

Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment in India

Arun Kumar Shukla and Vikash Kumar Singh***

ABSTRACT

The empowerment of the women is a highly significant issue of our times. There are so many saints and statesmen who have struggled for the empowerment of women in India. Several international conferences were organized to take stock of the situation and prepare grounds for the empowerment of women in all walks of human life. Today the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. But practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. We observe in our day to day life how women become victimized by various social evils. Women Empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. The study is based on purely from secondary sources. The study reveals that women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by Government. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. The study concludes by an observation that access to Education, Employment and Change in Social Structure are only the enabling factors to Women Empowerment.

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

Introduction

The empowerment of women is one of the central issues in the process of development of countries all over the world. The International Women's Day celebrated on 8th march every year has become a day of demonstration for equal opportunity and solidarity. But the question arises how relevant is celebration of Women's Day in view of the fact that their position in the society has not changed much. They are still treated as the 'weaker sex' who needs to be protected entire life-be it by her father, husband or son.

* Director & Professor, Seth Vishambhar Nath Institute of Management Studies & Research, Barabanki

** Assistant Professor, Seth Vishambhar Nath Institute of Management Studies & Research, Barabanki

The 'New Age Women' and the 'Women of Substance' in true terms are just words in books.

Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure.

Women and men are different in four manners. They think and act differently in some given conditions. Men are egoist, arrogant, assertive and dominate. Men and women have their specific areas of strengths and weaknesses but understanding is the mandatory. If they understand each other they can have better relationship. But from the long time, the women on this earth were treated as a sort of thing. Her place in this society was not like other human being. She has no rights even she cannot move nor does anything at her will. In Hindu Shasta's, she has been branded just like animals. **'Great poet of Hindi-"Tulsi Das" said in Ramayan 'Dhol, Ganwar, Shudra, Pashu, Naari-Ye Sab TadanKeAdhikari'**, according to this statement one can easily understand that what status has been granted to our mothers. There is not only one example; we have many examples of this type.

Just see, another example of women's status-Mahabharata "Draupadi" She was not only the wife of Five Pandwas, she put at stake in gambling by none else than the so-called DharmrajYudhishtar!

Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave.

Review of Literature

M. BhavaniSankara Rao (2011) has highlighted that health of women members of SHG have certainly taken a turn to better. It clearly shows that health of women members discuss among themselves about health related problems of other members and their children and make them aware of various Government provisions specially meant for them.

Duflo E. (2011) Women's Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge The study argues that the inter relationships of the Empowerment and Development are probably too weak to be self sustaining and that continuous policy commitment to equality for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women.

Sethuraman K. (2008) The Role of Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence in child Growth and Under nutrition in a Tribal and Rural Community in South India. This research paper explores the relationship between Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence, maternal nutritional status and the nutritional status and growth over six months in children aged 6 to 24 months in a rural and tribal community. This longitudinal observational study undertaken in rural Karnataka. India included tribal and rural subjects.

Venkata Ravi and Venkatraman (2005) focused on the effects of SHG on women participation and exercising control over decision making both in family matters and in group activities.

Objectives of the Study

1. To know the Need of Women Empowerment.
2. To assess the Awareness of Women Empowerment in India.
3. To analyze the Factors influencing the Economic Empowerment of Women.
4. To study the Government Schemes For Women Empowerment.
5. To identify the Hindrances in the Path of Women Empowerment.
6. To offer useful Suggestions in the light of Findings.

Research Methodology

This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. In this paper an attempt has been taken to analyze the empowerment of in India. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the need of this study.

Crime 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 alarming statistics. The Crime Head Wise details of reported crimes during the year 2011 to 2015 along with percentage variation are presented in Table 1;

Table 1
Crime Head-wise Cases Registered under Crime against Women during
2011 - 2015 and Percentage Variation in 2015 over 2014

| Sl No. | Crime head | Year | | | | | Percentage variation in 2015 over 2014 |
|--------|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--|
| | | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | |
| 1 | Rape# | 24,206 | 24,923 | 33,707 | 36,735 | 34,651 | -5.7 |
| 2 | Attempt to Commit Rape* | - | - | - | 4,232 | 4,434 | 4.8 |
| 3 | Kidnapping & Abduction of Women | 35,565 | 38,262 | 51,881 | 57,311 | 59,277 | 3.4 |
| 4 | Dowry Deaths | 8,618 | 8,233 | 8,083 | 8,455 | 7,634 | -9.7 |
| 5 | Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage her/ their Modesty | 42,968 | 45,351 | 70,739 | 82,235 | 82,422 | 0.2 |
| 6 | Insult to the Modesty of Women | 8,570 | 9,173 | 12,589 | 9,735 | 8,685 | -10.8 |
| 7 | Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives | 99,135 | 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 | - | - | - | 3,734 | 4,060 | 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 | 6,619 | 9,038 | 10,709 | 10,050 | 9,894 | -1.5 |
| 13 | Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act | - | - | - | 426 | 461 | 8.2 |
| 14 | Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act | 2,436 | 2,563 | 2,579 | 2,070# | 2,424 | 17.1 |
| B. | Total SLL Crime against Women | 9,508 | 11,742 | 13,650 | 12,593 | 12,819 | 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

A total of 3,27,394 cases of crime against women (both under various sections of IPC and SLL) were reported in the country during the year 2015 as compared to 3,37,922 in the year 2014, thus showing a decline of 3.1% during the year 2015. These crimes have continuously increased during 2011 - 2014 with 2,28,650 cases in 2011, which further increased to 2,44,270 cases in 2012 and 3,09,546 cases in 2013, to 3,37,922 cases in 2014. It declined to 3,27,394 in 2015.

The proportion of IPC crimes committed against women in total IPC crimes has increased during last 5 years from 9.4% in the year 2011 to 10.7% during the year 2015 Table 2.

Table 2
Proportion of Crime against Women (IPC) towards Total IPC Crimes

| <i>S.no</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Total IPC Crimes</i> | <i>Crime Against Women (IPC cases)</i> | <i>Percentage to Total IPC Crimes</i> |
|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | 2011 | 23,25,575 | 2,19,142 | 9.4% |
| 2 | 2012 | 23,87,188 | 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% |

Source: Crime in India-2015

Present Situation of Women

Being equal to their male counterparts is still a far cry for Indian women. Not only are they marginal as public figures an average Indian women can hardly call the shots at home or outside. In 2017 (March, 14) women occupied only 7 out of 75 ministerial positions in the union council of ministers. There were only 1 woman judges out of 28 judges in the Supreme Court and there were only 75 women judges out of 653 judges in various high courts.

Why Need of Women Empowerment?

Reflecting into the “Vedas Purana” of Indian culture, women is being worshiped such as LAXMI MAA, goddess of wealth; SARSWATI MAA, for wisdom; DURGA MAA for power. The status of women in India particularly in rural areas needs to address the issue of empowering women. About 67% of the female population in rural area is unutilized. This is mainly due to existing social customs. In agriculture and Animal care the women contribute 90% of the total workforce. Women constitute almost half of the population, perform nearly 2/3 of its work hours, receive 1/10th of the world’s income and own less than 1/ 100th the world property. Among the world’s 900 million illiterate people, women out number men two to one. 70% of people living in poverty are women. Lower sex ratio i.e. 933, The existing studies show that the women are relatively less healthy than men though belong to same class. They constitute less than 1/7th of the administrators and managers in developing countries. Only 12% seats in World Parliament and 9% in National Cabinet are held by women.

Hindrances of Women Empowerment: The main Problems that were faced by women in past days and still today up to some extent:

| | |
|--|---------------------------|
| Gender discrimination | Dowry |
| Lack of education | Low ability to bear risk |
| Absent of ambition for the achievement | Financial constraints |
| Female infanticide | Low need for achievements |
| Low mobility | |
| Social status | |

Need for Women Empowerment: Women are deprived of

- Decision making power
- Access to employment
- Freedom of movement
- Exposure to media
- Domestic violence
- Access to education

Government Schemes For Women Empowerment

Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India have come up with various schemes, programmes, social welfare schemes, Health and Nutrition, scholarship for women empowerment, Girl Child pregnant women, mothers, ward members, Anganwadi Workers, Women Health Volunteers, the women living in the rural & tribal areas, ex-servicemen, physically handicapped, nursing women, Lactating mother, widows/destitute, Old age women, women self-help group (SHG), Women Entrepreneurs and Adolescent Girls'.

This scheme provides assistance for Education, Training, Financial assistance/Cash, Subsidy on the loans, Scholarship, Nutrition, self-employment and other facilities. The prime goal is for empowerment, development, protection and welfare of Women & Child.

The Central Government Sponsored Schemes for Women Empowerment Schemes are listed below:

- ❖ Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme
- ❖ One Stop Centre Scheme
- ❖ Women Helpline Scheme
- ❖ UJJAWALA : A Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of trafficking and Reuse, Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation
- ❖ Working Women Hostel

- ❖ Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme For the Children of Working Mothers
- ❖ Ministry approves new projects under Ujjawala Scheme and continues existing projects
- ❖ SWADHAR Greh (A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances)
- ❖ Revision under IGMSY in Accordance with National Food Security Act, 2013 in XIIth Plan
- ❖ Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)
- ❖ NARI SHAKTI PURASKAR
- ❖ Awardees of Stree Shakti Puruskar, 2014 & Awardees of Nari Shakti Puruskar
- ❖ Awardees of RajyaMahilaSamman&ZilaMahilaSamman
- ❖ Indira Gandhi MatritvaSahyogYojana (IGMSY) - A Conditional Maternity Benefit Scheme
- ❖ Mahila police Volunteers
- ❖ Mahila E-Haat

The efforts of government and its different agencies are ably supplemented by nongovernmental organizations that are playing an equally important role in facilitating women empowerment. Despite concerted efforts of governments and NGOs there are certain gaps. Of course we have come a long way in empowering women yet the future journey is difficult and demanding.

Status of Women Empowerment

The status of Women Empowerment cannot be visualized with single dimension rather multidimensional assessment in terms of various components of women's life and their status would bring a clear conception. So, this paper tries to give a basic idea about the condition and status of women in terms of employment, education, health and social status. Before

Table 3
Details of Gender Gap Index - 2012 (Out of 135 Countries) Gender Gap sub-Indices

| | <i>India</i> | | <i>Sri lanka</i> | |
|---|--------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| | <i>Rank</i> | <i>Score</i> | <i>Rank</i> | <i>Score</i> |
| 1. Economic Participation and Opportunity | 123 | 0.4588 | 105 | 0.5596 |
| 2. Educational Attainment | 121 | 0.8525 | 108 | 0.9946 |
| 3. Health and Survival | 134 | 0.9612 | 1 | 0.9796 |
| 4. Political Empowerment | 17 | 0.3343 | 22 | 0.3151 |
| Overall Index | 105 | 0.6442 | 39 | 0.7122 |

Source: World Economic Forum (2012) Global Gender Gap Index - 2012

going to elaborate separately let us have a quick view of the overall status of women in terms of gender gap index prepared by World Economic Forum in 2012.

The above table clearly depicts the status of low level of attainment of women in the varied field of their attainment. The ranking and scores for India amply proves that it is found in the lower rank even compared to Sri Lanka in all sub-indexes of gender equality. India gained eight places (from 113 rank in 2011 to 105 rank in 2012) as a result of improvement in the educational attainments and political empowerment. Keeping aside the Political Empowerment, the other three indices is all above the rank of 100. The Political Empowerment ranks quite high may be due to the 73rd and 74th Constitution amendments of India providing greater opportunity to women to take part in active politics.

Reasons for the Empowerment of Women

Today we have noticed different Acts and Schemes of the central Government as well as state Government to empower the women of India. But in India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. A few women are engaged in services and other activities. So, they need economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men. Other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. According to 2001 census, rate of literacy among men in India is found to be 76% whereas it is only 54% among women. Thus, increasing education among women is of very important in empowering them. It has also noticed that some of women are too weak to work. They consume less food but work more. Therefore, from the health point of view, women folk who are to be weaker are to be made stronger. Another problem is that workplace harassment of women. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment, and so on. For these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. To sum up, women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

Women Empowerment - Challenges

There are several constraints that check the process of women empowerment in India. Social norms and family structure in developing countries like India,

manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. One of the norms is the continuing 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 in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities. The root cause of this type of attitude lies in the belief that male child inherits the clan in India with an exception of Meghalaya. Women often internalize the traditional concept of their role as natural thus inflicting an injustice upon them. Poverty is the reality of life for the vast majority women in India. It is the factor that poses challenge in realizing women's empowerment.

There are several challenges that are plaguing the issues of women's right in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India

- **Education:** While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since 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. The gender bias is in higher education, specialized professional trainings which hit women very hard in employment and attaining top leadership in any field.
- **Health and Safety:** The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country and are an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned.
- **Professional Inequality:** This inequality is practiced in employment and promotions. Women face countless handicaps in male customized and dominated environs in Government Offices and Private enterprises.
- **Household Inequality:** Household relations show gender bias in infinitesimally small but significant manners all across the globe, more so, in India e.g. sharing burden of housework, childcare and menial works by so called division of work.
- **Poverty:** 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 this, women are exploited as domestic helps.
- **Morality and Inequality:** Due to gender bias in health and nutrition there is unusually high morality rate in women reducing their population further especially in Asia, Africa and china.

Constitutional Provisions for Empowering Women in India

Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.

Constitutional Privileges

- o Equality before law for women (Article 14)
- o The State not to discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15 (i))
- o The State to make any special provision in favour of women and children (Article 15 (3))
- o Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Article 16)
- o The State to direct its policy towards securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); and equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d))
- o To promote justice, on a basis of equal opportunity and to provide free legal aid by suitable legislation or scheme or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Article 39 A)
- o The State to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42)
- o The State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46)
- o The State to raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people (Article 47)
- o To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women (Article 51(A) (e))

- o Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat (Article 243 D(3))
- o Not less than one- third of the total number of offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayats at each level to be reserved for women (Article 243 D (4))
- o Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Municipality to be reserved for women and such seats to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Municipality (Article 243 T (3))
- o Reservation of offices of Chairpersons in Municipalities for the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and women in such manner as the legislature of a State may by law provide (Article 243 T (4))

Findings of the Study

- Globalization, Liberalization 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.
- Support independence and mobility- Most women in rural/urban India have to ask their husbands for permission to leave home. a large majority of women (75-77%) report being able to freely travel outside of their home unaccompanied.
- There needs to be a sea - change in the mindset 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.
- In order to create a sustainable world, we must begin to Empower Women.
- Poverty and illiteracy add to these complications, The Empowerment of Women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety.
- We have to create a safe space so, they get together with other women and talk about issues like gender equity, women's rights, or health.
- 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.
- There are several Government programmes and NGOs in the Country, there is still a wide gap that exists between those under protection and those not.

Suggestions

1. The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grassroots problem. Hence, education for women has to be paid special attention.
2. Women should build self-esteem and confidence.
3. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights.
4. By building social networks, women have more support and greater opportunities to effect change in their communities.
5. Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in the society.
6. Strict implementation of Programmes and Acts should be there to curb the mal-practices prevalent in the society

Conclusion

Thus, the Enlistment in the field of income / employment and in educational front, the scenario of women empowerment seems to be comparatively poor. The need of the hour is to identify those escape clause which are observing the realization of empowerment of women and this initiative must be started from the women folk itself as well as more importantly policy initiative taken by the state and society. In present scenario the Indian women have progressed a lot in various parts of their life although they are still suffering from various social evils like dowry, eve teasing, rape etc. It is a fact that in the glorious development of Indian society, the Indian women have march forward to the developmental process and somewhere treated equally with their male counterparts but it is yet to be realized by the people of India that women should have given the equal rights and opportunity with men so as to establish a shining India where women can live freely and equally irrespective of religion, caste, creed, gender etc. "When women move forward the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves". It is essential as their thought and their value systems lead the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation. The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the mainstream of development. Women empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed income and property so that they may stand on their feet and build up their identity in the society. The Empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which

there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

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