

## Women Empowerment in India

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### Abstract

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the term 'Empowerment of Women' has become a well worn subject on many occasions. Most of the politicians so called well wishers of the society left no chance to mention their interest- come- responsibility in giving priority to the empowerment of women. But when we look at the prevailed situation in the society, a question arises in our mind that, Are our women empowered? And the answer is 'No' it is a pitiful for us. So far as empowerment is concerned, we should not consider only economical empowered women but social and political empowerment also Since ancient times a women has been considered inferior and subordinate to man. She must be obligatory to work within the domain of 'Health and Birth'. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban/rural), educational status, social status (caste and class), and age.

Policies on women's empowerment exist at the national, state, and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation. However, there are significant gaps between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level.

Especially the Indian woman has to come out of her long cherished male dominance, her inferiority and inability to fight the problems of this world. She has to build up her self confidence. There is no bar related to sex. She can join any government administrative services or professions like medicine, engineering, teaching, business management etc. and we have some ideals of successful women in every field But these numbers can be counted only on finger tips. We have to alter the traditional definition of woman as a productive object. The 21th century has to see the grassroots woman chasing the higher and higher peak point of success.

**KEYWORDS:** Women Empowerment, Role of Women in nation building, Recourses of W.E., Measuring of Empowerment, Causes of W.E., Problems of W.E.

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### 1.0 Introduction:

Women have a distinct role to play in the development of the nation. In the role of mother, a woman shapes the personality and character of children, then and hence as housewife, she maintains the productivity of the human capital, and is therefore, capable of making a contribution to the economy of the nation. Empowerment is a process which generates changes in our ideas and perceptions and creates awareness about one's rights and opportunities for self development in all important spheres of life. Women

empowerment is an important issue addressed by all nations who prepare themselves for national development. Women constitute nearly half of our population, so they cannot be left out of any endeavor for building up the nation. One of the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century is to empower women so that they would be able to regulate their day to day lives in the social, political and economical terms. The Indian constitution granted gender equality. The central government directed the states to take various steps to maintain the equality. It is also aimed at providing equal participation of women in different spheres of development through democratic policies, plans and programmes. Various government bodies, NGOs came forward to secure human rights of women. These organisations are working for women to justify their equality with men.

### **1.1 Status of Indian women: Past, Present and Future:**

In the Indian society the status of women has changed from time to time In ancient period women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life. In medieval period, the status of women went down considerably. The woman was considered to be inferior to man. During the Muslim period of history they were deprived of their rights of equality with men. In the modern period, due to movement against women's subjugation to men and British influence on Indian culture and civilization, the position of women has once again undergone a change. Women's position in modern India has changed considerably. Their position in modern Indian society is equal to that of men, socially, economically, educationally, politically and legally. Their sufferings from sati, child marriage, institution of temple prostitution do not longer exist. Now they have right to receive education, inherit and own property, participate in public life and political life of nation. They have become economically independent. They can seek employment anywhere and remain not domestic slaves. So, they have certainly enjoying the equal status with men in all respects. For this change in the status of women, several factors like women's education, reform movements by many social reformers, women participation in politics and numerous social legislations are held responsible. Women's bill which passed in Rajya Sabha will definitely improve the participation of women in Government. It is not to deny the fact that women in India have made a considerable progress in the last sixty years, yet they have to struggle against many handicaps, social evils and discrimination in the male dominated society. In contemporary India, women occupy a paradoxical status. On the other, some wives are burnt because they did not bring enough dowries. In this context, empowerment of women becomes a very important issue for the policy makers, intellectuals, social activists, etc.

### **1.2 Society is dominated by the men:**

Women constitute around 50% of the world's population, but in no country they get their due rights; not even in developed countries. The positions at the highest level- political or administrative- are occupied mostly by men. Few women have risen to the top most elected offices like the president of a country or the highest executive office like Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Chandrika Kumartunga, Golda Mier, Pratibha Patil, Margaret Thacher, Benazir Bhutto, Kavlida Zia, Sheikh Haseena Wazed are exceptions.

Even in the Victorian era it was considered that the man is for the sword and a woman is for the needle. It shows that the society was dominated by men. They determined the

conditions governing the terms of relationship between man and woman. Since men fought the wars and ran the enterprises of industrial production, they arrogated to themselves superior position and gave women a subordinate role in social and economic activities of communities.

### **1.3 Imbalanced Sex Ratio:**

A survey made by the DGIPR in September 2011, indicates that the sex ratio between the male and female are decreasing day by day. It is not a question that we can solve with the help of law. It is our duty and responsibility to aware each other about the male, female ratio.

### **2.0 Objectives of the Study:**

Objectives of the study are determined as follows:-

1. To study the status of women in society.
2. To study the resources of women empowerment.
3. To assess the basic problems of women empowerment.
4. To suggest better policy of women empowerment.

### **2.1 Methodology:**

This study intends to examine the women empowerment of Indian society based on partially secondary and some extent of primary observation of the researcher. The data has been collected and furnished from the official website of the HRD Ministry of India, Economic survey of India 2008-09, 2009-10 and other related research papers, books and published works.

### **2.2 Role of women in nation building:**

Mahatma Gandhi once said that “if we teach a man, we teach an individual, if we teach a woman, we teach the whole family”. Women are the magnificent creation of God, a multifaceted personality with the power of benevolence, adjustability, integrity and tolerance. She is the companion of man gifted with equal mental faculty protection and provides the embodiment of love and affection. The role given to women in society is a measuring rod and true index of its civilization attainment. In the words of Ravindarnath Tagor “Woman is the builder and moulder of a nation’s destiny. Though delicate and soft as lily, she has heart, far stronger and bolder than men. She is the supreme inspiration for man’s onward march.

Nation is the mirror of individual’s living in it and only the women can mould the character and behavior and also the morality of an individual from childhood. Really, women are less selfish; more dedicated to duty and have much potential than man by nature. In order to make optimum use of our vast women of power, we must liberate Indian women of many social taboos. However mere legislation cannot emancipate the lot of our women this need a radical change in our mental makeup and our social structure.

The nucleus of the true progress of a nation lies in the hands of educated mothers. It is the mother’s primary duty to inculcate in her child that bread earning alone is not the aim

individual's life. There is potential divinity in every human soul, and the aim of education should be to manifest the divinity in man. If this supreme truth is borne in mind by the mother, her child will grow up to be a citizen in the correct sense of the term, which is the prime necessity today.

### **2.3 Meaning of women empowerment:**

Women empowerment means assigning equal opportunity to women in all fields such as social, economic, educational, political, etc. to accord equal positive participation and to offer similar wages as men, social justice and enjoy rights equally to fulfill social duties and responsibilities which may be defined in short as "Empowerment means to create healthy, balanced, affirmative and compassionate individual".

### **2.4 Objectives of women empowerment:**

The motif of this study is to assess development of women, corresponding achievement in attaining goal of women empowerment and to propagate acceleration to this process. Naturally it is expected to appreciate all such efforts and to support such resources in every possible way. Thus especially the objectives in this respect can be enlisted as under-

1) Social policies and positive economy to be implemented in consonance of the women empowerment to achieve overall development of women and appreciation of good qualities amongst women for their social upliftment. 2) To safeguard the interest of women along with their human rights to offer equal opportunities in almost all fields like Economic, cultural, politics, social and citizenship and eradication of discrimination in all fields. 3) Decision making process in National, Political, Cultural, Economic and Social should have equivalent participation and contribution. 4) The principle of equal opportunity must be adopted in the fields of individual health, security, quality education, employment, self employment training, common wages, social and occupational health norms, social justice, and opportunities in Government as well as public sectors undertakings be ensured.

### **2.5 Measuring Empowerment:**

Malhotra (2002) emphasises that even after identifying empowerment as a primary development goal, neither the World Bank nor any other major development agency has developed a rigorous method for measuring and tracking changes in levels of empowerment. The UNDP's Human Development Report of 1995 introduced two new complementary indices: the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The GDI indicator measures the inequalities between men and women in terms of access to basic needs. GEM evaluates women's access to political and economic posts. The three indicators retained are the share of seats held by women in the parliamentary assemblies, the share of supervisory posts, high administrative posts and technical posts assumed by women, and the estimated share of income from work of women compared to that of men. Based on Amartya Sen's work, the UNDP makes the distinction between the measure of inequality and empowerment. The GDI focuses on the extension of capabilities; the GEM is concerned with the use of those capabilities to take advantage of the opportunities of life. The UNDP found a very strong correlation between its gender empowerment measure and gender-related

development indices and its Human Development Index. Bardhan (1999), points that these indices have limitations. Firstly, the presence of large proportion of elected women members in the national parliament does not necessarily have significant real power. Secondly, such measure does not take into account the participation of women in the local political institutions and their visibility in other bodies of civil society. Sinha and Patole use the EDA Rural System to evaluate 20 Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) representing various models within India. The EDA approach's triangulation method uses three different tools: the direction of change (Focus Group Discussions), the process of change in different contexts (case studies) and the assessment of that change (quantitative data). Interestingly, they do not build any index of empowerment. Ackerly (1995) constructs an indicator, Accounting Knowledge, to measure the probability that the changes associated with empowerment intervene. Goetz and Sen Gupta (1996) built an index of Managerial Control in order to classify the borrowers into five categories ranging from no control (no knowledge of the use of the loan or no contribution in terms of labour to the financed activity) to full control of the use of the loans (full control over the entire productive process, including marketing). Hashemi, Schuler and Riley (1996) investigate the change in women empowerment with the help of an ethnographic study and quantitative survey. The analysis studies 1,300 women to measure the effects of Grameen Bank and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee. They create an empowerment indicator built on the following eight criterions: mobility, economic security, ability to make small 87 Beteille (1999) points out that the political participation in the local political institutions does not automatically reflect at the national level and also does not automatically suffice to define empowerment. The Indian constitutional amendments of 1992 had fixed a quota reserving one-third of the seats for women in the local political institutions (Panchayati Raj Institutions). However, in 2000, the share of elected women in the two houses of parliament was only 8.9%. Hence political participation in the local political institutions does not automatically reflect at the national level and also does not automatically suffice to define empowerment. Purchases, large purchases, involvement in major household decisions, and relative freedom from domination by the family, political and legal awareness, participation in public protests and political campaigns. In the past the repayment rate was used as an indicator of empowerment. However, many researchers have expressed concern about this, pointing out

that women may repay loans through taking loans elsewhere and get into serious debt. In some cases men may control loans, whereas women might be mediating between male family members and MFIs. Hulme and Moseley (1996), suggest that the focus on repayment rates puts further pressures on the groups to exclude those who are most in need of microfinance. On measuring empowerment, Kabeer (1999) highlights various methodological points about some of the key elements: Resources, agency and achievement. Many analysts point the need to go beyond 'access' indicators in order to grasp how 'resources' translate into the realization of choice and have led to a variety of concepts seeking to bridge the gap between formal and effective entitlement to resources, generally by introducing some aspect of agency into the measure. 'Control' is one of the most commonly used ways to measure empowerment. For instance, Goetz and Sen Gupta (1996) argue that if it is hypothesized that control over loan filled activity is in fact a critical 'control' point in the process by which access to loans translates into a range of

valued achievements, then ‘managerial control’ can serve as an indicator of empowerment. Since women are given greater respect within their communities for conforming to its norms, and are penalized if they do not, their own values and behavior are likely to reflect those of the wider community and show a preference for similar practices. Therefore, if empowerment was simply equated with a role in decision-making and ‘control’ over household resources, then having sons and bringing in large dowry would be women empowerment. Yet both dowry and a preference for sons are associated with some of the strongest indicators of gender discrimination on the Indian sub-continent. In terms of measurement of agency, there are both positive and negative measures like women’s mobility in the public domain, their participation in public action, the incidence of male violence and the most commonly used is the agency of decision-making. The decision-making may range from making decisions about expenditure on food and household budget to more important decisions like children’s education, decision of women to work outside the market, when sons and daughters marry, to purchase and sale of major assets. However, different cultures have different distribution of power with men-making decisions in some areas and women taking decisions on some other issues. Kabeer (1999) points that evidence from South Asian studies suggests that, within the family, the purchase of food and other items of household consumption and decisions related to children’s health appear to fall within the women’s arena whereas decisions on education, marriage of children and market related transactions in major assets tends to be the male domain. Therefore, greater care needs to be taken in selecting the decisions which indicate levels of empowerment.

However, decision-making is an art, as reflected in an account of the Kisii in Kenya by Silberschmidt (1992). Women admitted that men should be consulted on all issues but in reality took decisions themselves. He also pointed that it was common practice to avoid open confrontation while still taking their own decision and sometimes even manipulating the men-folk and taking independent decisions. Kabeer points that within the South-Asian context, the re-negotiation of the power relations within the family are about changes in the informal decision-making, with the women opting for private forms of empowerment, which retain the public image of the man intact within the current norms of the society. While measuring achievements, Kabeer cautions on the need to make the distinction between achievement differentials which reflect the differences in choice and those which draw attention to inequalities in the ability to make choice. She draws attention to the fact that improvements in the care of infants is not necessarily evidence for empowerment as ‘care of infants’ came within the women’s pre-assigned jurisdiction, then improvements reflect increased efficiency in pre-assigned role rather than an evidence of empowerment. However, women who lived or had lived with their in-laws, or whose husbands were much older than them, were less authoritative in taking care of their children’s health. Pitt and Khandker (1995) investigated the decision-making outcomes according to the gender of the loaned to infer the gender differences within the household. However, it is difficult to interpret their results that state that loans to men were likely to have a greater fertility-reducing effect than loans to women. Kabeer suggests that this could have been due to the fact that they try to make assumptions about agency on the basis of evidence on relationship between resources and achievements.

## **2.6 Resources of women empowerment:**

1) Legal judiciary, 2) Decision making process, 3) Gender free development process, 4) Eradication of poverty, 5) Agri business, 6) Industries, 7) Education, 8) Health etc.

## **3.0 Empowerment of women in India:**

Women constitute about 46 percent of total population of the country, As per the 2011census; They suffer many disadvantages as compared to men in terms of literacy rates, labour participation rates and earnings. In order to address issues relating to social and economic advancement of women, the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) under the Ministry of Human Resource Development has been implementing various schemes. The national policy of employment of women was adopted in the country in 2001 with the ultimate objective of ensuring women of their rights.

The major strategies of women empowerment include- social empowerment, economic empowerment and gender justice i.e. to eliminate all types of discrimination against women and the girl child. Social empowerment of women is designed to create an enabling environment by adopting various affirmative policies and programmes for development of women, besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services to enable them to realize their full potential. Education, being an important tool for social empowerment of women, specific schemes to provide incentive to promote education, especially amongst girl children and reduce the school dropout rates are being implemented. Two important schemes viz. 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Manla Samakhya' are being implemented by department of education and it is a special effort to stretch the reach of education especially to the girl child. In addition, the Department Of Women and Child Development implements the schemes of 'condensed courses for educated and vocational training and 'Distance Education Programme for Women' supplementing the efforts of Department of Education.

## **4.0 Women empowerment problems:**

1) **Poor health**-The malnutrition results in poor health of women. The women of India are prejudiced from the birth itself. They are not breastfed for long. In the want of a son the woman wants to get pregnant as soon as possible which decreases the caring period to the girl child whereas the male members get adequate care and nutrition. Women are not given the right to free movement that means they cannot go anywhere on their own if they want and they have to take the permission of male member of family or have to take them along. This results in decrease in women's visit to doctor and she could not pay attention to her health, as a result.

2) **Maternal mortality**- The mortality rate in India is almost highest in the world. As females are not given proper attention, which results in the malnutrition and then they are married at an early age which leads to pregnancies at younger age when the body is not ready to bear the burden of child. All this results in complications, which may lead to gynecological problems, which may become serious with time and many ultimately, lead to death.

**3) Ill-treatment-** In India violence against women is a common evil. Not just in remote parts but in cities also women bear the brunt. They are subjected to physical and mental violence. They are the ones who work most but are not given their due. The woman is not safe anywhere neither at home nor at workplace. Every hour a woman is raped in India and every 93 minutes a woman is burnt to death due to dowry problem. There are many laws such as The Hindu marriage Act of 1955, The Hindu Succession Act of 1956, The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, The Hindu Women right to Property Act of 1937, The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, to protect women and punishment is severe but the conviction rate of crime against women is very low in India.

**4) Overworked-** Indian women work more than men of India but their work is hardly recognized as they mainly do unskilled work. Their household chore is never counted as a work, if a woman is working in a field to help her husband; it will also be not counted as a work. A study conducted by Miens in 1986 states that in Andhra Pradesh a woman works around 15 hours a day during the agriculture season whereas a male on an average works for around 7-8 hours.

**5) Lack of power-** In India a large percentage of women does not have power. They cannot take decisions independently not even related to their own life. They have to take permission of male for each and every issue. They don't have any say in important household matters and not in matter of their own marriage.

**6) Marriage-** The family mainly fixes the marriages in India. The scenario in villages is very bad. The girl is not consulted but is told to marry a guy whom her family has chosen for her. They are taught to abide by the whims and fancies of their husbands. Going against the wishes of husband is considered to be a sin. In marriage, husband always has the upper hand. The groom and his parents show as if they are obliging the girl by marrying her and in return they demand hefty dowry.

**7) Dowry-** It's a serious issue. Courts are flooded with cases related to death due to dowry harassment by husband and in laws. In ancient times, women are given 'Stridhan' when they depart from the house of their parents. This amount of money was given to her as a gift which she can use on her and her children but her in-laws do not have any right on that amount this amount was supposed to help the girl in time of need. Slowly this tradition became obligatory and took the form of dowry. Nowadays, parents have to give hefty amount in dowry, the in-laws of their girl are not concerned whether they can afford it or not. If a girl brings large amount of dowry, she is given respect and is treated well in her new home and if she does not bring dowry, according to expectations of her in-laws, then she has to suffer harassment. Due to this evil practice many newlywed women in India have to lose their lives.

**9) Divorce-** The divorce rate in India is not so high compared to western countries but it does not mean that marriages are more successful here. The reason behind low level of divorce rate is that it is looked down by the society. It is regarded as the sign of failure of marriage, especially of women. She is treated as if she has committed some crime by divorcing her husband. In some communities like Muslims women did not have the right

to divorce their husband. They were divorced at just the pronouncement of 'I divorce you' by their husband twice and they could not do anything except to be the mute spectator. Recently Muslim Law Board has given right of divorce to women. After divorce, woman is entitled to get her "Mehr" for herself and her children's sustenance. In Hindu society, women get maintenance for themselves and their children after divorce.

### **5.0 Suggestion for women empowerment:**

Women's self dependence and confidence have increased their excellence and leadership skills as well as high literacy levels and enhanced decision making capacities have encouraged women to step out and achieve status. Women have become self reliant enabling them to have a voice to subdue centuries of oppression and inequality.

Women empowerment has gained considerable significance in the recent past as an area of policy interventions and initiatives. No country can achieve its potential without adequately investing in and developing the capacities of women. Women empowerment is an active process enabling women to realize their identity, potentiality and power in all spheres of their life. Women economic and social empowerment helping women to built their businesses, families and communities. Although men as well as women face difficulties in establishing industrial enterprises, women particularly, have to confront many social and economic barriers to overcome because of century's exploitation and subjugation.

Finally, despite the potential contribution of socio-economic women's empowerment, realizing this contribution is dependent on, rather than a substitute for, adequate welfare provision and feminist mobilization. What is particularly worrying about the current situation is that financially sustainable minimalist socio-economic promoted as the key strategy for poverty alleviation, empowerment in response to ever-decreasing official development assistance budgets. Women and laws guarantying for their equal rights of participation in political process and equal opportunities and rights in education and employment were enacted. But unfortunately, the government sponsored development activities have benefited only a small section of women. The large majority of them are still unaffected by change and development activities have benefited only a small section of women i.e. the urban middle class women. The reasons are well sighted in the discussion part of this research paper.

### **5.1 Conclusion:**

The constitution of India has provided women a significant position in the socio-economic life of the nation. The constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also was the stage to adopt measures of 'positive discrimination' in favor of women for neutralizing the cumulative 'socio-economic', educational and political disadvantage faced by them. The women's movement and wide spared network of various government organization non-government organizations which have strong grass-roots presence and deep insight into women's concerns have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women.

A woman is different by nature. Yet this deference doesn't mean inferiority. Her economic independence counts the most. If a woman is economically dependent, she

becomes dependent almost everywhere. If motherhood is an obstacle in her economic independence, she will either discard it or be a dependent person forever. Both the things are not fair in any case. For development of the latent talents of women, she must have freedom to work besides facilities regarding motherhood, maternity and her responsibilities regarding to her offspring. Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. Legislatures such as Equal Remuneration Act; Constitutional Safeguards such as maternity relief, and other provisions should be strictly followed. Though economic empowerment emancipation could be realized of women's.

Most important thing is that it is the ultimate attitude of men should be changed towards women. As government provides some reservation to backward communities so that they should come up with others, same thing should happen with working women. Working women should get some facilities and relaxation in working time so that they manage both the fronts as well work and prove themselves to be successful women. Government should make some provision in law in this regard otherwise women empowerment will be a distant dream.

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