

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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Abstract

Empowerment of women has been a major concern of the 21st century. Even today in our daily life we see how women are targeted and become victim by various social evils. India is the second most populated country in the world having 49% of female population. But if we compare the position of Indian women with other countries having lesser female population it is worst. The reason being Indian females have to face various types of barriers in the society. 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 present paper attempts to study the status of Women Empowerment in India and highlights the Issues and Challenges faced by them.

Keywords: Empowerment, Barriers, Victims

Introduction

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional process which should enable individuals or a group of individuals to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.

According to Webster's dictionary the word empowerment indicates the situation of authority or to be authorized or to be powerful. In other words empowers means to authorize so empowerment is a process which gives women power or authority to challenge some situation. The term empowerment indicates a process of giving to developing conditions for generating power within. Therefore, conceptually the term empowerment has multi-dimensional focus and can be described as a process wherein a group or individuals are enabled to enhance their status in the society on the hand and overall participation and growth in the other. Empowerment is active multi-dimensional processes which enable women to realize their identity, position and power in all spheres of life. Empowerment provides greater making process at home and in the matters autonomy in the decision making process at home and in the matters concerning society and freedom from customs, beliefs and practices.

Empowerment demands drastic and basic changes in the system or marriage and family, husband and wife

relationship and attitude towards the socialization a remarriage. Empowerment is a process that gives a person freedom in decision making.

Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economic, political, caste and gender-based discrimination. It means granting women the freedom to make life choices. Women empowerment does not mean 'deifying women' rather it means replacing patriarchy with parity. In this regard, there are various facets of women empowerment, such as given here under:

Human Rights or Individual Rights A woman is a being with senses, imagination and thoughts; she should be able to express them freely. Individual empowerment means to have the self-confidence to articulate and assert the power to negotiate and decide.

Social Women Empowerment A critical aspect of social empowerment of women is the promotion of gender equality. Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life.

Educational Women Empowerment It means empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. It means making women aware of their rights and developing a confidence to claim them.

Economical and occupational empowerment It implies a better quality of material life through sustainable livelihoods owned and managed by women. It means reducing their financial dependence on their male counterparts by making them a significant part of the human resource.

Legal Women Empowerment It suggests the provision of an effective legal structure which is supportive of women empowerment. It means addressing the gaps between what the law prescribes and what actually occurs.

Political Women Empowerment It means the existence of a political system favouring the participation in and control by the women of the political decision-making process and in governance.

The position of Women in India:

The position enjoyed by women in the Rig- Vedic period deteriorated in the later Vedic civilization. Women were denied the right to education and widow remarriage. They were denied the right to inheritance and ownership of property. Many social evils like child marriage and dowry system surfaced and started to engulf women. During Gupta period, the status of women immensely deteriorated. Dowry became an institution and Sati Pratha became prominent.

During the British Raj, many social reformers such as Raja Rammohun Roy,

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Jyotirao Phule started agitations for the empowerment of women. Their efforts led to the abolition of Sati and formulation of the Widow Remarriage Act. Later, stalwarts like Mahatma Gandhi and Pt. Nehru advocated women rights. As a result of their concentrated efforts, the status of women in social, economical and political life began to elevate in the Indian society.

Based on the ideas championed by our founding fathers for women empowerment, many social, economic and political provisions were incorporated in the Indian Constitution. Women in India now participate in areas such as education, sports, politics, media, art and culture, service sector and science and technology. But due to the deep-rooted patriarchal mentality in the Indian society, women are still victimized, humiliated, tortured and exploited. Even after almost seven decades of Independence, women are still subjected to discrimination in the social, economic and educational field.

Issues and Challenges:

Perspective: The most widespread and dehumanising discriminations against women are on the basis of the biased perspective. The discrimination against the girl child begins from the birth itself. Boys are preferred over girls; hence, female infanticide is a common practice in India. The ordeal that an Indian girl faces at birth is only the beginning of a lifelong struggle to be seen and heard.

Patriarchate Bottlenecks The traditional Indian society is a patriarchal society ruled by the diktats of self-proclaimed caste lords who are the guardians of archaic and unjust traditions. They put the burden of traditions, culture and honour on the shoulders of women and mar their growth. The incidences of “honour killing” reveal the distorted social fibre in the male-dominated society.

Economic Backwardness: Women constitute only 29% of the workforce but forms majority of the destitute in the country. There has been a failure in transforming the available women base into human resource. This, in turn, has hampered not only the economic

development of women but also of the country’ as a whole.

Implementation Gaps Through all these years, the attention is only on developing and devising new schemes, policies and programmes and have paid less attention to the proper monitoring system and implementation short-sightedness, for e.g. despite the presence of The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technologies Act and various health programmes like Janani Suraksha Yojana and National Rural Health Mission (NHRM), our country has a skewed sex ratio and a high maternal mortality rate (MMR).

Loopholes in the legal structure Although there are a number of laws to protect women against all sorts of violence yet there has been the significant increase in the episodes of rapes, extortions, acid, attacks etc. This is due to delay in legal procedures and the presence of several loopholes in the functioning of a judicial system.

Lack of Political Will: The still-pending Women’s Reservation Bill underscores the lack of political will to empower women politically. The male dominance prevails in the politics of India and women are forced to remain mute spectators.

Way ahead starts with bridging the deep-rooted biases through sustained reconditioning. It is only possible by promoting the idea of gender equality and uprooting social ideology of male child preferability. This concept of equality should be first developed in each and every household and from there, it should be taken to the society. This can be achieved by running sustained awareness programmes with the help of Nukkad natak or dramas, radio, television, Internet, etc. across the country.

Replacing ‘Patriarchy’ with Parity: A strong patriarchate society with deep-rooted socio-cultural values continues to affect women’s empowerment. The need of the hour is an egalitarian society, where there is no place for superiority. The Government should identify and eliminate such forces that work to keep alive the tradition of male dominance over its female counterpart

by issuing inhumane and unlawful diktats.

Education is the most important and indispensable tool for women empowerment. It makes women aware of their rights and responsibilities. Educational achievements of a woman can have ripple effects for the family and across generations. Most of the girls drop out of schools due to the unavailability of separate toilets for them. The recently launched ‘Swachh Bharat Mission’ focusing on improving sanitation facilities in schools and every rural household by 2019, can prove to be very significant in bringing down the rate of girls dropping out of school.

Political Will: Women should have access to resources, rights and entitlements. They should be given decision-making powers and due position in governance. Thus, the Women Reservation Bill should be passed as soon as possible to increase the effective participation of women in the politics of India.

Conclusion:

Empowering women socially, economically, educationally politically and legally is going to be a prodigious task. It is not going to be easy to change the culture of disregard for women which are so deep-rooted in Indian society. But it does not mean that it is implausible. Only revolutions bring changes in a day, but reforms take their time. This one, in particular, will take its time as well. The idea of women empowerment might sound hard by the yard, but by the inch, it is just a cinch. All we need is a concentrated effort focused in the right direction that would rest only with the liberation of women from all forms of evil.

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