Women Empowerment in India-Current Scenario

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Abstract--- Women empowerment and economic development in any country are very closely related in one direction, wherein the developmental measures alone can play a major role in driving down the inequality between men and women and empowering women may benefit development in the other direction. Women need to be 'empowered' mainly to narrow down the existing 'gender gap'. Also, the government and policy makers in this field have to create a field regardless of gender so that the differences between women and men are nullified and to power the plugs of gender equality across the nation. This in turn will lead to attain women empowerment at large.

Keywords--- Women, Empowerment, Status, Economic Reforms, Gender Equality.

Empowerment

The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women which was established on 21st June 1946. According to the UN Population Fund, an empowered woman has a sense of self-worth and she can determine her own choices, and has access to opportunities and resources providing her with an array of options she can pursue. She has control over her own life, both within and outside the home and she has the ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, both nationally and internationally. Women's active participation in decision-making facilitates the allocation of public resources to investments in human development priorities, including education, health, nutrition, employment and social protection.

Empowerment can be defined as a "multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important". Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2014, there is proven synergies between women's empowerment and economic, social and environmental sustainability. 'Empower' is mainly to make one powerful or equip one with the power to face the challenge of life to overcome the disabilities, handicaps and inequalities. It is an active multi-dimensional process which would enable women to realise their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It demands a basic change in the social system. The philosophy of women's empowerment needs a total re-hauling of the Indian society. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban/rural), educational status, social status, and age. Policies on women's empowerment exist at the national, state, and local 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.
Women Empowerment

Women empowerment is a prerequisite for creating a good nation. India is the world’s largest democracy and fastest growing economy, home to 1.4 billion people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and cultures. The country has made good advancement on poverty reduction, education, AIDS, HIV etc., An increase in female labour force participation or a reduction in the gap between women’s and men’s labour force participation results in faster economic growth. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, endorsed on 27th July 2015 by 193 UN Member States, provides a foundation for implementing the 2030 Agenda. It states that women’s empowerment is vital for sustainable development as well as for sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) includes the following factors in its definition of women empowerment:

- Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the way in which these relations may be changed [2].
- Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one’s ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one’s life [3].

Women’s security, decision-making power and mobility are three indicators for women’s empowerment. In India, and more so for rural and less educated women, these three indicators are significantly low. In the today’s context, only 30% of the women are capable of decision making at their home, school, office, hospital, industry etc., the caste, creed and social status also restricts the women to play a critical role in India. Now-a-days, in the areas of science and technology, Indian women are advancing, but many barriers still remain which causes a setback for many poor women. These needs to be addressed by both state and central government at various levels so as to build up the courage, confidence Creating opportunities in science education and increasing equality of opportunity in science professions, are the two major crucial elements in the quest to empower Indian women. Though the education and employment environment in the last three decades for women in science and technology has witnessed a positive transformation, the deep-rooted issues in socio-cultural acceptance have not been adequately addressed. As a result, women are still victims of gender disparity in families and at work places.

Economic Development & Women Empowerment

There is a bidirectional relationship of economic development & women empowerment defined as improving the ability of women to access the constituent of development [3]. Economic development can also lead to the empowerment of women by freeing their time. It has a strong correlation between empowerment of women and their legal rights. In India, women rights are not taken much care and hence they face lot of challenges in their day today life. Education and employment together can improve the economic status and social recognition of the women. The proper education plays a greater role in developing the skills and improving the knowledge. In rural and slum areas, lack of education and knowledge ultimately results in poor quality of life of the family. The gap between the rules, policies and women welfare programmes and the real system needs to be narrow down in order to ensure safety and security to the living community. Various schemes designed by the

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Government for women and child welfare are not implemented in all states, districts or villages. By having more women in policy making bodies and more men involved in caring for their home and children, hopefully the norms for an excellent professional life will result for both the genders. One of the biggest challenges to women in the workplace is that allegations of harassment or gender discrimination are often ignored or not taken as seriously as they should be. In fact, in several cases, perpetrators of harassment remain in positions of authority and the system does not adequately punish them for such misdemeanours. In such situations, many women prefer to tolerate behaviour that should otherwise be reported [4].

**Role of Government of India in Women Education**

The inaccessibility of early education in rural areas, restrictions on education of the girl child, inflexibility of the system to allow woman re-enter the workforce after a break, and gender-based inequities at work places are challenges that must continue to be addressed at all levels. Infrastructure development is in part the solution for rural inaccessibility issues, but there is much to be done in transforming societal mindsets so that every human being, irrespective of gender, has an equal opportunity to study science and to build a successful scientific career. To boost women participation in education and work force, awareness about gender inequality and its outcome needs to be increased. Above all, the young girls having big dreams of pursuing higher education are indulging in gender inferiority complex. The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India (GoI) has been proactively addressing the issues for women education at all levels. The MHRD of GoI has devised few programs that facilitate the elementary, secondary and higher education for women. Government of India is committed to achieving universalization of elementary education by 2010 [5]. This entails a special thrust on girls'education as well as greater rigour in planning, targeting and actual implementing the interventions designed. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has limited financial provisions for girls'education in the form of free textbooks and innovations at district levels. The National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL) has been formulated for providing additional support for education of underprivileged/disadvantaged girls at elementary level. The education for Women Equality is another programme of MHRD, GoI which aims to evolve a modality of planning involving government institutions and voluntary agencies reaching out to village women. This program involves continuous dialogue so that the educational quality is not subordinated to the desire for immediate results. This program adopts an area-intensive approach to integrate the existing efforts to provide formal and non-formal schooling, adult education upgradation of educational qualifications through condensed courses and vocational training [6].

The famous woman entrepreneur Dr. Kiran Shaw Mazumdar, identified few key milestones for women aspiring to have their career path in science and engineering:

- Initial entry to science & engineering field
- Getting a degree
- Getting fellowships/awards in science & engineering
- Being accepted to associations and recognized as an achiever
- Breaking into science and technology field as a female entrepreneur
Empowering women in higher education is a high priority for the GoI, which is apparent from the various schemes and programmes the Government undertakes towards promoting science and technical education and bringing equity in science and technical based professions. With the support from GoI in the last few decades, the Indian women has travelled huge distances, from the time when women weren't allowed to move out of the house, to a new beginning of empowering in science. However, there are enormous seen and unseen challenges though, that doesn’t allow the benefits fully reaching to women. One of the main challenges is huge and diverse population in India, wherein GoI’s limited resources cannot cater at the same time. The progress is taking time, as it is focusing as a long term goal to be achieved and beneficial to women community. As India is a vast and diverse nation, policy measures must be flexible to adapt to local conditions. The GoI has promoted S&T schemes for women since 1986, with mixed results. The Department of Science and Technology (DST) of India was the first department to take advantage of gender-based budgeting, introduced in 2005, which helped it to substantially expand its budget to promote women in science and technical field.

**Women & Government Policies**

The gap in policy and practice in women’s empowerment is most visible when it comes to the level and kinds of violence women face in India. Despite the policies, laws, and initiatives by civil society institutions, violence against women in India is widespread and the consequences for perpetrators rarely match the crime. Enforcement of laws and sentencing of perpetrators are long and arduous processes, and the gaps in these processes are further widened by corruption. Another gap in implementing laws and policies on violence against women is the inaccessibility of information on victims’ rights among rural and less educated women. Additionally, social stigma and the fear of abandonment by the family play a big role in women and girls’ ability or inability to access laws and policies to address sexual and physical violence.

**Conclusion**

The women are increasingly entering the workforce particularly, women professionals who are creating phenomenal changes at state and national levels. Also, the higher level education in science, engineering, law, aerospace etc. should reach at larger level to women at par with religion, caste and creed. Moreover, women safety and security needs to be addressed by the Government and ensure at all levels continuously in India. Thus, by combining the right to education with rights within education, women can achieve their rights and become empowered in future.

**References**


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Schlumberger Foundation offers a Faculty for the Future Program Supporting Women in Science in Developing Countries. (http://www.slb.com/about/community/foundation/facultyfuture.aspx)