

## Women Empowerment: Challenges and Strategies for Development of Society



### Management

KEYWORDS :

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### ABSTRACT

*The present paper explores the questions central to women's right in India that is fundamentally patriarchal in nature. In India women are majorly deprived of their fundamental right to dignity. United Nation has itself declared 'Gender Equality and Women Empowerment' as one of the important goals to be achieved till 2015. The underlying assumption was that if women understood their conditions, knew their rights and learned skills traditionally denied to them, empowerment would follow. We can't neglect the importance of education in reference to women empowerment in India because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. The objective of the paper is to explore ways and means of operationalizing the term "empowerment."*

### INTRODUCTION

Empowerment allows individuals to reach their full potential, to improve their political and social participation, and to believe in their own capabilities. Women's execute multilateral role in the society as a mother, wife, daughter and service provider to the society. But the dominating masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the world. The few challenges like the dowry, female foeticide, denial of inheritance rights, sale and trafficking of girls etc. are frequently faced by the women in India. Still a little has been achieved in the area of women empowerment, but for this to happen, this sector must experience a chain of reforms. Though India could well become one of the largest economies in the world, it is being hindered due to a lack of women's participation.

Women empowerment is the cultivation of personhood in women that consists of the only concrete, everlasting ingredient of one's identity- their mind and the knowledge it possesses. By networking to build better businesses, women gain economic empowerment. In the simplest of words it is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society.

### CHALLENGES THAT VIOLATED WOMEN'S RIGHTS

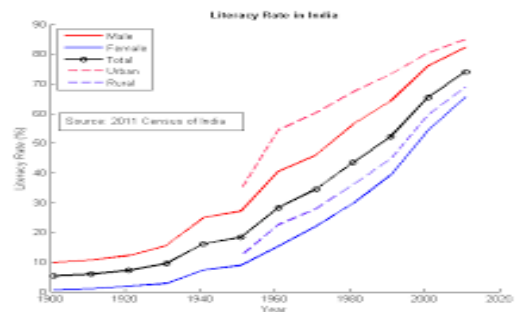
Women Empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the fore front of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. This section reports us an alarming situation of women in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India.

### EDUCATION

Education is one of the most critical areas of empowerment for women. 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. Pt. JawaharlalNehru once said that "If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered".

Women education in India has also been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as educated women can play a very important role in the development of the country. Although in the Vedic period women had

access to education in India, they had gradually lost this right. In 1971 only 22% of Indian women were literate, by the end of 2011 65.46% female were literate. The growth of female literacy rate has drop down to 9.45% as compared to 11.72 % of that of male literacy rate. Still there are 81.6% men literate in India for now.



**Fig 1: literacy rates in India**

Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Moreover educated women can also help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and growth of the population.

### SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND INEQUALITY AT WORKPLACE

Even today the issue of sexual harassment has largely been swept under the carpet in India. In India the women are discriminated against in terms payment of remuneration for their jobs. This is true for both urban as well as rural areas. Women entrepreneurs often have to deal with more complications in getting credits to start their independent business. The initiative on a discourse on sexual harassment of women at their workplace in India started with Supreme Court's Vishaka guidelines in 1997. However it was the passage of the 'Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill 2013' that helped in translating these guidelines into concrete rules that are to be implemented. The provisions have never been successfully invoked because of social taboos still associated with sexual harassment.

### DOMESTIC AND SOCIETAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The most important amendment came in the form of the intro-

duction of Section 498A in the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which deals with domestic violence against women. Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, is a criminal offence. It is a cognizable, non-bailable and compoundable offence. A major scale of violence that a woman is subjected to in India is linked to the domain of domesticity. The reasons for Domestic aggression are primarily ingrained in the patriarchal nature of the Indian society which supports such violence at home. Besides this the problem of alcoholics of husband or desire for endowments or a male child are some of the other factors liable for household brutalities in India. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data for 2003 also showed that approximately 50,000 cases of domestic violence were reported in India during the year. There has been a 67% decadal growth rate in Crime against Women (CAW) between 1993 and 2003. The domestic violence had taken the form of psychological and physical abuse against women like slapping, hitting, public humiliation, etc. Government has started a 'Protection of women from Domestic violence Act 2005'; still it has become a major problem in India. The communities and societies in India in most of the places are bound up with patriarchal normative universe from which women could hardly get true justice. The religious communities, village communities or the artificial communities like professional bodies are hardly epitome of equality between men and women. Quite often the religious communities have made the life of the women worse by forcing them to adopt conservative practices that are harmful to women.

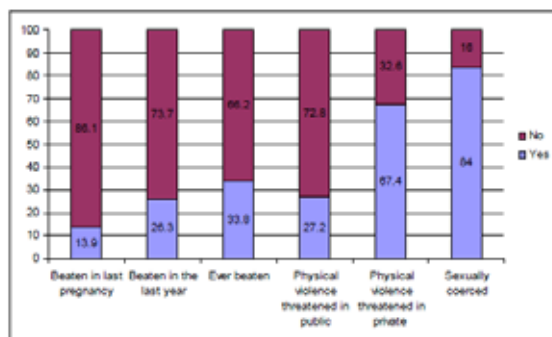


Figure 2: Prevalence of domestic violence

Women should have freedom of making decision regarding household decisions, employment, income, household assets and expenditure, fertility, sexuality, and freedom of movement (physical mobility) and their control over material and intangible resources such as property. Recent surveys have found that the prevalence of domestic violence (defined as physical beating or battering of a woman by a male intimate partner) ranges from 22 per cent to 60 per cent in developing countries. The prevalence of psychological and emotional abuse (defined as a woman being threatened with physical abuse, ridiculed, or ignored) is believed to be even higher. Some tribes in India have social norms that enable their women to be more empowered than their rural counterparts. For example, in these tribes women are more involved in decision-making, have greater freedom of movement, and are free to choose their marital partners, and can divorce and remarry without stigma.

### CHILDLESSNESS

The inability of women to have children becomes a cause to subject them to social discrimination and places restrictions on their participation in social events and celebrations. In India, over 50% of the married women in the 15-19 years age group were childless in 1981, which increased to 70% in 2001. Factors affecting likelihood of childlessness are closely associated with place of residence, religion, standard of living index, educational and economic activity status, age at marriage, body mass index (BMI), repro-

ductive morbidity status, and caste (at significance level of 5% among young women aged 15-34 years). Among older women aged 35-49 years childlessness was greater for those with schooling, economically active, married after age 18 years, having medium BMI, substance users and had reproductive morbidity in the past. Consequences of childlessness were marital disruption. Over 4% of younger childless women aged 15-34 years were divorced/ separated/ deserted as against just 1.5% among those with children. Gender based violence in which the proportion of women who experienced violence from husband/in-laws was 16-22% for older childless women compared to 13-21% for women who had children. The analyses further showed that the women who remain childless face many adverse results in the form of divorce/desertion and discrimination.

### DESERTATION OF WOMEN

Desertion of women has been an issue in fora of women activists and NGOs for the past few decades. Their concern is for deserted women belonging to the lower strata of society. A majority of NRI marriages were proposed by relatives in Punjab, same was the case for Andhra Pradesh. About 50% parents made an enquiry about the groom, his employment and other status before marriage. They also gave gold jewelry, household articles, furniture, vehicles, landed property and a lump sum amount of cash and gifts to family members. Nearly 90% respondents stated that after marriage, within days to months, their in-laws started demanding more dowry and harassed the girls. It was recommended that registration of FIRs should be made mandatory in cases of desertion. It should also be ensured that no name of any accused person is deleted from the FIR. The Indian Government should enter into a bilateral agreement with countries having a large Indian diaspora to take criminal action against offenders on the basis of reciprocity, especially Section 44A of CrPC and Section 3 of Maintenance Orders Enforcement Act of 1921. Rehabilitation and support services should be provided to deserted women such as shelter homes, legal aid, vocational/ skill training, etc. Counselling centres in police stations should provide support to the victims.

### STRATEGIES TO INCORPORATE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

The women in India are positioned at a receiving end primarily because they have remained ignorant of their fundamental civil and constitutional rights. In such a situation often a majority of them are forced to accept the traditional practices that are detrimental for both their and their children's development. Although women have acquired a level of financial and political autonomy and consciousness about their rights, yet they experience helplessness in bringing about basic changes for eliminating gender inequalities from the society.

The NATIONAL MISSION FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN (NMEW) was launched by the Government of India (GOI) on International Women's Day in 2010 with a view to empower women socially, economically and educationally. The Mission aims to achieve empowerment of women on all these fronts by securing convergence of schemes/programmes of different Ministries/Departments of Government of India as well as State Governments. The Mission utilises existing structural arrangements of participating Ministries wherever available and partners with Panchayati Raj Institution (PRIs) in implementation of activities. In light with its mandate, the Mission has been named Mission Purna Shakti, implying a vision for holistic empowerment of women.

**Focus areas of the Mission**

- Access to health, drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities for women
- Coverage of all girls especially those belonging to vulnerable groups in schools from primary to class 12
- Higher and Professional education for girls/women
- Skill development, Micro credit, Vocational Training, Entrepreneurship, SHG development
- Gender sensitization and dissemination of information
- Taking steps to prevent crime against women and taking steps for a safe environment for women

The Government has been undertaking several programmes to improve the socio-economic situation of women/ girls in India. For example in Himachal Pradesh, 10 specific beneficiaries' schemes were taken up. These were 1. Scheme of Widow Pension, 2. Balika Samridhi Yojana, 3. Vocational Training for Destitute Girls/ Women, 4. Working Women's Hostels, 5. ICDS, 6. Old Age Pension, 7. Grant for Construction of House (SC/ ST), 8. Assistance to Women Victims of Atrocities (SC/ ST), 9. Incentive for Inter-Caste Marriages, and 10. Hostels for SC/ ST Girls. 47.13% women were engaged in agriculture, 4.19% were self employed, 1.77% were in service and 34.12% were housewives. 240 respondents benefited under the Widow Pension Scheme. Under Balika Samridhi Yojana there were 116 beneficiaries, Under the Scheme of Stipend to SC/ ST Girls for Technical Education in ITI, the daughters of 163 respondents were benefiting. The problems faced by beneficiaries at different levels were 'completion of formalities at different levels' (5.70%), and distance of programme implementing agency from home (61%). It was suggested that the inbuilt difficulties in implementing different schemes for women should be reduced. Financial norms should be revised to enhance the amount of assistance extended to women beneficiaries. Provisions should be made for a single window system to reach the benefits, and mainstreaming of gender perspective should be introduced in different schemes.

**GENDER INEQUALITY SOLUTIONS**

The National Policy for Women's Empowerment mandates gender audits as an important method of monitoring women's empowerment. Decisions about property, loans, number of children were taken by men, whereas women were confined to making decisions about rearing of children. 63% of the women were not involved in decision making in the family. Women also reported facing violence in the initial stages of marriage and were harassed by in-laws on the issue of having girl children. Participation of women in elections was nil and it was seen that all contestants to the Lok Sabha elections were males. There is a need to sensitize various government agencies in the ways of handling gender differences. Professional empowerment should go beyond administrative and technical positions and should include participation in cooperatives and self help groups. Bringing about women's ownership or control over assets is extremely important.

**EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION**

Globalization involves economic internationalization leading to inter-linkages of independent national economies, and the electronic media also has acquired worldwide access. The objective of the study was to enable Ministry of Women and Child Development and particularly National Commission for Women to evolve strategies to counter the cultural invasion through television and to discourage the mindless westernization of Indian women and girls, men and boys. According to a recent surveying the age group 10-20 years 18.24%, and in 21-40 years age group 17.30%

respondents showed more interest in watching advertisements featuring women; 41.11% respondents preferred women models; and 37.15% preferred girls for advertising various products. About 39.83% females described the role of T.V. as positive, 19.62% viewers picked negative messages, 5.62% females felt that T.V. characters provided models to defiant teenagers. On the choice of women as models, difference between the opinion of male and female respondents was 18.85% and 22.26% respectively, which was not glaring. Popular television should be brought into the school curriculum, both to acknowledge children's out of school activities, and to explore their environment in the learning process. The underlying objective is to help children read and interpret the visual text of advertisements and cartoons, and to train them as discriminating viewers of programmes for children. Integration of new technologies with Indigenous models of knowledge is extremely relevant. Guidelines for media owners, makers of advertisements having images of women and children, and producers of TV programmes

**Should be formulated after intensive discussions**

The state and society must provide instantaneous support to victim-survivors to ensure that the victims can carry on with their daily life. In dealing with the problem of violence against women innovative levels of coordination and integration must be built up between government, civil society and the family. The state occupies a central position in initiating positive policies to end discrimination against women. In India it was state which initiated the first reform measure when after lot of debate it reformed the Hindu Succession Act in 1956 in which women were given equal right to inheritance. Continuous extensive unconditional financial as well as emotional assistance must be provided to the women by both the formal set-up of the state like legal system, police, medical and health care sectors etc, as well as from the informal networks such as family, friends, fellow citizens, and local community groups. Violence against women can be curtailed only when cultural norms and attitudes towards the women can be changed for which change should be made in the school curriculum. Curriculum that educates the students at the school, college and university level on issues like human rights and gender issues should be included in their study material. "Curriculum reform that works towards eliminating the gender stereotyping in schools (teaching about women's contributions in history class, eliminating sex stereotypes in textbooks, promoting girls participation in sports) are important steps in achieving gender equality

**EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY**

Another area in which women's equality has shown a major improvement as a result of adult literacy programs is the area of enrolment of boys and girls in schools. As a result of higher participation of women in literacy campaigns, the gender gap in literacy levels is gradually getting reduced. Even more significant is the fact that disparity in enrolment of boys and girls in neo-literate households is much lowered compared to the non-literate households.

**CONCLUSION**

According to the Country Report of the Government of India, "Empowerment means moving from a weak position to execute a power." Education of women in the education of women is the most powerful tool of change of position in society. Education also brings a reduction in inequalities and functions as a means of improving their status within the family. The Millennium Development Goal on gender equality and women's empowerment can be real-

ised in India only when the traditional practices like female infanticide, dowry deaths, and honour killings by khap panchayats, domestic violence, or sexual abuse is eliminated. Improving security of women in offices, providing good community child care centres and nurseries, awareness about legal rights, provision of good quality food for school lunch, health care facilities at school for children, and employment after break are the other measures suggested to reduce stress among working women. It is only then that gender equality and women empowerment can become a reality.