

A Study on Concerns and Challenges of Women Empowerment in India

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the status of Women Empowerment in India and highlights the Concerns and Challenges of Women Empowerment. Women Empowerment is an issue of immense significance of 21st century. We witness how women become victimized by various social evils in day to day life. Practically, Women Empowerment is still an illusion of reality. Women Empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to make strategic life choices by the widespread resources. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Women Empowerment is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. The study is based on ground realities and secondary sources. The study reveals that women of India are relatively disempowered and enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by Government. It is found that gender sensitization is still deficient in our society. The study concludes by an observation that Women Empowerment is possible only through Education, Employment and Change in Social Structure.

Key Words: *Women Empowerment, Socio-Economic Status, Policy implications, Education, Health, Crimes against women.*

1. Introduction

Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Women Empowerment in particular, is a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources material, human & intellectual like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money – access to money & control over decision-making in the home, community, society & nation and to gain power.

Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but in India female population is

comparatively lower than males. In Western countries, women have got equal status and right with men in all walks of life. India is a complex country where through centuries developed various types of customs, traditions and practices. On one hand females are worshiped as goddesses but on the other hand gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To understand women in India and need for Women Empowerment.
2. Evaluating Awareness of Women Empowerment in India
3. Observing factors influencing the Economic Empowerment of Women
4. To study the Government Schemes for Women Empowerment.
5. To identify the challenges in the Path of Women Empowerment.
6. To discover constructive suggestions in the light of Findings.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Current status of Women in India

Being equal to their male counterparts is still a far cry for Indian women. Women are discriminated from a very young age and marginalized at every level of society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education and also reproductive healthcare. Women in India have come a long way from the days of being worshipped as Goddesses to being molested and harassed - gruesome domestic violence cases, acid attacks and rapes. A very few were allowed into the public space, which she was expected to manage on her own, while maintaining her domestic role as a homemaker.

India ranks 148 globally in terms of representation of women in executive government and parliament, according to a report by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN. Women in Politics 2017 map showed that women make up only 11.8% (64 MPs) of the 542 member Lok Sabha and 11% (27) of the 245 member Rajya Sabha. In terms of ministers, India ranks 88 with only 5 ministers (18.5%) in the cabinet. The sex ratio of women at present is slightly better, standing at 945 females per 1000 males. The judiciary continues to be a male bastion with women comprising less than 28% of the current strength of 17,160 judges across all courts in the country. In the Supreme Court, there is just 1 among 25 judges is a woman (4%). In all High Courts out of 692, there are only 70 judges (10%). Reservation for women judges range from 5% to 35%; not all states have provided quota in the subordinate courts. No quota in SC and HC as well.

An article published in Hindustan Times in Feb 2017 reveals how much control do Indian women have over different aspects of their lives. Only 65% of Indian women are literate, 5% have control over choosing their husband, while 79.8% of women needed permission to visit a health centre.

3.2 Crime Against Women

Crime against women are rising day by day. Alarming statistics of Crime Records Bureau is presented in Table 1.

A total of 3,27,394 cases of crime against women (both under various sections of of IPC and SSL) were reported in the country during the year 2015.

Table No.1: Crime Head-wise Cases Registered against Women during 2011-2015 and Percentage variation in 2015 over 2014

S. No.	Crime Head	Year					Percentage variation in 2015 over 2014
		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
1	Rape	24206	24923	33707	36735	34651	-5.7
2	Attempt to Committ Rape	-	-	-	4232	4434	4.8
3	Kidnapping & Abduction of Women	35565	38262	51881	57311	59277	3.4
4	Dowry Deaths	8618	8233	8083	8455	7634	-9.7
5	Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her/their Modesty	42968	45351	70739	82235	82422	0.2
6	Insult to the Modesty of Women	8570	9173	12589	9735	8685	-10.8
7	Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives	99135	1,06,527	1,18,866	1,22,877	1,13,403	-7.7
8	Importation of Girl from Foreign Country	80	59	31	13	6	-53.8
9	Abetment of Suicide of Women	-	-	-	3734	4060	8.7
A	Total IPC Crime against Women	2,19,142	2,32,528	2,95,896	3,25,327	3,14,575	-3.3
10	Commission of Sati Prevention Act	0	0	0	0	0	0
11	Indecent Representation of Women (P) Act	453	141	362	47	40	-14.9
12	The Dowry Prohibition Act	6619	9038	10709	10050	9894	-1.5
13	Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act	-	-	-	426	461	8.2
14	Immortal Traffic (Preventiion Act)	2436	2563	2579	2070#	2424	17.1
B	Total SLL Crime against Women	9508	11742	13650	12593	12819	1.8
	Total (A+B)	2,28,650	2,44,270	3,09,546	3,37,922	3,27,394	-3.1

Source : Crime in India 2015

Unfortunately, majority of crimes against women remains unregistered, even in 2017. As per the latest data from National Crime Records Bureau, the IPC crimes committed against women in total IPC crimes rose from 9.4% in the year 2011 to 10.7% during the year 2015 as shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Proportion of Crime Against Women (IPC) towards total IPC Crimes

S. No.	Year	Total IPC Crimes	Crime Against Women (IPC Cases)	Percentage to Total IPC Crimes
1	2011	23,25,575	2,19,142	9.4%
2	2012	27,87,188	2,44,270	10.2%
3	2013	26,47,722	2,95,896	11.2%
4	2014*	28,51,563	3,25,327	11.4%
5	2015*	29,49,400	3,14,575	10.7%

** Number of crime heads have also increased from 11 to 14 in 2014 & 2015 in the revised proforma.

3.3 Constitutional Provisions For Empowering Women in India

“I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved – Dr. B.R. Ambedkar”

There are adequate Provisions for Women’s Right in the Constitution of India as follows :

Article 14 –Guarantees that the State shall not deny Equality before the law and equal protection of the laws.

Article 15 – Prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the ground of sex.

Article 15(3) –Enables affirmative discrimination in favor of women.

Article 16 – Provides for equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.

Article 39 (a) (d) –Enjoins the state to provide equal means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work.

Article 42 –Enjoins upon the state to make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

Article 46 – The state shall promote with special care, the educational and economic interests of weaker sections of people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

Article 47 –Directs the state to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties.

Article 51A (e) – Imposes a Fundamental duty on every citizen to renounce the practice derogatory to the dignity of women.

Article 243D (3), 243T (3), 243T (4)– Provides for allocation of seats reserved in a Panchayati Raj / Municipality / Offices of Chairperson.

3.4 Government Schemes For Women Empowerment

Government has introduced various schemes for the holistic development of women i.e. promoting social & economic empowerment of women through cross cutting policies and programs, mainstreaming gender concerns, creating awareness about their rights and facilitating institutional and legislative support for enabling them to develop to their full potential and to ensure care and protection. Some of these are as follows :

1. Rastriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) 1993
2. Swayam Sidha Scheme (IWEP) 2001 – (by merging MahilaSamridhiYojana 1992 and

- recasting Indira MahilaYojana (IMY launched in 1995-96)
3. Women Entrepreneur Development (ILO-WED) programmemid 2000
4. MahilaSamakhya 1988 –currently active in 12000 villages
5. Swayamsidha 2001 – Self Help Groups
6. Swa Shakti Project around 2001 – earlier known as the Rural women’s development and empowerment project in 1999
7. BalikaSamridhiYojana 1997
8. Support to Training and Employment Program for Women (STEP) – 1986-1987
9. Swalamban 2010-11 – replaced with Atal Pension Yojana
10. Working Women Hostels – amended in June 2015
11. Swadhar2001-02 – A Scheme for Women in difficult circumstances
12. National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW) 2011-12 – for protection and development of women
13. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) 1975
14. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls (RGSEAG) – SABLA 2010
15. Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) - 2009-2010
16. DhanalakshmiScheme – 2008
17. Short Stay Homes
18. Ujjawala 2007 (A comprehensive scheme for prevention of trafficking and rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration of victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation)
19. Scheme for Gender Budgeting (XI Plan)
20. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) – 1980
21. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) – 1979
22. Prime Minister’s RojgarYojana (PMRY) – 1993
23. Women’s Development Corporation Scheme (WDCS)
24. Working Women’s Forum –1978
25. Indira Mahila Kendra – 1995
26. MahilaSamridhiYojana under NBCFDC – 1992
27. Khadi and Village Industries Commission – 2008
28. Indira PriyadarshiniYojana– 1989
29. SBI’s Sree Shakti Scheme
30. SIDBI’s MahilaUdyam Nidhi MahilaVikas Nidhi
31. NGO’s Credit Schemes
32. National Banks for Agriculture and Rural Development’s Schemes
33. BetiBachaoBetiPadhao Scheme (BBBP) – Jan 22, 2015
34. One Stop Centre Scheme – August 2016
35. Women Helpline Scheme – 01-04-2015
36. Nari Shakti Puruskar – 2016

37. Mahila Police Volunteers – 2016-17
38. Mahila E-Haat–7Mar 2006
39. Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY) – 1st Nov 1991

4. Challenges

There are various difficulties faced by Women in our society in past days and still today up to some extent. Family structure and social norms in developing countries like India, demonstrates and solidify the subordinate status of women. One of the norm is constant preference for a son over the birth of a girl child which is present in almost all societies and communities. The society is more biased in favor of male child.

There are several challenges that are hampering the issues of women's right in India as follows:

- Gender Discrimination
- Female infanticide
- Lack of Education
- Financial Constraint
- Access to Employment
- Family Responsibility
- Almost Nil Decision Making Power
- Restricted Freedom of Movement :
- Social Status
- Absence of ambition for the achievement
- Marriage in same case and child marriage (still exist)
- Dowry / Domestic Violence
- Atrocities on Women (Killed, raped, kicked, subdued, humiliated almost daily)

5. Suggestions

1. The bias against daughter can only end if women's education is accompanied by social and economic development.
2. More Awareness Programmes need to be organised to create awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections.
3. Strict implementation of the constitutional provisions which have been framed to protect, safeguard and promotes the interests of women.
4. Women should be allowed to work with enough security and support to work. They should be paid proper wages to elevate their status in the society

6. Conclusion

Thus the scenario of women empowerment seems to be comparatively poor in the field of income, employment, social and education front. 50% participation of women is essential for the overall development. Government must ensure that

women should be inducting in the mainstream of development to enable them to build their identity. "When women move forward the family moves, the village moves and the Nation moves."

In this 21st Century, the Women Empowerment has become one of the most important concerns not only at National level but also at International level. Proper implementation of Government policies as well as Non-Government Societies initiatives is must to create a culture where women have full opportunities of self- decision making, participating in social, political and economic life.

"It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing." — Swami Vivekananda.

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