

## Women Empowerment in India: Issues and Challenges

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### Abstract

The term empowerment implies to invest with power. It is defined as the ability to influence the behaviour of others with or without restraint. Education is the key factor for women empowerment, development and welfare. Women constitute almost half of the population in the world, despite they are considered as the subsidiary entities or inferior one in existing male dominated social system. Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. It is not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside. Women empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women rights are at the fore-front of many campaigns worldwide. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women conference at Naroibi in 1985. This paper aims to study the concept, types and obstacles in the process of women empowerment and the role of education in empowering women.

**Keywords:-** Empowerment ,Education ,Obstacles ,Campaigns.

### Introduction

Education is a personality building process and has always being linked with society, it has both a personal and social dimension and like the two sides of the same coins these are inseparable. According to Mahatma Gandhi real education didn't consist in packing the brain with information, facts figures , or in passing examination by reading the prescribed number of books but by developing the right character. In the worlds of Dr Rajendra Prasad "Our Women have very great part to play in the progress of our country as the mental and physical contact of woman with life is much more lasting and comprehensive than that of man". These words of Dr Rajendra Prasad clearly indicate the importance of women in family, society and nation. If we want to develop the world we have to focus on the development of women.

Empowerment literally means making someone powerful, facilitating the weak to attain strength to increase one's self-esteem, to keep someone to be assertive and self-confident to avail someone to confront injustice and oppression and to support someone to fight for their right. Women empowerment is basically the creation of an environment where human can make independent decision on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society. Women education in India has been a major pre-occupation of both the government and civil society as educated women can play a very important role in the development of the country. Women power is crucial to the economic growth of any country. In India this is yet to meet the requirements despite reforms, little has been achieved in the area of women empowerment. Though India could become one of the largest economies in the world, it is being hindered due to lack of women participation.

### **Characteristics of Women Empowerment**

Women empowerment possesses certain characteristics:

1. Women empowerment enables a greater degree of self-confidence and a sense of independence among women.
2. Women empowerment is a process of acquiring power for women in order to understand her rights and to perform her responsibilities towards oneself and others in a most effective way.
3. Women empowerment enables women to organise themselves to increase their self-reliance.
4. Women empowerment provides greater autonomy to women.
5. Women empowerment means women's control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology.
6. Women empowerment abolishes all gender-based discriminations in all institutions and structures of society.
7. Women empowerment means participation of women in policy and decision making process at domestic and public levels.

8. Empowerment of women enables women to realise their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.
9. Empowerment also means equal status to women.
10. Women empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological, political, cultural, familial and economic spheres and at various levels such as individual, group and community.
11. Women empowerment is a process of creating awareness and capacity building.

### **Government Schemes For Women Empowerment**

The Government programmes for women development began as early as 1954 in India but the actual participation began only in 1974. At present, the Government of India has over 34 schemes for women operated by different department and ministries. Some of these are as follows;

1. Rastria Mahila Kosh (RMK) 1992-1993
2. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) October,1993.
3. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) 1995.
4. Women Entrepreneur Development programme given top priority in 1997-98.
5. Mahila Samakhya being implemented in about 9000 villages.
6. Swayasjdha.
7. Swa Shakti Group.
8. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women(STEP).
9. Swalamban.
10. Crèches/ Day care centre for the children of working and ailing mother.
11. Hostels for working women.
12. Swadhar.

13. National Mission for Empowerment of Women.
14. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (1975),
15. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls (RGSEAG) (2010).
16. The Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers.
17. Integrated Child Protection scheme (ICPS) (2009-2010).
18. Dhanalakahmi (2008).
19. Short Stay Homes.
20. Ujjawala (2007).
21. Scheme for Gender Budgeting (XI Plan).
22. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).
23. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM).
24. Prime Minister's Rojgar Yojana (PMRY).
25. Women's Development Corporation Scheme (WDCS).
26. Working Women's Forum.
27. Indira Mahila Kendra.
28. Mahila Samiti Yojana.
29. Khadi and Village Industries Commission.
30. Indira Priyadarahini Yojana.
31. SBI's Sree Shaki Scheme.
32. SIDBI's Mahila Udyam Nidhi Mahila Vikas Nidhi.
33. NGO's Credit Schemes.
34. National Banks for Agriculture and Rural Development's Schemes.

The efforts of government and its different agencies are ably supplemented by nongovernmental organizations that are playing an equally important role in facilitating women empowerment. Despite concerted efforts of governments and NGOs there are certain gaps. Of course we have come a long way in empowering women yet the future journey is difficult and demanding.

### Forms of Empowerment of Women

Women empowerment means women gaining more power and control over their own lives. The empowerment of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important and in itself. In addition, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. If it is to be elucidated beyond the two self explanatory words, 'Women Empowerment' refers to complete emancipation of women from socio-economic shackles of dependency and deprivations. Women empowerment needs to take a high speed in this country to equalize the value of both genders. To bring empowerment really every woman needs to be aware about her rights from her own end. There are different types of women empowerment. These are given below –

**Economic empowerment:-** Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial service, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information. Women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development.

**Political empowerment:-** Establishing mechanisms for women's equal participations and equitable represent action at all levels of the political process and public life in each community and society and enabling women to articulate their concerns and needs and ensure the full and equal participation of women in decision-making process in all spheres of life. Women's reservation Bill or the Constitution (108th Amendment) Bill, is a pending Bill in India which propose to reserve 33% of all seats in the Lok Sabha, the Lower House of Parliament of India, and state legislative assemblies. This Bill has been passed by the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of the Parliament in march 2010. It needs to be passed by the Lok Sabha and at least 50% of all state legislative assemblies, before it is put before the president of India for his approval. In

India, reform movements before and after independence has helped women to gain some power in politics also. They were among the foremost to take active part in politics.

**Educational empowerment:-** Education is considered one of the most important means to empower women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in development process. Education is a key factor for women empowerment prosperity, development and welfare. Women education in India plays a very important role in the overall development of the country. Education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. Education is considered as a milestone for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their lives.

**Social empowerment:-** Social empowerment it is a process to change the distribution of power in interpersonal relations among different people, cultures, activities of the society. Social empowerment refers to the enabling force that strengthens women's social relations and their position in social structures. Social empowerment addresses the social discriminations existing in the society based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion or gender.

**Health empowerment:-** Women's health and safety is another important area. The empowerment of women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety. The health concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country, and are important factors in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. The government of India is aware of the health status of women in the country. The National Health policy 2002 pays scant attention to the health of women, which is considered the ambit of the National Population Policy 2000. Maintaining and expanding education for women and girls will play a critical role in driving continued improvement in female health outcomes. In many poor countries, HIV/AIDS is the leading killer of women of reproductive age. Better educated women and girls are more likely to use contraception, which helps them avoid diseases, and to delay childbirth. However there are alarming concerns where maternal health care is concerned.

**Psychological empowerment:-** The psychological component, on the other hand, would include the development of feelings that women can act upon to improve their condition. This means formation of the belief that they can success in change efforts.

**Legal empowerment:-** Make them aware of the civil rights, exercising the legal rights whenever necessary, preparing and canvassing the documents regarding the legal freedom for women, providing good literacy programs regarding the legal empowerment. In future women empowerment should be there from all dimensions. If there is no woman empowerment, national development is never possible. Therefore, women empowerment is essential for the development of family, society and above all nation.

### **Challenges of Women Empowerment**

In the simplest words, empowering the women means creating such an environment in which they can take independent decisions for their personal development and the development of society in general. Empowerment is the process by which the women achieve increased control and participation in decision making which in turn helps to achieve equal basis with men in various spheres – political, economical, social, cultural and civil. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to strive and adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. The problem essentially is rooted in gender disparity in India. Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last few decades. Social stereotyping and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other manifestations. The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms and practices. Consequently, the access of women to education, health and productive resources is inadequate. Therefore, they remain largely marginalized, poor and socially excluded. There are various issues which poses myriads of challenges towards the vision of Women Empowerment. In social field, women are suppressed domestically and do not enjoy respectable position. They are not regarded as intelligent and powerful enough as men. Politically they do not participate and even where they do as voter or representative, mostly they are used as rubber-stamps in the hands of their male relative. Globalization has presented new challenges for the realization of the goal of women's equality, the gender impact of which has not been systematically evaluated fully.

## Conclusion

Women Empowerment is not merely a slogan but a prerequisite for an optimal capacity for overall development of a family, society, nation and a sustainable world. There is urgent need of reassessing India's affirmative actions, giving fresh impetus on empowering girls and women not only through conventional education but also hand holding for skill acquisition and providing them with equitable economic opportunity. The need of the hour is to identify those loopholes or limitations which are observing the realization of empowerment of women and this initiative must be started from the women folk itself as well as more importantly policy initiative taken by the state and society. Let us take the oath that we want an egalitarian society where everybody whether men or women get the equal opportunity to express and uplift one's well being and well being of the society as whole.

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