

Women Empowerment in India: Strategy and Execution



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Abstract

Women Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. To increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as: Empowered Women's Characteristics

1. Empowered women define their attitude, values and behaviors in relation to their own real interest. They have autonomy because they claim their freedom from existing male hierarchies, whether they live in traditional societies or modern industrial societies.
2. Empowered women maintain equal mindedness. They act out roles that challenge male dominance. They respond as equals and co-operate to work towards the common good.
3. Empowered women use their talent to live fulfilling lives. They not only survive the harshness of their own subjugation but also transcend their subjugation.
4. Empowered women maintain their strength on the face of pressures from the religion and work and contribute towards the empowerment of all women.
5. Empowered women define their values and formulate their beliefs themselves, they do not derive their sense of being from male authorities nor do they live vicariously through men.

It is very important to know that what is the strategy to empower women in India and at what extent this effort has become successful. Government and Certain NGO's have very important role to play regarding women empowerment in India.

Keywords: Empowerment, Domestic Violence, Exploitation, Decision Making.

Introduction

Women empowerment means increasing political, social, educational and economic strength of women. Women's empowerment in India is mainly dependent on different variables that includes their location (urban / rural) their educational status (literate / illiterate) their social status (caste and class) and age group. Various Policies for Women's empowerment present at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including education, health, economic opportunities, and political participation. However there is big gap between policy advancements and actual practice and at the community level. Empowerment of women is essentially the process for upliftment of economic, social and political status of women in the society. It is the process to protect them from all types of violence. Women empowerment includes the making up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can live without fear of exploitation, apprehension, oppression, discrimination and the feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated societies. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown adverse sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. When we discuss about their social status, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. But we can defiantly feel In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in each sphere of life. Gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes considered as Goddess and at other times only as slave.

'EMPOWERMENT' may be described as a process which helps people to establish their control over the factors which can affect their lives.

Empowerment of women clearly means developing them as more aware individuals, who are economically independent, politically active and are able to make wise discussion in matters that affect them. Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International women Conference in 1985 at Nairobi (Kenya), where defined it as control of resources and redistribution of power in favor of women.

Women's role in economic development, in most countries of the world, cannot be undermined. Although women constitute almost half of the total population of the world, their social, economic and political status is lower than that of men and they are subjected to the tyranny and oppression of a particular order for centuries and de facto even today. They are customarily expected to confine themselves to household environs and play a passive role as daughters, daughters-in-law, wives and mothers. They are typically considered as weaker than men. This attitude has constrained their mobility and consequently lack of opportunities for the development of their personalities.

H. Subrahmanyam (2011) compares women education in India at present and Past. Author highlighted that there has a good progress in overall enrolment of girl students in schools. The term empower means to give lawful power or authority to act. It is the process of acquiring some activities of women.¹

M. Bhavani Sankara 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.²

Doepke M. Tertilt M. (2011) Does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development? This study is an empirical analysis suggesting that money in the hands of mother's benefits children. This study developed a series of non-cooperative family bargaining models to understand what kind of frictions can give rise to the observed empirical relationship.³

Dufo 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.⁴

Sethuraman K. (2008) The Role of Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence in

child Growth and Undernutrition 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.⁵

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.⁶

Ram Ahuja (1993-Reprinted, 2013) Indian Social System focused Status of Women in Ancient India, changes in British Period Affecting Women's status and Women in post-independence period.⁷

David G. Man (2011) Society In India focused on Housewife expected friction and central importance.⁸

World Bank (1978) in its study found that volume of migration of women has been increasing more rapidly than that of males of the last several decades. It is also observed that employment among women from the lower middle class and poor socio-economic groups is more common than it is among the elite. The women labourers engaged in the unorganized segment suffer from disabilities and exploitation of much higher magnitude than those employed in organized sector.⁹

Manimekalai and Rajendran (1993) in their study found that the DWCRA was helping and promoting self-employment among the rural women who are below the poverty line. It helped them in organizing the beneficiaries in group activities and promotes economic and social self-reliance.¹⁰

Sivasankaraiah and Ramappa (1993) in their study concluded that the marketing of product made by the members of the DWCRA group is very important. The interest of women in the programme can be sustained only when a proper market is arranged for their products.¹¹ Rajakutti and Prita Sarkar (1994) in their study opined that orientation of panchayat members and bankers towards the philosophy of DWCRA and than imaginative and committed role of NGO would be a contributing factor for the success of DWCRA programme.¹²

Hemalatha Prasad (1995) in his study identified certain common factors, for success of self-help groups, like homogeneity of the group in terms of caste occupation and locality made the group more cohesive, assured and regular income from the scheme. Effective and dynamic leadership, awareness about the repayment procedures and consequences of the non-repayment influenced their repayment behaviour the study identified that systematic planning for skill training, raw material

supply, quality control and marketing support from officials were the key factors for the effective management of the programme¹³.

Karl (1995) studied the role of empowerment of women on decision making and concluded that empowerment as a multifaceted process, involving the pooling of resources to achieve collective strength and countervailing power and entailing the improvement technical skill, administrative, managerial and planning capacities and analytical reflective abilities of local women¹⁴.

Usha Narayana (1996) confirms that the main position of 73rd Constitutional Amendment involves the participation of women as voters, women as members of political parties and women as candidates. Women elected members of panchayat Raj institutions. She has stressed that the provisions of resignation are a guarantee for their empowerment¹⁵.

Swetha Misra (1997) examined the participation of women. Political participation of women was severely limited due to various traditional factors such as caste and religion. Feudal attitudes have brought rural women to the forefront of village politics. This research study was conducted in the states of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, West Bengal, Haryana, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh. She concludes that, women are getting more opportunities to play a vital role at all levels, including village level politics and that women have to utilize these opportunities to change the decision making process¹⁶.

Rama Lakshmi (1998) found that the DWCRA groups take up traditional income generating activities like dairy, agriculture related activities like sericulture. Silk worm rearing and silk weaning, grafting of fruit plants, managing orchards, fish rearing, prawn processing crop production on leased lands managing tractors, litters and other agricultural equipment, sheep and goat rearing, small business, vending of agricultural production – flowers, fruits, vegetables, artisan activities like pottery, toy making, leather work, bakery products and she concluded that DWCRA groups evolve from consumption phase to income generation phase on a lower scale to income generation phase on a higher scale¹⁷.

Manimekalai (1998) attempted a study of rural women beneficiaries of DWCRA scheme, which is basically a self-employment oriented scheme for rural poor that has succeeded in improving the economic status of the women of Pudukottai district of Tamilnadu. The credit for this

achievement goes to a unique scheme in which quarry lease to the DWCRA group has been found to be higher than the other groups. This group not only earns more than the private contractor and co-operative groups but also enjoys the facility of being the masters. The members felt that thanks to economic independence obtained through DWCRA, they could spend more on nutritious food, clothing and on children's health and education¹⁸.

Ariz Ahmed (1999) found that most unique feature of this thrift activity is involvement of all communities he observed that the involvement of women groups not only empowering them but also enabling to shape themselves as social activities by different schemes and in the system¹⁹.

Shylendra (1999) in his study identified the reasons for the failure of Self-Help Groups. Wrong approach followed in self-help groups formation by the team, misconceptions about SHGs goals both among the team and the members of SHGs and lack of clarify about the concept of SHG particularly by the team leading to failure in ensuring conditions necessary for their successful functioning²⁰.

Sivasubramanian (1999) studies empowerment of poor and felt that social mobilization is the possible process for eradicating poverty. Poverty can be effectively eradicated only when the poor start contributing to the growth process through their active involvement. Voluntary organizations community – based Self- Help Groups and local government organizations have a substantial to play in eradicating poverty²¹.

Annapurna (2000) in her study analyzed the role of women in economic development. The world of women is no longer confined to periphery of household, activities like cooking, caring and tending the family needs. But today women are actively contributing to the promotion of economic development in different capacities, namely, as housewife, mother, labourer, officer, scientist, executive and technocrat. With the spread of education, training and technology, their mobility has been increased and they are coming out of their shells to do different works to raise the living standards of their families²².

Nagayya (2000) found that non-governmental Organizations and Voluntary Agencies like Rashtriya Manila Kosh and Rashtriya Grameen Vikas Nidhi SIDBI has established a foundation for Micro Credit and NABARD has set up a Micro finance Development Fund²³.

Table – 1.1

TRENDS OF SEX RATIO IN INDIA (1911-2011)

| Year | Population (in millions) | Sex ratio (female per 1000 males) |
|------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1911 | 252.1 | 972 |
| 1921 | 251.3 | 964 |
| 1931 | 279.0 | 955 |
| 1941 | 318.7 | 950 |
| 1951 | 361.1 | 945 |
| 1961 | 439.2 | 946 |
| 1971 | 548.2 | 941 |
| 1981 | 683.3 | 930 |
| 1991 | 846.3 | 927 |
| 2001 | 1027.0 | 933 |
| 2011 | 1210.2 | 940 |

Source: Census reports

India stands far below in gender related indices. There are historical reasons for the lower status of women in India especially in rural areas. Patriarchal symbolism, ritualism, dualism, marital traditions and caste systems are some of the historical factors that prescribe the status of Indian women. Some of these traditions are thousands years old and their impacts have become almost irreversible. By socialization both men and women develop gendered self-image since childhood and carry these stereotypes till their death. They bring up with them such a mental set which do not permit them either to perceive the reality properly or even to think otherwise. Present study mainly focus on secondary data to understand the real situation of women empowerment in india.

Census report and election commission data are used for this purpose. Gender equality has become unthinkable for Indian psyche. But efforts are on from both governmental and non-governmental sectors to reverse this situation. Women who number 586.5 million according to 2011 Census represented 48.5 per cent of country's population of 1210.2 million. The sex ratio is 940 women per 1000 men as per 2011 Census. Trends of sex ratio in India during 1911-2011 are given in Table – 1.1. It shows the misuse of the prenatal diagnostic technique to do away with female foetus. The declining sex ratio in India could be a reflection of the son preference in the country.

Education can pave way for an overall development of individuals and for the society. Female literacy is not only an end itself, but also serves as a catalyst for overall performance in other segments too. Trends in Literacy rates are given in Table – 1.2. According to the Census of India 2011, female literacy rate is 65.46 per cent, while literacy rate is 82.14 per cent in case of males. In Politically, the reforms in the Panchayat Raj Act have given greater share for women in rural governance with the introduction of 33 per cent reservation for women in local village level elections. More and more women have shown that once they have power, they are able to use it, to the benefit of

1951, the literacy rate of women was only 8.86 per cent. By 2011 Census, it had raised manifold and went up to 65.46 per cent. The gender gap between them

Ever since India became free, there have been phenomenal changes in the conditions of women. The constitution has given women the much needed status. They are now equal before law. There can be no discrimination by the state on grounds of gender. In matters related to economic development, women continued to be marginalized both in policy formulation and programme implementation. In terms of employment, she enjoys the same status as men and has to be given equal pay for equal work. Women's work participation mostly goes unrecorded and unrecognized. They work roughly twice as many hours as men. The report by the National Committee on the Status of Women reveals that women's participation in the economy has been declining since 1921. The reasons for the decline of women's participation in the work force differ in urban and rural areas and in rural areas there is a strongly rooted view that the wife's leisure might be regarded as a sign of status by others. The other factors that inhibit women's employment are heavy domestic work load, lack of assumed work, irregular and underpayment of wages, absence of transport facilities, lack of child care centres and other supportive structures. Workforce participation rate in India is given in Table – 1.3. It is evident from the table that only about 26 per cent of total female population are working, while around 52 per cent of the total male population are working. In case of non-workers, female accounts for 74.3 per cent of the total female population, while male accounts for only about 48 per cent of the total male population. This shows the lower work participation of the women compared to male.

society in general and women in particular. However, their active participation in politics is very slow. This can be evident from Table – 1.4. It can be observed from the table that women's participation and representation in political activities and public life has also been very marginal, although

Table – 1.3

**DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION BY WORKFORCE IN INDIA
(Percentage to total population)**

| Workers | 2001 Census | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|--------|
| | Male | Female |
| Total workers (Main and Marginal) | 51.7 | 25.6 |
| Main workers | 45.1 | 14.7 |
| Marginal workers | 6.6 | 11.0 |
| Non-workers | 48.1 | 74.3 |

Source: Census reports

women comprise almost half of the population in India, 340 million voters out of a total electorate of 710 million in 2009 – 11 constitutes a lowly 10.87 per cent of the total strength of the Lok Sabha. Their

representation in Parliament has just increased from 4.4 per cent to 10.87 per cent over a period of more than 50 years.

Table – 1.4

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PARLIAMENT OF INDIA

| Year | (In per cent) | |
|------|---------------|-------------|
| | Lok Sabha | Rajya Sabha |
| 1952 | 4.4 | 7.3 |
| 1962 | 6.7 | 7.6 |
| 1971 | 4.2 | 7.0 |
| 1980 | 7.9 | 9.8 |
| 1991 | 7.16 | 15.5 |
| 1996 | 7.18 | 8.63 |
| 1998 | 7.5 | - |
| 1999 | 8.6 | - |
| 2004 | 8.3 | - |
| 2009 | 10.87 | - |

Source: Election Commission, Government of India.

Empowerment is the process of changing power relations in favor of those at the lower levels of a hierarchy. Empowerment of women implies process by which women's power of self-realization is promoted and reinforced. They develop the capacity for self-reliance out crossing the relationship subordination on account of gender, social and economic status and the role in the family and society. It encompasses the ability to make choices, control resources and enjoy participatory relationship within family and community. To achieve these objectives, empowerment of women also implies their ability to participate in it and also lead social movements to remove obstacles in their progress towards their goal. As per the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the term women's empowerment means acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and ways in which these relations may be changed; developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life; gaining the ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power; and developing the ability to organize and influence the direction of social change, to create more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. The empowerment of women include creating awareness and consciousness about situations of women, discrimination of women, rights of women, opportunities to the women and importance of gender equality; organizing a group collectively, group identity and group pressure; capacity building and skill development – ability to plan, to decide, to organize, ability to manage, ability to carry out activities, ability to deal with people and institutions in the world around them; participation in decision making at home, in the community and in the society; and access and control over resources, over means of productivity and over distribution. Empowerment emphasizes not only increasing the power of the individual but also the quality of life for the individual, the efficiency and autonomy of the individual. Empowerment has several other dimensions like social, economic,

psychological and political aspects. Social empowerment connotes formation of social capacities such as health, education, freedom and opportunities for realizing one's potentialities. Economic empowerment implies entitlement to employment, income, property, productive resources and benefits regardless of gender differences. Psychological empowerment signifies confidence building, acquisition of sense of efficacy and ability to overcome feeling of helplessness. Political

Empowerment implies equal say in the decision-making process in the power structure at all levels from local to global. All these dimensions of empowerment are so intertwined with one another that over reliance on one to the neglect of the other are not likely to work.

Women, in fact, contribute more than half of the wealth of nations and yet they are denied economic, social and legal rights and privileges that such a contribution often entitles men to. The Beijing meet and subsequent meets emphasized a great hope which will take equity. There has been a perceptible shift from viewing women as target of welfare policies to treat them as critical agent for development. Now the emphasis has shifted from development to empowerment. Undoubtedly, human development and people's participation go hand in hand. Our planning process has underscored the need for women's empowerment for the country's progress. It augurs well for the country that it has now been recognized that women had the key to substantial development. The efforts at improving the economic conditions of women certainly enhance their status in society. Literacy and education would sharpen women's awareness in manifold spheres including political sphere. Agents of women empowerment can be broadly classified into two, viz., external and self motivation. The external agents are government/semi-government agents and non-governmental organization. The external agents empower women through legislation, policy, special programmes and positive discrimination for women. Self

motivation includes Self-help groups and thrift and credit groups.

There are many limitations and ambiguities in the safeguards provided by the Constitution and various Acts for the uplift of women in India and they have been stricken with various loopholes. Though a number of policies have been formulated and reformulated for the empowerment of women, the agents for the implementation of policies have remained unchanged and have been meticulously ineffective. Improper implementation of these Acts constrains the empowerment of women in India. Hence, there have not been much qualitative changes in the status of women belonging to the marginalized groups of society. This can be evident from various facts listed below. The Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls, 1956, has not been able to arrest the problem of trafficking and prevent the exploitation of women. Although the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 is passed to prevent dowry system in India, the evil of dowry still continues. Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1975 has led to amniocentesis and female foeticide. Although changes have been made in the Indian Penal code, Code of Criminal Procedures and the Indian Evidence Act especially for the offence of rape, judicial process and perception continue to be heavily weighed against victims of rape. Some of the labour laws are never enforced. In spite of the Equal Remuneration Act 1976, there is discrimination in promotion, training and transfer on the basis of sex.

The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, has not been systematically enforced and the media still continues to project women as sex objects. Sati Prevention Act was passed in 1987 but glorification of sati continues in the state of Rajasthan. The National Commission of Women Act (1990), which empowers the National Commission of Women to investigate, examine and review all matters relating to safeguards provided for women under the Constitution and other relevant laws, is not satisfactory according to the National Commission of Women. The Commission feels that it should have the power to prosecute and summarily decide on cases of violation of gender justice. Several studies conducted earlier revealed that women have not been able to get a share in the decision making process owing to the patriarchal character of India's rural society. The main hindrances to women's participation in decision making are cultural and traditional inhibitions. In our country, women are to be seen not heard and women's roles should revolve around taking care of the children and the home. Women had inadequate awareness on their capacity to change and develop the potentialities of leadership. Deep ignorance of social, cultural, economic and political conditions enslaves them.

Factors discouraging women empowerment in India are illiteracy, poverty resulting in lack of funds, unemployment, low wages, ignorance, illhealth, unorganized nature, marginalization by male dominated structures, exploitation by

outsiders, lack of skills to do work, caste and religious conflicts and the absence of basic amenities of life discourage women empowerment in the country. Lack of proper knowledge and general awareness do not allow the women to even take benefit of the rights given to all the women of India by its constitution and make use of their potential and tremendous talent. Inadequate support of family also prevents women from taking up positions of power and has to be dealt with. The problem of balancing between their personal and professional lives remains a major challenge for women.

Migration of men to urban areas in search of employment is another problem of women empowerment in India. Many rural women are left behind to support their families and agriculture alone when men migrate to urban areas in search of employment. In such a situation, women could usually be found engaged in farming operations, raising livestock, cutting fodder, bringing fuel and water from distant places. These activities keep them so busy and they do not find time to indulge in other activities of their choice. In such situation, the empowerment of women also seems to be a distant dream and their status in the society still low. The formal political participation of women in India is still less than 10 per cent. Earlier studies have also delineated that the position of the elected women representatives in the institutions of decentralized rural governance varies from State to State. The prevailing male dominated power structure in villages is generally not ready to accept women as the Chairperson of the Panchayats. Further, women in positions of power do not bring up gender issues primarily because most of them have been appointed by men. Lack of education, political awareness and knowledge of public affairs among women folk of rural areas also discourages the women to attend the meetings and to express their views in Panchayats. The social taboos and traditions also create problems in women about induction in these institutions.

The political factors for slow progress in empowering women include unwillingness of political parties and leaders to encourage women, lack of political and leadership training, inadequate allocation of resources to women's structures, absence of affirmative action, absence of women's critical mass in decision-making bodies, discriminatory laws and practices against women.

Considering results from the data, strategies regarding advancement in education, empowerment of women and improvement in the role of NGOs we can give some suggestion as follows:

1. Since socio-economic weak condition of family is reported, we should initiate educational programmes for girl children from those households, by involving them in these programmes it can be able to reduce children in labor and early marriage.
2. We should increase the number of government girl's schools for the easy accessibility of basic

- education to girls.
3. NGOs are not giving financial encouragement to girls. To minimize the drop-outs among girls, the government scholarships and other educational schemes must be launched and implemented effectively through.
 4. Mere school education to women cannot guarantee empowerment. The economic empowerment of women is crucial. Therefore, women must be facilitated to gain higher education, especially technical education, to obtain economic benefits from modern occupations.
 5. Sensitization of mass media along with families is necessary to create awareness about the importance of women education and empowerment among parents.
 6. It is found that most of the women are assisting in household business of handicraft. Skill improvement programs, information of new techniques of production and marketing should be provided to women of Hamadan province.
 7. By bringing change in the attitude of men-folk; women's economic participation can be increased. In order to change the mindset of men, the awareness programmes like adult education, mass media education and higher remunerative jobs to women should be given importance.
 8. There is a lot to learn from Indian experiences of women development and NGO work. To build-up organizational capacity among women, we should encourage
 9. formation of groups/professional organizations like SHGs, credit societies, employee's associations, etc.
 10. Most of the women are wishing to keep continuing their education further. Those who said no have given various valid hurdles to it. These hurdles can be removed by initiatives taken of government and NGOs. Role of NGOs in encouraging, sensitizing and providing help to them becomes important to women's education.
 11. NGOs stated that sometimes classes are taken in houses, so, government should provide place for classes run by NGOs.
 12. It is found that the voluntary agencies have not put in the required effort to recruit enough staff because of financial constraint. Increase in government financial assistance to NGOs will solve this problem. Further, it will strengthen the NGOs initiative of educating and empowering women.
 13. The voluntary agencies have a number of problems such as financial, co-ordination, supervision, lack of infrastructure, in-adequate staff etc. It is to be suggested that a co-ordination council of voluntary agencies at the district level may be formed involving the schools of social work, officers of the concerned government departments and the experts from the field of voluntary work through which a constant effort will be ensured in strengthening the voluntary agencies.

14. Practice of professional and scientific social work is found absent in the voluntary organizations in Hamadan district. The efforts in this regard, may be made by establishing the schools of social work and by way of organizing orientation programmes, refresher courses, workshops, seminars to NGOs etc. 227

Conclusion

To promote the scientific and professional social work, establishment of more social work colleges in Iran to give professional social work education is needed. Iran can seek cooperation of India to establish institute like Tata Institutes of Social Sciences.

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