Women Empowerment in India

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Abstract: This paper attempts to analyze the women empowerment in India. Today the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. But practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. We observe in our day to day life how women become victimized by various social evils. Women empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women’s ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. The study is based purely on secondary sources. The study reveals that women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by government. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. The study concludes by an observation that access to education, employment and change in social structure are only the enabling factors to women empowerment.

Key Words: Women Empowerment, Education, Health, Socio-Economic.

Introduction

Women in India constitute about 50 percent of the total population and comprise one third of the labour force. It is, therefore, important that when considering the economic development of this segment of the population, due attention is given to their socio-economic empowerment. The empowerment is one of the key constituent elements of poverty reduction, and as a primary development assistance goal. The promotion of women’s empowerment as a development goal is based on a dual argument, that social justice is an important aspect of human welfare and is intrinsically worth pursuing, and that women’s empowerment is a means to other ends.

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Women’s empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location, 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, and gender based violence and political participation. However, there are significant gap between policy advancement and actual practice at the community level.

Women empowerment generally has five components: firstly, women’s sense of self worth; secondly, their right to have the power of control their own lives, both within and outside home; and lastly, their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a just social and economic order nationally, internationally and universally. Educational attainment and economic participation are they key constituents in ensuring the empowerment of women. The economic empowerment of women is a vital element of strong economic growth in any country. Empowering women enhances their ability to influence changes and to create a better society. Other than educational and economic empowerment, changes in women’s mobility and social interaction and changes in inter-household decision-making are necessary. They equal to men in all aspects. Women are more perfectionists in the power to create, nurture and transform. Today, women are emerging as leaders in growing range of fields.

Review of Literature

Review of literature helps the researcher not only in understanding the issues involved but also in planning and execution of the experiences of others. Further, the knowledge of possible gap of empirical research provides clue to plug those gaps to the extent possible which in turn helps in making empirical research socially more meaningful. The main objective of the study is to know the women empowerment in India. So, we briefly review some of the earlier studies on women empowerment, which would help in present study and brief review of some studies, is given below.

E.Duflo (2011) has discussed women’s empowerment and economic development. The study argues that the inter relationship of the empowerment and development are probably too weak to be self sustaining and that continuous policy commitment to equally for its own sake may be needed to bring about between men and women
H. Subrahmanyam (2011) compares women education in India at present and past. Author highlighted that there has a good process in overall enrolment of girl student in schools. The term empowers means to give lawful power or authority to act. It is process of acquiring some activities of women.

K. Sethuraman (2008) analyses the role of women empowerment and domestic violence in child growth and under nutrition in a tribal and rural community in South India. This research paper explores the relationship between women’s empowerment and domestic violence, maternal nutritional status and the nutritional status and growth over six months in children aged 6 to 24 months in a rural and tribal community. This longitudinal observational study undertaken in rural Karnataka.

M. Bhavani Sankara Rao (2011) has highlighted that health of women members of SHG have certainly taken a turn to better. It clearly shows that health of women members discuss among themselves about related problems of other members and their children and make them aware of various government provisions specially meant for them.

M. Doepke and M. Tertilt (2011) has analysis does female empowerment promote economic development? This study is an empirical analysis suggesting that money in the hands of mothers benefits children. This study developed a series of non cooperative family bargaining models to understand what kind of frictions can give rise to the observed empirical relationship.

Thus, from the above review of literature it is evident that quite a number of studies have already been undertaken on women empowerment and related issues. The present study in this respect is an attempt to highlight the women empowerment in India.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to analyse the women empowerment in India. With this following is supportive objective:

1. To know the need of women empowerment.
2. To assess the awareness of women empowerment in India.
3. To analyze the factors influencing the empowerment of women.
4. To study the government schemes for women empowerment.
5. To offer useful suggestions for women empowerment.

Research Methodology

This paper is basically descriptive in nature. In this paper an attempt has been taken to analyze the women empowerment in India. The study based on secondary sources according to the need of study.

Need for Women Empowerment

In this contemporary world, women need to gain the same amount of power that men have. Now, it is time to forget that men are the only holders of power. In India, women are still facing different obstacles in male-dominated cultures. The things are related to women’s status and their future. However, I believe that Indian women are slowly getting empowerment in the sectors like education, politics, the work force and even more power within their own households. The worth of civilization can be arbitrated by the place given to women in the society. Today, women are busy running in the presidential campaign. The work force is covered with intellectual women who currently hold the CEO positions at large companies which were never held by Indian women in long ago. In our country, women have reached a long way eventually and have discovered a new path for them to come. Women rights are human rights. The concept of feminism is very vogue. Feminist usually deals out balky attention. Women’s right and changes effort to win equality for women have containing women’s suffrage, feminism, women’s property rights, equal opportunity in work and education, and equal pay. Now, the future of women is seeking out. More, we have come across a more image of gender differences. Each year, we notice that the headlines as “Girls outshine boys” in CBSE, ICSE and State Board results as well. It arrests us showing that girls are now more confident of getting better-paid professional jobs than their flagging male counterparts. Clearly, there is an excellent amount of reason for the girls to be more confident than boys and this is because of their remarkable academic feat around the nation. This achievement of girls is an absolute reversal of what would have been expected a generation ago. This is likely to steer to higher-income jobs. The empowerment is an aid to help women to achieve equality with men or, at least, to reduce gender gap considerably.

Without empowerment certain social roles cannot be performed. Women play a distinct role in the economic development. She is the chief
architect of family, the first teacher; suoolier of labour power and by playing main role in the development of agriculture, industry, service sector, socio-culture etc. creates a civilized society. In the visible and invisible form women contribute for economic development. The nature has given the biological power of reproduction especially to the women. She can create social, cultural and economic wonders. Even then the socio-economic status of women is so poor. Socio-economic status of women labour is so poor. Women labourers in India are illiterates. Hence, her status should be improved; she should be physically, mentally, economically, socially, politically and culturally strengthened so that the country can make use of hidden potential power for the economic development.

**Ways to Empower Women**

1. Changes in women’s mobility and social interaction
2. Changes in women’s labour patterns
3. Changes in women’s access to control over resources
4. Changes in women’s control over decision making
5. Through providing education
6. By self employment and self help groups
7. Providing minimum needs like nutrition, health facility, sanitation, housing etc.
8. Other than society should change the mentality towards the word women.
9. Encouraging women to develop in their field they are good at and make a career.

**Reason for the Empowerment of Women**

Today we have noticed different acts and schemes of the central government as well as state government to empower the women of India. But in India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. A few women are engaged in services and other activities. So, they need economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men. Other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. According to 2001 census, rate of literacy among men in India is found to be 76% whereas it is only 54% among women. Thus, increasing education among women is very important in empowering them. It has also noticed that some of women are too weak to work. They consume less food but work more. Therefore, from the health point of view, women folk who are to be weaker are to be made stronger. Another problem is that workplace harassment of women. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment of women. For the reason, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. To sum up, women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

**Challenges to Women Empowerment**

There are several constraints that check the process of women empowerment in India. Social norms and family structure in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. One of the norms is the continuing preference for a son over the birth of a girl child which in present in almost all societies and communities. The society is more biased in favour of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities. The root cause of this type of attitude lies in the belief that male child inherits the clan in India with an exception of Meghalaya. Women often internalize the traditional concept of their role as natural thus inflicting an injustice upon them. Poverty is the reality of life for the vast majority of women in India. It is another factor that poses challenge in realizing women’s empowerment. There are several challenges that are plaguing the issues of women’s right in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefits the empowerment of women in India.

- **Education**: while the country has grown from leaps and bounds since 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. The gender bias is in higher education, specialized professional trainings which hit women very hard in employment and attaining top leadership in any field.

- **Poverty**: Poverty is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradication of poverty should be a national goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy. Due to this, women are exploited as domestic helps.

- **Health and Safety**: The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the well being of a country and are an important factor in gauging the
empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned.

- **Professional Inequality:** This inequality is practiced in employment and promotions. Women face countless handicaps in male customized and dominated environs in government offices and private enterprises.

- **Morality and Inequality:** Due to gender bias in health and nutrition there is unusually high mortality rate in women reducing their population further especially in Asia, Africa and China.

- **Household Inequality:** Household relations show gender bias in infinite small but significant manners all across the globe, more so, in India e.g. sharing burden of housework, childcare and menial works by so called division of labour.

**Government Schemes for Women Empowerment**

The government programmes for women empowerment 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:

2. Mahila Samridhi Yojana, 1993
3. Indira Mahila Yojana, 1995
5. Mahila Samakhya being implemented in about 9000 villages.
6. Swayasjdhara
7. Swa Shakti Group
8. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women.
10. Day care centres for the children of working and ailing mother.
11. Hostels for working women.
12. Swadhar.
16. The Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers.
17. Integrated Child Protection Scheme, 2009-2010.
18. Dhanalakshmi, 2008
19. Short Stay Homes.
21. Scheme for Gender Budgeting.
22. Integrated Rural Development Programme.
23. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment.
24. Prime Minister’s Rojgar Yojana.
25. Women’s Development Corporation Schemes.
27. Indira Mahila Kendra.
28. Mahila Samiti Yojana.
30. Indira Priyadahini Yojana.
31. SBI’s Sree Shakti Scheme.
32. SIDBI’S Mahila Udyam Nidhi Mahila Vikas Nidhi.
33. NGO, s Credit Schemes.
34. National Banks for Agriculture and Rural Development Schemes.

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

**Findings of the Study**

1. Globalization, Liberalization and other socio-economic forces have given some respite to a large proportion of the population. However, there are still quite a few areas where women empowerment in India is largely lacking.
2. There needs to be a sea-change in the mind set of the people in the country. Not just the women themselves, but the men have to wake up to a world that is moving towards equality and equity. It is better that this is embraced earlier than later for our own good.
3. There are several government programmes and NGO’s in the country, there is still a wide gap that exists between those under protection and those not.
4. Poverty and illiteracy add to theses complications, the empowerment of women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety.
5. Empowerment of women could only be achieved if their economic and social
status is improved. This could only be possible only by adopting definite social and economic policies with a view of total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings.

6. In order to create a sustainable world, we must begin to empower women.

Suggestions

1. The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grassroots problem. Hence, education for women has to be paid special attention.

2. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging weaker sections about their rights.

3. Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in the society.

4. Strict implementation of programmes and acts should be there to curb the mal-practices prevalent in the society.

Conclusion

Thus, the attainment in the field of income and in educational front, the scenario of women empowerment seems to be comparatively poor. 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.

Women represent half the world’s population and gender inequality exists in every nation on the planet. Until women are given the same opportunities that men are, entire societies will be destined to perform below their true potentials. The greatest need of the hour is change of social attitude to women. It is essential as their thought and their value systems lead the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation. The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the mainstream of development. Women empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed income and property so that they may stand on their feet and build up their identity in the society. The empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

References


