

An Analysis of Women Empowerment with Special Reference to India

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Abstract

This Paper deals with "Women Empowerment" a burning issue all over the world. "Women empowerment" and "women equality with men" is a universal issue. 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. Women Empowerment refers 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: freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity, have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace, to make their own choices and decisions, have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities, have equal social status in the society, have equal rights for social and economic justice, determine financial and economic choices, get equal opportunity for education, get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias, get safe and comfortable working environment Women have the rights to get their voices heard. Women population constitutes around 50% of the world population. A large number of women around the world are unemployed. The world economy suffers a lot because of the unequal opportunity for women at workplaces. Women are equally competent. Nowadays, women are even ahead of men in many socioeconomic activities. Women Empowerment leads to decrease in domestic violence. Uneducated women are at higher risk for domestic violence than an educated woman.

Keywords: Economic Growth, Discrimination, Employment, Gender-Based Violence

Introduction

Women's empowerment refers to the process of enabling women to have greater control over their lives and to be able to make their own decisions. This can include empowering women to participate fully in the economy and in the political process, as well as empowering them to make decisions about their own health and well-being. Women's empowerment is important because it can lead to a range of positive outcomes, including increased economic growth and development, improved health and well-being, and greater gender equality. In India, women's empowerment has been a key issue for many years. Despite some progress in recent decades, women in India continue to face significant challenges when it comes to gender equality. These challenges include discrimination, lack of access to education and employment, and gender-based violence. Women's empowerment can have a range of positive impacts on women's lives, including improved economic opportunities, greater control over their own lives, increased political participation, and greater gender equality. By empowering women to participate fully in the economy, women can have access to better paying jobs, which can help to lift them and their families out of poverty. Empowering women can also give them more control over

their own lives, allowing them to make decisions about their own health, well-being, and future, which can lead to increased self-esteem and confidence, as well as improved mental and physical health.

When women are empowered to participate in the political process, they can have a greater say in the decisions that affect their lives and their communities, leading to more inclusive and representative decision-making and policies and programs that better address the needs of women and girls. Women's empowerment can also help to reduce gender inequality and promote greater gender equality, leading to more balanced relationships between men and women and positive impacts on women's health, well-being, and overall quality of life.

“Entrepreneurship is a creative process and innovative response in any field of social, business, agriculture, education and others.” Entrepreneurship is the dynamic process of creating wealth and it is created by individuals one who assume risks in time, equity, career, commitment and to provide value in business. In 20th century, women became more aware of social potentials hidden by social, economic and political constraints. Economic empowerment leads to women empowerment.

It is a concept that stimulates the feeling of creating something new or innovative in order to bring the changes in the economy. The development of entrepreneur is a old phenomenon for developed countries like U.S, U.K and Canada, where 30% of all small companies are owned by women and if it is continue to grow, then the percentage will rise to 50%. Entrepreneurship development is the way to promote self – employment among the educated youth in order to sustain economic development. In present scenario, new generation entrepreneurs have been welcomed to carry out radical and tremendous changes in the business sector. He is a innovator, one who accepts risk or failure and takes initiative to organize and re – organize social and economic mechanism. Women empowerment refers to empowering women to be self – dependent by providing them access to all freedom and opportunities.

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women and also guarding them against all forms of violence. Since women constitute almost 50% of world's population, women empowerment involves building up of society and political environment in order to breathe without fear of oppression, exploitation, discrimination, etc.

Empowerment of women has five components – i) sense of self – worth, ii) right to have and to determine choices, iii) right to have access to opportunities and resource, iv) right to have power to control their own lives, v) ability to influence direction of social change. Women entrepreneur feels difficult in reaching her goal in business, but his empowerment basically depends on gaining more strength in financial, social and cultural aspects.

Review of Literature

- **Dr.RanaZehraMasood (2011)** in his study on “Emergence of women owned businesses in India-an insight” revealed that, India is a male dominated society and women are assumed to be economically as well as socially dependent on male members. The absolute dependence seems to be diluted among the high hand middle class women as they are becoming more aware of personal needs and demanding greater equality.

- **Angayarkanni (2010)** in her study on “Problems of Women entrepreneurs in India”, revealed that equally in education is the key to meeting other requirements for a culture of peace. Women continue to face barriers to economic empowerment and entrepreneurship. These obstacles include discrimination in education, training, hiring, access to credit, the right to own and inherit property, lower levels of pay, promotion for equal work and greater domestic responsibilities for women.
- **N.Manimekala and A.Mohammed Abdullah (2008)** undergone a study to identify the nature, size and scale of operation of women entrepreneurial activities. It reveals that women entrepreneurs are more in small and micro level business and tend to choose products which are mostly used by women rather than engaging in production or service oriented activities. Finally it was found that, women running enterprises had contributed to their empowerment by leading them to be independent, improving education of their children and sending girls outside for education and work. In 18th century, person with capital was differentiated from one who needed capital. The entrepreneur was distinguished from capital provider and innovations during this period are according to changing world.

Challenges Facing Women in India

Discrimination: Women in India often face discrimination in many areas of life, including in the home and in the workplace. This can make it difficult for them to access education and employment opportunities, and can lead to unequal treatment and lower pay.

Lack of access to education and employment: Women in India face significant barriers when it comes to accessing education and employment. For example, data from the World Bank shows that only around 50% of women in India participate in the labour force, compared to around 80% of men. This is due in part to cultural and social barriers that prevent women from participating in the workforce, as well as lack of access to education and training.

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Gender-based violence is a major problem in India. The National Crime Records Bureau reports that in 2021, there were over 428,278 reported cases of violence against women in India. This included incidents of physical and sexual assault, as well as dowry-related violence and female infanticide. The statistics are alarming, with 31,677 reported rapes against women in 2021 alone.

Poverty: Many women in India live in poverty, particularly in rural areas. Poverty can make it difficult for women to access education and employment, and can lead to other challenges such as poor health and malnutrition.

Disparities between urban and rural areas: Women in rural areas of India often face greater challenges when it comes to empowerment. For example, they may have less access to education and health care, and may be more isolated and vulnerable to gender-based violence.

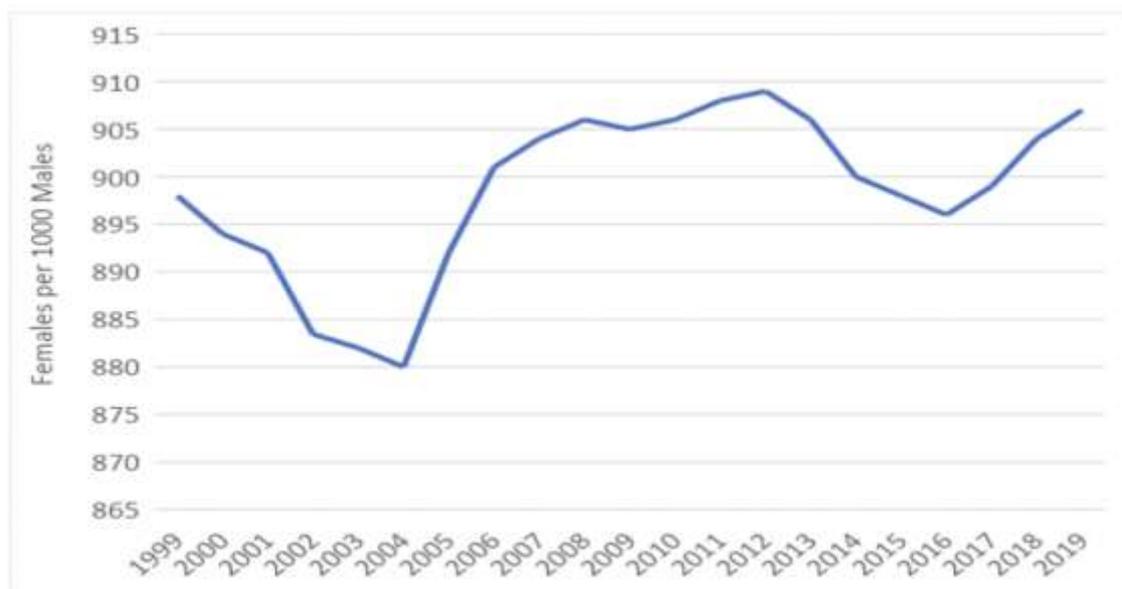
Indian Women Empowered

As the world celebrates International Women’s Day, let us take this occasion to reflect on the progress made by India regarding women’s empowerment and gender equality. While it might not have been their holy grail, several governments over the years have worked towards issues pertaining to reducing gender inequality, violence against women, improving the sex ratio at birth, health, and education, thanks to decades of women’s activism and the feminist movements. Today we see some signs of positive changes in the status and position of women but there are many challenges, especially in the wake of the pandemic.

Scripting Success

The country has registered significant improvements in closing gender gaps in education. According to the latest edition of the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report Index (2022), India has a score of 1 for the sub-categories of primary education and tertiary education enrolment under the vertical ‘Educational Attainment’. This implies the convergence between genders in primary and tertiary education enrolment. Concerted governmental efforts at the Union and state level, such as Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyaan (2001), the Right to Education Act (2009), the mid-day meal scheme (1995), and BetiBacho, BetiPadhao campaign (2015), and myriad scholarship schemes for the girl child, have at least captured public imagination at some levels. However, gender gaps when it comes enrolment into different streams of higher education still continues.

From having a highly skewed sex ratio at birth owing to the social and cultural devaluation of females and the phenomenon of strong ‘son preference’, India has improved its sex ratio at birth from 898 females per 1000 males in 1999 to 907 females per 1000 males in 2019. While gender balance is still not in sight and sex-selective abortion continues to take place, we must acknowledge the change that has transpired in a society rife with instances of female foeticide, infanticide, and neglect.



As per the latest estimates from the report of the Office of the Registrar General of India, female life expectancy at birth improved by 22.9 years from 47.8 years in 1971 to 70.7 years in 2014-18. While the overall life expectancy of Indian women is ~2.7 years higher than men, looking at the female

advantage in life expectancy at birth across the world, we can't say Indian women are still near their biological potential, thus indicating a persisting gender bias in health.

India also improved its position marginally in the Gender Inequality Index (GII) in 2021 (0.490) from 2020 (0.493). The GII measures inequality in the achievement between women and men across three dimensions – reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market. Despite the country lowering gender inequality over the years, the achievement is not outstanding even compared to its immediate neighbours.

Female education has translated into substantive and qualitative changes pertaining to the labour market, socio-economic status, and autonomy for females. Exploration of these questions results in a mixed bag. The gender gap in asset ownership and lifetime earning remains a major concern. According to National Family Health Survey data, only 42.3% and 31.7% of females said they own a house and land alone or jointly, respectively. While 51.2% of women respondents agreed to have autonomy in financial matters, most of them did not have any autonomy in selecting their life partner. This is not surprising since most marriages continue to occur within the matrix of caste, religion, and class. In 2021, India's female labour force participation was 23%, one of the lowest in the world and well below the world average of 47%.

The COVID-19 crisis has further hit the already plummeting graph. Much of women's work is primarily undercounted, eclipsing their accurate participation and contribution to the economy. Notwithstanding, a U-shaped relationship has been observed between female education and labour market participation, implying the higher involvement of lower and higher-educated women in the labour market. In contrast, middle-educated women seem to be crowded out due to unfavourable and underpaid labour market conditions. Further, despite having one of the most generous maternity leaves globally, there is no national-level provision of parental leave for fathers, which reinforces traditional gender roles and the male breadwinner model of family.

Despite significant gains in the 2019 general elections, women's political representation remains dismal at less than 15%. While women's political representation has increased at the local levels with the introduction of gender quota in politics, the Women's Reservation Bill aiming to reserve 33% seats for women at the Union and state level has been reduced to a mere poll promise due to a lack of political will. Technology and innovation for gender equality', which is crucial for women's empowerment, it is vital to note that only 54% of women own mobile phones, and internet accessibility is comparatively lesser. Thus, bridging digital gender gaps needs more effort. Despite efforts to tackle gender-based violence against women, 32% of women face intimate partner violence, which has been reported to have been exacerbated due to COVID-19-led lockdowns resulting in a shadow pandemic. While education and basic health indicators have improved, financial and personal autonomy eludes most women. The former is indiscriminately promoted but it also must be remembered that these are factors that also enhance women's marriage market prospects. However, within the private realm, rigid gender roles are practised and promoted, and women's socio-economic autonomy is discouraged and seen with suspicion. To truly empower women and reduce gender inequality, we need to value and invest in girls and women not merely as a means to some end but as an end in themselves.

Conclusion

From international level to grass-root level, from government organization to non-government organization everyone is fighting hard to reduce the gender gap and to bring women empowerment in the world. However, this can only be achieved if from the very basic we nurture our children without any gender bias during their developmental stage by providing appropriate training, education, awareness, building self-confidence to women and girls, also providing them free reign to expand their choices, strengthen their voices and transforming power to claim their true right in the society, community and in their own lives.

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