering women: "Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education by no later than 2015"

While India's progress in this front has been brave, there are quite a few corners that it needs to cut before it can be called as being truly revolutionary in its quest for understanding what women empowerment is. As UNDP says:-

India missed the 2005 deadline of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. However, the country has hastened progress and the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) in primary and secondary education has risen. Given current trends, India is moderately or almost nearly on track. However, as the Government of India MDG Report 2009 notes, "participation of women in employment and decision-making remains far less than that of men, and the disparity is not likely to be eliminated by 2015." Achieving GPI in tertiary education also remains a challenge. In addition, the labour market openness to women in industry and services has only marginally increased from 13-18 percent between 1990-91 and 2004-05.

Constitutional Provisions For Empowering Women In India

- Equality before law for all persons (Article-14);
- Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15(i));
- However, special provisions may be made by the state in favour of women and children Article 15(3);
- Equality of opportunity for all citizens relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state (Article 16);
- State policy to be directed to securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a); (v) equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d);
- Provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42);
- Promotion of harmony by every citizen of India and renouncement of such practices which are derogatory to the dignity of women Article 51A(e)
- 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).

Measures To Be Taken:

According to Mahatma Gandhi, "If you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate an entire family."

Our predominant patriarchal system doesn't provide enough chances for women to have higher education even if they wish. Girls should be motivated to take up higher education. Universal education for all below 14 years should be strictly implemented. Gender sensitive curricula should be framed at all stages of primary education to address sex-stereotyping menace. It is important to usher changes in the societal attitudes and perceptions with regard to the role of women in different spheres of life. The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all.

Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. Legislations such as Equal Remuneration Act, Factories Act, etc, Constitutional safeguards such as maternity relief, and other provisions should be strictly followed. Macroeconomic policies would help in this drive. Through economic empowerment women's emancipation could be realized. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in society.

Political empowerment of women is necessary for their emancipation. In recent years many steps have been taken so as to increase the participation of women in the political system. The Women's reservation policy bill is however a very sad story as it is repeatedly being scuttled in parliament. Further, there is the Panchayati Raj System, where women have been given 50% representation as a sign of political empowerment. Apart from these, strict implementation of programs and acts should be there to curb the malpractices prevalent in the society. Strict measures should be taken for the implementation of Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act 1994, which prohibits any prenatal diagnostic techniques and sex selective abortions. Dowry prohibition acts and other legislations pertaining to woman emancipation must be implemented strictly.

Conclusion:

To conclude, it might be observed that India has enacted many constitutional and legislative provisions for empowerment of women. Many development schemes especially for women have also been launched for improving their fortune. Such measures have started giving positive outcomes relating to women's problems. But the position of women in our country still leaves much to be desired. Top priority should be given in our developmental plans for improving female literacy and creating skills and capability among women for enabling them to stand on their own feet. Unless the process of development is properly engendered, it shall remain endangered.

No doubt women have the potential to achieve an equal footing with men. But, it is the social practices and male attitudes that are making an effective and invisible barrier preventing women from rising above a certain point. 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. The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grass root problem. Swami Vivekananda had said "That nation which doesn't respect women will never become great now and nor will ever in future" and in pursuit of making India a great nation, let us work and strive hard in empowering women to the maximum.

Swami Vivekananda has also said "arise away and stop not until the goal is reached". Thus our country should thus be catapulted into the horizon of empowerment of women and revel in its glory.

*"We have a long way to go, but we will get there someday".
We shall overcome.*

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