

Women Empowerment: Source to Economical Development

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ABSTRACT : *This research is based on the qualitative and quantitative approaches towards the women empowerment in the society .Historically, women has been victimized under the patriarchical system worldwide. The research critically explained the need of women empowerment in the society for the socio economical development of the entire society in general as the Mahatama Gandhi advocated that there should be no distinction in equality of status between men and women in society and worked for the removal of many customs that cramped the development of Indian womanhood. Hence this study throws light on the five important dimensions of female empowerment and opportunities, which are economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment, health and well-being, and education attainment. The research study inclusively binds up that empowerment approaches for women therefore is not only about providing services, but also about recognizing their lived realities of multiple layers of discrimination that hinder their access to services.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the simplest of words it is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society. Women want to be treated as equals so much so that if a woman rises to the top of her field it should be a commonplace occurrence that draws nothing more than a raised eyebrow at the gender. This can only happen if there is a channelized route for the empowerment of women. Thus it is no real surprise that women empowerment in India is a hotly discussed topic with no real solution looming in the horizon except to doubly redouble our efforts and continue to target the sources of all the violence and ill-will towards women. 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. Now the women in India enjoy a unique status of equality with the men as per constitutional and legal provision. But the Indian women have come a long way to achieve the present positions. Femininity is manufactured in society. What is world without women? Women bear almost all responsibilities for meeting the basic needs of the family, yet are denied the respect, identity, resource, information and the freedom of action needed to fulfill this responsibility. There are both government and non-government organizations, which have contributed in inspiring initiatives for the empowerment of women. However there exists a wide gap between the goals enunciated in the policies, plans, programmes, and related mechanisms on the one hand and the situational reality of the status of women in India, on the other.

Gandhi was a protagonist of women education. When Gandhi emerged on to the political scenario the percentage of women with basic education was as low as two percent. Only very few could avail education and attend schools. It was in such a dismal milieu that Gandhi took the responsibility of shouldering a social crusade that led to a major re-orientation of the common notion of women in the Indian society. He advocated that there should be no distinction in equality of status between men and women in society and worked for the removal of many customs that cramped the development of Indian womanhood. He considered female sex to be nobler of the two, as it is the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge. He realized that the backwardness of woman was a stumbling block in the path of progress. Education will transform her life by opening up the world to her. It offers her learning and an expanded sense of her own potential, increasing her self-confidence, her social interaction, her earning power and her ability to protect herself against violence, exploitation and ill health. Education plays an important role in enabling girls and women to secure other rights. Change is needed. In this fast moving world women can no longer remain static. Giving importance to education is a smart thing to do if not lakhs of girls and women will continue to be left behind, uneducated, unprotected, economic possibilities restricted, and without a voice to advocate for their families, communities and nation. The first step toward meeting the Millennium Development Goals is to invest in girl's education today with concern, commitment and enthusiasm. It is strategies that will jump-start all other development goals. Despite the commitments, the universal education remains unfulfilled and gender gap persists until today. Man and woman are like the two sides of a coin. Without one the other cannot exist. So education should be given to both.

The price of losing education is very high not only by the girl but also by her family, her society and her country. Her education is the most effective means of combating many of the most profound challenges to human development. Greek warrior Napoleon once said, "Give me a few educated mothers; I shall give you a heroic race." The present study aims to discuss on the five important dimensions of female empowerment and opportunity based on the findings of UNIFEM. They are economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment, health and well-being, and education attainment. Economic participation is an important factor to raise the household income as well as encouraging economic development of the country. Women are most often concentrated in feminised professions where they tend to remain in the lower job categories than men. Hence the economic opportunity of women is slow and shows uneven progress in obtaining a share of managerial positions; those in positions need to make a painful choice between successful career and family. In rural India, women's economic opportunities remain restricted by social, cultural, and religious barriers. Most notably inheritance laws embedded in Hindu and Shariat civil codes continue to marginalize women in the household and the larger community.

Women's economic opportunity in India is a rapidly changing landscape. Women are increasingly entering the workforce and are creating change, but there remain a large number of invisible women workers in unorganized and volatile sectors. However, organizing at the local level, albeit small, is widespread. Implementation of national and state level policies lags behind in ensuring that women workers have equal pay and are free from exploitation. The recognition of women's political equality in the Indian constitution was a radical departure not only from the inherited norms of Indian society but also from political norms. The absence of women from structures of governance inevitably speaks of how resources are allocated without meaningful input from women whose life experience gives a different awareness of the community's needs, concern and interest from that of men. Women should not be deprived of their equality and freedom in shaping and sharing of power. Health and well-being is also a substantial difference between men and women in their access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and reproductive facilities and to issues of safety and integrity. Research on women statistics has found that women are viewed as economic burdens. Hence it is to be taken seriously that women's health affects the household economic well-being and in turn the Indian economy. Indian women have to go miles before they can sleep. Women have to march on the path of gaining participation and influence in politics, families, communities, economy leads to equitable development, stronger families, better services, and better child health and rearing. The majority of women go through their life in a state of nutritional stress i.e. they are anaemic and malnourished. Poverty, early marriage, malnutrition and lack of health care during pregnancy are the major reasons for both maternal and infant mortality.

Women also lead a differential life style. 32% women in India drink alcohol, 57% chew paan masala and 33% women smoke currently. (NFHSIII, 2005-06). What needs to be done is what arises next. Create a conducive or unbiased atmosphere to empower women in higher education otherwise men will try to psychologically disempowerment them. Revise rules and regulations making it more 'women-friendly'. Women should not be considered 'reserve force' but as inheritors of particular skills, craftsmanship which are significant to corporate and educational leadership. Higher Education is a very important sector for the growth and development of human resource, which can take responsibility for social, economic and scientific development of the country. The University Education Commission (1948-49), under the Chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, gave the foundations of the future of Indian Higher Education. Even after 60 years of sustained efforts to develop and expand education, overall literacy rate could not reach 75 percent (2007 estimate), which is a threshold level of literacy needed to ensure speedy socio-economic development of a nation. The literacy rate for women is even less-about 65 percent, compared to many developed and developing countries. According to a recent estimate, about 19% of the people are poor and live below the poverty line. The target date for achieving the goal of providing free and compulsory elementary education for all children aged 6-14 years has had to be shifted ahead several times.

II. ACTIONS TAKEN TO EMPOWER WOMEN

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL :The United Nations Development Programme constituted eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for ensuring equity and peace across the world. The third MDG is directly related to the empowerment of women in India. The MDGs are agreed-upon goals to reduce certain indicators of disparity across the world by the year 2015. The third MDG is centred towards promoting gender equality and empowering women: "Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education by no later than 2015" While India's progress in this front has been brave, there are quite a few corners that it needs to cut before it can be called as being truly revolutionary in its quest for understanding what is women empowerment. As UNDP says: - India missed the 2005 deadline of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education. However, the country has hastened progress

and the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) in primary and secondary education has risen. Given current trends, India is moderately or almost nearly on track. However, as the Government of India MDG Report 2009 notes, “participation of women in employment and decision-making remains far less than that of men, and the disparity is not likely to be eliminated by 2015.” Achieving GPI in tertiary education also remains a challenge. In addition, the labour market openness to women in industry and services has only marginally increased from 13-18 percent between 1990-91 and 2004-05.

HEALTH SAFETY NEEDED: The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country, and is an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned. In its 2009 report, UNICEF came up with shocking figures on the status of new mothers in India. The maternal mortality report of India stands at 301 per 1000, with as many as 78,000 women in India dying of childbirth complications in that year. Today, due to the burgeoning population of the country, that number is sure to have multiplied considerably. The main causes of maternal mortality are:-

- Haemorrhage: 30%
- Anaemia: 19%
- Sepsis: 16%
- Obstructed Labour: 10%
- Abortion: 8%
- Toxaemia: 8%

While there are several programmes that have been set into motion by the Government and several NGOs in the country, there is still a wide gap that exists between those under protection and those not. Poverty and illiteracy add to these complications with local quacks giving ineffective and downright harmful remedies to problems that women have. The empowerment of women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety.

III. CONCLUSION

While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since its 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. Not only is an illiterate women at the mercy of her husband or father, she also does not know that this is not the way of life for women across the world. Additionally, the norms of culture that state that the man of the family is the be-all and end-all of family decisions is slowly spoiling the society of the country. A country is not ‘developed’ either systemically or culturally through neglect; it deprives 50% of its population of its basic needs, livelihood options, access to knowledge and effective political representation, especially based on gender. Empowerment approaches for women therefore is not only about providing services, but also about recognizing their lived realities of multiple layers of discrimination that hinder their access to services.

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