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SOCIAL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Sabhya Kaushal¹

“Once a woman is on the move, the whole family moves, then the village moves, at last, the nation also moves.”

- Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, 1951

INTRODUCTION

From the inception of the time, women have lived a life of deprivation, discrimination, and bias. They are constantly exposed to threats such as abuse, molestation, rape, poverty, malnutrition, ill-treatment. Women have been suffering for ages from their protectors i.e., brothers, fathers, uncles, neighbours, and others from childhood; boyfriends and lovers from youth; husband and in-laws during the married life; and finally from sons in their old age. The patriarchal society has inflicted unspeakable injuries upon women by subjugating them at different stages in their lives. Thus, Empowerment of women is essential for boosting the social, economic, and political status of women.

MEANING AND DEFINITION OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women Empowerment can be defined as a “multi-dimensional social process which helps people to get control over their own lives. It is a process that gives power to people, to use in their own lives, in their communities, and in their respective society, by acting on the issues which they mark as important”.²

Women empowerment means improving the ability of a woman to access different sectors of development-in particular, education, health, economy, and politics. Empowerment enables a person to have the ability to be independent, to do everything on their own.

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² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405883116300508#bib22>

WHY THERE IS A NEED FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT?

The need for women empowerment comes from the position of dis-empowerment. Women have a long history of ill-treatment all over the world. Whether a country is developed or not, women have been the constant subject of discrimination. Discrimination and domination against women hold no boundaries. It arises out of society's inability to accept the fact that men and women should be equal. To start with there are a lot of stereotypes and misconceptions in society, which gives rise to misogyny in society. Women are considered incapable of making decisions for themselves and their families, they have always been confined to four walls of the house where their only job was to cook food, clean house, and raise children. No rights were given to them. They are considered as the weaker sex. Many people think that certain jobs need to be done by men only and women should be prohibited even from pursuing education. Prohibiting women from getting an education means a violation of their human rights. All these factors are a serious deterrent to development and encourage the need for empowerment.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT ACCOMPLISHES THE GOAL OF GENDER EQUALITY

Ironically, India is acknowledged as a leading economy, one of the largest democracies, and an emerging superpower but after nearly 73 years of independence, it is still battling for equivalent rights for people. Gender equality is considered to exist when all genders have access to equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. The success of a nation depends upon both men and women, solely focusing on women for gender parity or just creating a balanced representation of all the genders in an institution's staff, will not work. Promoting gender equality and empowering women depends on engaging men and women in strategy and program design and implementation. Encouraging people to live as they please, without concern for limiting and regressive gender roles has been a major cause that the feminist movement is fighting for. Sexual violence against women will not vanish until male companions, and victims are partners in solving the problem. Women's perspectives, expertise, and priorities will not be considered and heard until their male counterparts in societies and communities' value and seek their views. Likewise, the strategies which promote gender equality succeed only when the focus is on the needs and priorities of women.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

Women's participation in greater numbers in the social, as well as in the political domain, is indispensable to make the social and political institutions more demonstrative. It works as an instrument for the empowerment of women and contributes to gender-sensitive decision-making. Social empowerment strengthens women's social relations and position in the social structure. "Education" is the best tool for social empowerment.

"I am not only a passionate advocate of this belief but stand before you as proof of it too. Universities are great hubs of ideas, but they are not ivory towers. They are part of the society and thus remain engaged with social change³,"

-President Ram Nath Kovind

One of the most important factors to ensure gender equality and equal empowerment is Education. Without education for all children including girls, gender equality will be a dream and therefore, Enrolment of girls in school will lead to reducing gender parity. Educated women will not only promote education but can also guide other children. Moreover, it can help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and the growth of the population. The health and safety issues of women are of supreme consideration as it is an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. A woman needs to be physically healthy to take the challenges of equality, to confront their roles, and transform their lives. Thus, Women must have access to comprehensive, affordable, and quality health care.

By joining politics, the women usually feel empowered. It is considered as a stepladder for moving upward in the society⁴. It is a path of empowerment for the deprived and the powerless. Many people discover opportunities to change and influence public decisions and to bring them in their favour by political participation, they can also safeguard their personal-interest and legitimate rights and promote justice for the common men. In politics, women have very limited decision-making power. Women's participation in politics and various decision-making bodies is a tool for gender empowerment. It is fundamental to the accomplishment of the goals of equality, development, and peace." Without political participation it would be very difficult for women to increase effectiveness, capacity,

³ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/universities-great-hubs-of-ideas-but-not-ivory-towers-says-president-kovind/story-eqNOJJYJa0qAALoEvRuMXO.html>

⁴ http://americanscholarspress.us/journals/IFST/pdf/IFOTS-2-2013/IFOTS_v9_n2_art3.pdf

favouring the existing power structure, and patriarchal ideology. Active participation of women in decision-making will help the overall quality of governance in terms of boosting accountability and transparency, reducing corruption and exploitation, and protecting the marginalized sections and poor. Women's representation in the legislature is very poor in India. So, to increase women's representation in legislative and State Assemblies and in-state councils' necessary measures should be taken.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

“You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women”

– *Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru.*

Women's economic empowerment is the most significant factor contributing to equality between women and men. Even though India is one of the fastest-growing countries in the world the women's labour force participation rate is very low this is due to lack of employment opportunities. Women's participation in the labour force will decline discrimination and increase the empowerment of women. The economic development of a country substantially depends upon women's access and control over economic opportunities and benefits. The research also found out that when people take part in the financial system, they become more competent to bring off household, social risks, can start or spend in a new business, and can fund huge expenditures whatever they want. Despite some government efforts, the economic opportunities and participation of Indian women are still low. The main reason is male-oriented development projects while women are excluded from the formal employment sector. Also, inadequate access to the right to education has deprived them of employment opportunities. Economic empowerment enhances women's mobility, social interaction, and participation in decision making. Financial development exclusively gives a significant impact on reducing inequality between men and women. It is evident that countries with a higher level of gender equality, tend to have better education, better health, and better healthcare facilities, faster economic growth, higher per capita income, and higher international competitiveness. Furthermore, women's economic power plays a significant role in achieving a pillar of sustainable development. For economic empowerment training programs for women in agribusiness and other allied occupations should be expanded to benefit women workers in the agriculture sector. Through jobs and businesses women can earn money and it will enable them to become the 'bread earners' of the family, with strong

economic independence. Equal wages and recognition for equal work should be provided to elevate their status in society.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN IN INDIA

There is no doubt that there is a great change in the status of women. The constitution of India has given women equal rights to men thereby putting her at par with men socially, politically, and economically.

- ❖ Article 14 equality before law amongst all the person
- ❖ Article 15(1) there must be no discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Whereas there are some special provisions has been made by the state in regard to women and children Article 15(3)
- ❖ Article 16 - There must be equal opportunities for employment or an appointment in any office in the state to all the citizens of India.
- ❖ Article 39(a) - State to direct its policy towards securing the equal right for men and women to adequate means of livelihood.
- ❖ Article 39(d) - State to direct policy towards securing the principle of equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- ❖ Article 42- Directs the state to make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

To empower women, The Government of India has made the following schemes for women, launched by different governmental departments and ministries:

1. Rastriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) 1992-1993
2. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) October 1993.
3. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) 1995.
4. Women Entrepreneur Development program has given top priority in 1997-98.
5. Mahila Samakhiya Project which is being implemented in 9000+ villages.

6. Swa Shakti Group.
7. Support for Training and Employment Programme (STEP) for Women.
8. National Mission for Empowerment of Women.

CONCLUSION

Women in the 21st century have proved that they are no less than men in any field. Women in India have held high positions from the beginning from Prime Minister to astronauts as Razia Begum, Kalpana Chawla, Kiran Bedi, Indra Gandhi, Mary Kombucha, Saina Mirza, etc. However, still there are numbers of women who are powerless and who get somewhat lower status than men in our society, despite all the rights provided by the constitution. Women's empowerment will bring positive reforms in society which will have a direct effect on the growth of a country. Women empowerment will also lead to a decrease in cases of domestic violence as uneducated women are at a higher risk for domestic violence than an educated woman, hence, first and foremost priority should be given to education and awareness.

For women empowerment, different programs need to be conducted to raise awareness among women about their rights, particularly those belonging to the weaker sections. Campaigns to fight discrimination and violence against women are an important part of Women Empowerment.

Women empowerment is the best way to solve all the problems faced by developing countries. An environment must be created whereupon women have complete freedom for decision making and have access to social, political as well as economic upliftment of the country with a sense of equality.