



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Commerce**

**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA**

**KEY WORDS:** Women empowerment, Education, Health, Policy implications.

**Mitali Halder**

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, Srikrishna College, Bagula, Nadia-741502

**ABSTRACT**

Women empowerment is an important tool to bring about the required social changes in the society and the mindset of the people. To empower any woman of a society it is pertinent to first make her aware of her rights and correct role. The topic under research is the direct fallout of the ill-treatment meted out to women in India and the prevalent social situations adverse to women. It is a well acknowledged fact that the media has played a proactive role in highlighting women's problems and thereby compelling the policy makers to devise ways and means for women development. This research should create awareness and prompt the present generation to use media positively in working towards the cause of women empowerment and girl child I am sure that this will ensure that women are not treated merely as an object to increase the sales of newspapers by focusing upon glamour and violence concerning women.

**INTRODUCTION**

Women Empowerment is a significant topic of discussion, mainly in underdeveloped and developing nations. They have lately realised that the development that they aspire cannot be achieved unless we achieve gender equality by the empowering their women. The economic empowerment of women refers to their right to control the economic decisions, income, assets and other equivalents; improving their economic as well as social status.

**What is Women Empowerment?**

Women Empowerment means promoting women in their social and economic development, providing them equal opportunities of employment, education, economic development and allowing them to socialize; the freedoms and rights that were denied before. It is a process which empowers women to know that they too can achieve their aspirations as the men of the society and help them do that.

**Need of Women's Empowerment in India**

The status of Indian women has declined from ancient period to medieval period. Though in modern era Indian women have held significant political and administrative posts; still, on the contrary there is a majority of rural women who are confined to their homes and don't have access to even basic health amenities and education.

The female literacy rate in India lags behind the male literacy rate by a significant ration. Literacy rate for men in India is 81.3% and that of women is 60.6%. Many Indian girls don't have access to the school and even if they do, they drop out during early years. Only 29% of Indian young women have completed ten or more years of education.

Low education rate among women have kept them away from main workforce, resulting in their social and economical deterioration. Women in urban areas are well employed than their village counterparts; nearly 30% employees in the Indian software industry constitute women. On the contrary, nearly 90% of rural women are employed as daily wage labours, mainly in agriculture and allied sectors.

Another factor which brings in the need for woman empowerment in India is pay disparity. Women in India are not being paid equivalent to their male counterparts in various sectors. According to a study, women in India with same years of experience and qualification are paid 20% less than their male counter parts having same credentials.

As she is just few days away from entering into new year 2019, India is filled with hope and aspirations as never before and

she is about to win back her tag of world's fastest growing economy. We will definitely achieve it soon, but could only maintain it, if we remove the hurdles of gender inequality; providing equal opportunities of employment, development and wages to our men and women alike.

**Barriers to Women Empowerment in India**

Indian society is a complex society with varied customs, rituals, beliefs and traditions. Sometimes these age old beliefs and customs constitute the most significant barriers to the empowerment of women in India. Few of the significant barriers to the women empowerment in India are explained below-

**1) Societal Norms**

Many societies in India restrict women from leaving the house, given to their orthodox belief and age old traditions. Women in such societies are not allowed to go outside either for education or for employment and are forced to live an isolated and dejected life. Women living under such conditions become accustomed to being inferior to men and are unable to change their present social and economical state.

**2) Workplace Sexual Harassment**

Workplace sexual harassment is the most significant barrier to women empowerment in India. Private sectors like hospitality industry, software industry, educational institutions, and hospitals are some of the worst affected. It is a manifestation of deep rooted male supremacy in the society. There had been a steep rise of about 170% in the workplace sexual harassment of women in India in the past couple of decades.

**3) Gender discrimination**

Majority of women in India still face gender discrimination at work place as well as in the society. Many society don't allow the women to go out for employment or education. They are not allowed to take independent decisions either for work or for family, and are treated inferior to men. Such discrimination of the women leads to their socio economic decline and hugely contradicts "Women Empowerment".

**4) Pay disparity**

Women in India are paid less than their male counterparts. The situation is worst in unorganised sectors where women are employed as daily wage labours. Women working for the same number of hours and doing the same work are paid less than the men, which implies unequal powers between men and women. Even the women who are employed in organised sectors are paid less than their male counter parts having

equivalent qualification and experience.

**5) Illiteracy**

Female illiteracy and their high dropout rate is one of the major obstacles to the empowerment of women in India. In urban India girls are at par with boys in terms of education but they significantly lag behind in rural areas. The effective literacy rate of women is 64.6% while that of the men is 80.9%. Lot of Indian girls who join school, dropout in the initial years without having passed even 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

**6) Child Marriage**

Though, India has successfully reduced child marriages in the past few decades, through a number of laws and initiatives taken by the government; still a report in early 2018 by the UNICEF (United Nations Children Emergency Fund) states that nearly 1.5 Million girls in India get married before they turn 18. Early marriage reduces the growth prospects of girls who soon be moving onto adulthood.

**7) Crimes against Women**

Indian women have been subjected to domestic violence and other crime such as –dowry, honour killing, trafficking etc. It is strange that the women in urban areas are more prone to criminal assault than the women in rural areas. Even working women in big cities avoid using public transport in late hours, fearing their modesty and life. Women empowerment can only be achieved in true sense if we ensure safety of our women, providing them the liberty to roam free and without fear as the men in the society do.

**8) Female Infanticide**

Female infanticide or sex selective abortion is also one of the major obstacles to women empowerment in India. Female infanticide means identifying the gender of the fetus and aborting it when it is revealed to be a female; often without the mother's consent. Female infanticide has led to a high male female sex ratio in the states of Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir. Our claims on woman empowerment will not be substantiated unless we eradicate female infanticide or sex selective abortion.

**Government's Role in Woman Empowerment in India**

The government of India has implemented many programs for the empowerment of women. Many of these programs are for providing employment, education, health accessible to the masses. These programs have been especially incorporated keeping in mind the needs and conditions of Indian women, to ensure their participation. Some of these programs are- MNREGA ( Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme), Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan, Janani Suraksh Yojana ( reduce maternal mortality) etc.

The Ministry of women and child Development, Government of India has implemented various new schemes specifically aimed at the empowerment of Indian women. Some of those significant schemes are given below-

**1)Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme**

The scheme of focuses on eradicating female infanticide and also on the education of girl child. It aims for changing the mindset of people towards a girl, by providing financial support and also by strict enforcement of laws and acts.

**2) Women Helpline Scheme**

This scheme aims for providing 24 hours emergency support help line for women who are subjected to any kind of violence or crime. The scheme provides a universal emergency number -181 across the country for women in distress. The number also provides information on women related schemes in the country.

**3) Ujjawala Scheme**

A scheme aiming at the rescue of women affected by

trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation and their rehabilitation and welfare.

**4)Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)**

The STEP scheme aims at imparting skills to women, making them employable as well as to become self -employed. Various sectors like agriculture, horticulture, handloom, tailoring and fisheries etc. are covered under the scheme.

**5)Mahila Shakti Kendras**

The scheme focuses on empowering rural women through community participation. Community volunteers like students, professional etc. will teach the rural women about their rights and welfare schemes.

**6)Reservation for Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and for Lok Sabha**

In 2009 the Union Cabinet of the Government of India instituted 50% reservation for the women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. It is aimed mainly at improving the social status of women in rural India. The states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and Andhra Pradesh among various others have majority of women as elected head of gram panchayats. The Women's Bill in April 2010, which gives 33.3% reservation for women in all levels of Indian politics, took 14 years after its introduction to finally pass by the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of parliament). It is yet to be passed by the Lok Sabha (the lower house of parliament). The reservation bill will ensure 181 out of the 543 seats at the Parliament level, and 1370 seats out of the 4109 seats at the State Assembly level. This is a historic move in the Indian political landscape, as currently women occupy less than 10% of seats in the national Parliament.

**7)The Internet as a tool of empowerment**

The growing access of the web in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has allowed women to empower themselves by using various tools on the Internet. With the easy accessibility and affordability of e-learning, women can now study from the comfort of their homes.

**CONCLUSION**

As India is progressive to become world's fastest growing economy in near future, it must also focus on 'Women Empowerment'. We must understand that women empowerment is a process which hopes to bring gender equality and a balanced economy. Indian women had been President, Prime ministers, civil servants, doctors, lawyers etc., but still a good majority of them needs help and support. Support to be educated, to do what they want to do, to travel safe, to work safe and to be independent; making their own decisions. The way to the socio-economic development of India goes through the socio-economic development of her women folk.

**REFERENCES**

- (1) National Commission on Population: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.
- (2) Oxfam (Forthcoming), "Women's Economic Empowerment Conceptual Framework".
- (3) UNESCO.2014. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/2014: Teaching and Learning, Paris, UNESCO.
- (4) UNDP. 2013. Human Development Report. The Rise of the South. Human Progress in a Diverse World; New York, UNDP.
- (5) Raighatta, C.(2016, April 23).Times of India.
- (6) Singh,N.(2015, Dec.9).Times of India.
- (7) <https://www.iaspaper.net/women-empowerment-in-india/dt22Nov'16>
- (8) <http://www.indiacelebrating.com/essay/social-issues/women-empowerment/dt25Nov'16>