



## Study of Issues Influencing Women Empowerment in India

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**ABSTRACT**

Empowerment of women means their development as a whole with power or capacity to regulate their lives in social, economical and political terms and ultimately delights equality with men. In India most of the women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society irrespective of their place (rural/urban). Women are found to be economically poor, less literate than men, less access to healthcare, workplace harassment, domestic violence and so on. Therefore, they require empowerment to secure their purity and dignity. There are various factors influencing the empowerment of women such as education and skill development, legal literacy, internet and other multimedia services, Govt. policies and their awareness, political participation, crime against women and their security, gender discrimination, family factors, religion, casts and other constraints in entrepreneurship activity for women etc. Present paper highlights the need of women empowerment, study of various factors affecting it and suggestions for development of future programs of women empowerment.

**KEYWORDS**

Empowerment; English language; Gender discrimination; Women; Welfare scheme.

### Introduction

Empowerment of women means not merely economic uplifting but their development as a whole with power or capacity to regulate their lives in social, economical and political terms so that have freedom to choose their work or job, realizing their full potential in society, shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations and ultimately feels the status of equality with men as granted by constitutional and legal provision. But in India most of the women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society irrespective of their place (rural/urban). Women are found to be economically poor, less literate than men, less access to healthcare, workplace harassment, domestic violence and so on. Therefore, they require empowerment to secure their purity and dignity. Women constitute almost 50% of the population of our country, their empowerment will turn ourselves winners in the current competitive world and make India a developed country. Thus, women's empowerment is important for the development of their self, the family, community and the nation. Therefore, it should be a major concern of themselves initiative, family support and Government to bring women into the mainstream of development process by empowering them. There are various factors influencing the empowerment of women which is the main focus of the present paper, some of these includes such as:

#### 1. Education, professional / technical / vocational qualification:

Women's education is of much importance in the development of our country, we can never compete with the developed nations without it. At present in India, according to the 2011 Census, the national male literacy rate is 82.14% while female literacy rate is 65.46% though in Kerala and Mizoram it is 92% and 89.4%, respectively to a good position [1]. But, compared to 50.4 per cent of men only 26.6 per cent women above 25 years received a secondary education, which is far behind as compare to developed countries like in US secondary education to 94.7 per cent women which is a little higher than for men (94.3%) in China 54.8 per cent of women received secondary education compared to 70.4 per cent for men [2]. Education makes the individual conscious, which helps them to perceive, interpret, criticize and finally transform their social position and surroundings. It helps in development of skills and self confidence which are necessary to shape life better [3]. Education provides more opportunities to get employment which in turn enhances economic empowerment to women. UNESCO conference in 1962 underlined the impor-

tance of the feminine access to technical and vocational education for their overall uplifting [4]. Thus, women today do not need just a basic education but skills oriented professional education also so that they can become economically independent and fills the gender equality in their surroundings.

#### 2. Communication skill particularly English language:

Communication skill is significant as it not only helps in academic but also in personal's professional life after formal education. With the globalization spread of English occurs around the world as language of communication. At present the role and status of English is that it is the language of social context, political, socio-cultural, business, education, industries, media, library and communication across borders etc. It is also a crucial determinant for university entrance and possession of well paid jobs in the government and private sector. Thus, with the changing times the importance of English language is growing in all walks of life [5]. Therefore, development of communication skill particularly of English language among women is the need of hour for their empowerment.

#### 3. Legal literacy:

Though various policies and laws relating to women's rights to advance gender equality in social, economic, and political areas have been developed in the past few decades and various are still in pipelines but there is a lack in awareness of all these among most of the women and less implementations also. Thus, it is necessary to makes women aware of their legal and personal rights and makes them fight for their rights which in turn will lead to safeguarding her constitutional rights. Therefore, legal literacy should be a part of their education.

#### 4. Knowledge of internet and other multimedia services:

Multimedia broadly covers the set of activities that facilitates capturing, storage, processing, transmission and display of information by electronic means. Through such technologies women may remains up to date to latest information related to jobs, government policies, legal rights etc. They remains in contacts with each other via social networking such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp etc. and can share information and their experiences. Besides such information this technology also helps them in security as well as generates more confidence among them.

#### 5. Govt. policies /schemes and their awareness:

The National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) named as Mission Purna Shakti was launched by the Govern-

ment of India on International Women's Day in 2010 with the aim to strengthen overall development of women i.e. assured equal access of women to health care, quality education, participation and decision making in Social, Political and Economical life of the nation. It has the mandate to strengthen the inter-sector convergence; facilitate the process of coordinating all the women's welfare and socio-economic development programmes across ministries and departments through a single window service. The National Resource Centre for Women has been set up which acts as a central repository of knowledge, information, research and data on all gender related issues and is the main body servicing the National and State Mission Authority [2]. Various Schemes have been launched for the empowerment of women such as Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, Mahila Samridhi Yojana, Self help groups at Panchayat level etc. Recently introduced national and states schemes particularly of Haryana include: Apni Beti Apna Dhan; Awards for Rural Adolescent Girls; Ch. Devi Lal. Rashtriya Uttan Aivam Parivar Kalyan Yojna "Devi Rupak"; Ladli Scheme; Ladli Social Security Allowance Scheme. Under National 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' Programme, scheme 'Sukanya Samridhi Account' was launched on January 22, 2015 and three other schemes were launched in Haryana on the occasion of International Woman's Day on March 8, 2015: Aapki Beti Hamari Beti, Haryana Kanya Kosh and Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Programme [6]. These schemes give assistance in the form of: subsidy on the loans, education, training, financial assistance/ cash, scholarship, nutrition, self employment and others much more etc. and aim to promote women development and empowerment, gender equality and gender justice of women, to improve child sex ratio, to raise the age of marriage of girls, to provide them economic empowerment and to provide much required **State Intervention** at the time of birth of girl child.

Other national level initiatives taken for empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized groups and women in difficult circumstances including and other schemes such as: Schemes of National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation; Integrated Child Development Scheme; National Rural Health Mission; Janani Suraksha Yojana; Integrated Child Protection Scheme; Swadhar—A scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances; Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS); Antyodaya Anna Yojna (AAY); Ujjawala—A Scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Reintegration; Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY); Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan; Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)—A Conditional Maternity Benefit Scheme; Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)—Sabla; Scheme for Working Women Hostel; STEP (Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women); Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana; Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY); Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA); Various schemes of MHRD, DST, CSIR, DBT etc. funding agencies for higher studies and research specially derived for women.

Besides such schemes development, also there is need of organization of awareness programmes about them by different ways for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights and their various welfare schemes. In this regard along with Government agencies NGO's may play an important role in women empowerment by organizing seminars, conferences and workshops for the awakening of the masses.

#### 6. Role of mass media:

Mass media can play an important role in changing the attitude of men towards women. It can effectively project and propagate women's empowerment related issues. Media may exert positive or negative effects on attitude of men towards women therefore proper control check should be on negative media which shows women as physical matter of use.

#### 7. Political participation of women:

Though reservations of seats for women at different level of political position have been made and women have reached

the position of President, Prime Minister, Speaker, and Leader of opposition in politics of India and have proved their worth [7]. But the percentages of women in decision-making positions always remained low and are not involved in policy making in Indian democracy in proportion to their numerical strength. According to a survey conducted in 2008 yielded that women made up close to 50% of all the village councils across the India [8]. Thus at the Panchayat level particularly though women are elected and their number has certainly increased due to reservation of seats or any way but in most cases decision-making power still remains in the hands of their husband or other family members. Thus there is a gap between the formal idea of women's participation and their meaningful use of power and thus needs to be review their actual participation.

#### 8. Crime against women and their security:

The multiple forms of violence / crime occurs against women from household to the community level that even starts at the womb level by female feticide and discrimination of girl children in access to health, nutrition, and education [9]. From remote rural areas to urban metro cities women and girls remains at high risk of gender-based violence/ crime. Such crime is high in big cities even more securities and police remains there, it is an important impediment in women empowerment as because of this females are not so easily allowed to move alone to cities for higher studies and job careers [9].

#### 9. Gender discrimination:

Though gender discrimination reflects in all spheres of feminine life from food and nutrition, economic - land and assets holding, education, health services etc. but it is of more concerns in their security, decision-making or action taking power and mobility, the main indicators of women's empowerment. In some cases it reached to such a level that once a time when even women are not allowed to worship in some Temples and Dargaha eg. Shani-Shignapur temple and Haji Ali Dargah at Mumbai [10, 11].

#### 10. Family factors:

These are highly significant factors affecting women's empowerment as discrimination starts from family level in parallel to community / social level. Some important factors among these include:

Type and size of family i.e. single/ small or joint/large family, generally in single or small families women take part in decision making as compare to large joint families where decision making power remains in the hands of senior male members. On the other hand large families' women have an advantage that by sharing housekeeping work/ responsibilities they may spare time for enhancement of their skill, knowledge and economic independence, if allowed.

Economic and literacy background of family, as women's empowerment is significantly influenced by education which in turn is greatly influenced by family incomes and literacy background. No doubt an economic but literate condition of family supports more the women in development of their economic independence and other indicators of empowerment. The fact for this situation is that the literate family members understand the importance of women's empowerment more and can provide good education to their child with more exposure to English as they are aware of the importance of English also and therefore guide them at home to perform better as well as provide better resources for their overall development.

#### 11. Other factors affecting women's empowerment:

These includes religion and casts – affects in several ways as early age marriage, multiple marriage, restriction in education and job, purdah partha etc.; geographical location (urban/rural) among these generally urban women remains on better side of their empowerment as compare to rural women the main fact behind this is educational and external resource facilities present in urban areas; other constraints in entrepreneurship activity for women such as child care facilities, over

burdened home and work load, insufficient loan / financial support, doubt on women capability etc.

### Suggestions

To achieve the goals of women empowerment development some of the suggestions are recommended on the basis of factors studied / discussed above, these includes:

1. Skills oriented professional education can be used as a tool for empowerment of women.
2. Development of communication skill particularly of English language is the need of hour for their empowerment so must be included in educational curriculum.
3. To makes them aware of their legal and personal rights, legal literacy should be a part of their education.
4. Development and constant updating of websites for maximum spread and utilization of information related to jobs, government policies, legal rights etc.
5. Development of knowledge of internet and use of other multimedia services particularly among rural women and making availability of low cost internet at remote areas particularly.
6. Development of mobile apps for information sharing and security as well as fast action should be taken on any emergencies for betterment and safety of women.
7. Formulation of various schemes of women welfare and their implementation with all sincerity and honesty.
8. Awareness program should be arranged particularly in villages on regular basis, for the awakening of the masses.
9. Development of large number of secure girls hostel /PG, for girl students and working women in cities along with secure transportation facilities.
10. Development and running of government hospitals with advanced facilities for women health problems particularly at remote areas/ villages.
11. Easy access or route to finance/loan should be provided for women entrepreneurships development.
12. Development of women police stations at every location (urban/rural) and availability of lady government attorney in courts.
13. Strict prevention of early age marriage.
14. Creation of laws to regulate minimum wage, working hours, and other measures such as life and health insurance etc. particularly for domestic / construction workers mostly women.
15. Improving access to sanitation, drinking water, fuel, wood and fodder for women.
16. Introduction of more child care centers (creche facilities), maternal and child care leave, flexi hours are some of the ways by which can encouraged the women to face the challenges of the job market, like countries Singapore and Malaysia have made.

In conclusion, paper highlights the women empowerment, its need, study of various factors affecting it and some possible suggestions that will be of immense help for government and non-government policy makers to plan the future programs of women empowerment most effectively.

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