

Women Empowerment in India: Barriers and Measures to Empower

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Abstract: Men as well as women are the two main pillars of the society. A woman makes a family perfect, a family makes a good home and a good home makes a good society. In our society women specially from rural areas do not enjoy their rights properly. So it is very important to empower women for the development of the society as well as the nation. Women Empowerment is an ability of women to challenge and combat their oppression and enjoy their rights properly. The objectives of the study are to discuss the barriers of achieving women empowerment and to discuss some measures to empower women. It is a qualitative study. Data have been collected from different secondary sources. In India gender inequality, illiteracy, child marriage, inequality in wages, physical abuse in workplace, dowry, rape, trafficking, caste system, child labour, female high dropout rate, gender biasness etc. are some of the major issues of women empowerment. There is an urgent need to improve the social and economical status of women. Some ways to empower the women are providing proper education, self-employment, increasing self-confidence level, arranging for proper nutrition, health and sanitation, stopping gender based violence. Besides this government has taken some policies and programme for the women.

Key Words: Women Empowerment, Barriers of Empowerment, Measures to Empower.

1. INTRODUCTION:

According to Swami Vivekananda 'There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly with one wing'. No society or nation can develop without the advancement of women. In ancient Indian culture, goddesses were worshipped as Indian ladies. In many spheres of life throughout the Vedic era, women enjoyed great status with men. In the middle ages, women's position began to decline. So many Indian reformers, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Jyotirao Phule, fought for the development of women's status while India was ruled by the British.

The empowerment of women is important for the development of society and the nation. The Masculine-Feminine Goddess, also known as "Ardhanareeshwara," is mentioned in Hindu scriptures. Now is the time for our culture to achieve that balance between the masculine and feminine. According to Indian history and culture, female goddesses have been worshipped since the earliest days. Together with Rani Lakshmi Bai, they all played a major role in the development of the country, including Matangini Hazra, Savitribai Phule, Mother Teresa, and Kalpana Chawla.

In general, women's empowerment refers to a woman becoming more powerful in social, economic, emotional, and political spheres. The five elements listed below make up the United Nations' concept of women's empowerment:

- women's self-worth;
- their right to make and exercise choices;
- their access to opportunities and resources and
- their right to the freedom to live their own lives;
- Capacity to choose the direction of social change.

The term 'women empowerment' must be familiar for everyone. The term 'women empowerment' describes activities taken to improve women's social position and remove all gender inequalities. It has to do with the adoption of numerous policy measures that will empower women on the economic and social levels.

In order to empower women, one must enhance their sense of self-worth. This means encouraging and helping them in identifying their ability to recognize their weaknesses and overcome them. Women who are empowered in society act on their own interest.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once remarked, "To awaken the people, it is women who must be awakened; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves". So there is a greater need of bringing women into mainstream of development of India. At every level of society, including social participation, political participation, economic productivity, and access to education, Indian women face discrimination and marginalized. Therefore, the problem might be stated as- 'Women Empowerment in India: Barriers & Measures to Empower.'

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the study are-

Obj. 1: To discuss the barriers to achieving women's empowerment.

Obj. 2: To discuss some measures to empower women.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Panda, D. (2017) had investigated on Women Empowerment in India: Rational and Present state. He found that women empowerment was not only necessary fact for our country but also it was essential for sustainable development of a nation. So let's start empowering women right away for our future security.

Shettar, R. M. (2015) in her article entitled A Study on Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment in India described that empowerment of women could only be achieved if their economic and social status was improved. This could be possible only by adopting definite social and economic policies with a view of total development of women and to make them realized that they had the potential to be strong human beings.

Khatri, R. (2016) in her study The Role of Education towards Women Empowerment in India focused on the impact of literacy and education on empowerment of women as well as the suggestion to improve the changes that need to be considered for women empowerment and economic development.

Suresh, P. & Sivakumar, T. (2017) had studied on Women Empowerment in India- A Changing Scenario They observed that empowerment of women was essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones in the society. It was the process of guarding them against all forms of violence.

Das, T.K. (2021) has investigated on A Study on Women Empowerment and Its Challenges in Assam found that the major cons of women empowerment in India and Assam were lack of quality education lack of employment opportunities for women, social barriers, and negative attitude of society towards women empowerment.

Umasankar, T., & Mahajan, R. (2022) in their study Barriers to Women Empowerment in the Context of Epistemological Diversity found that balancing the career and family life becomes a significant barrier for women empowerment.

5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

It's true to say that women's empowerment is now a serious challenge. In order to choose for their needs and expectations, women should have the freedom, faith, and self-worth. Women's full potential is not recognized since they are paid less and treated in households like slaves and cooks. In order to resolve such issues and give women a voice in Indian society, women must be empowered in that country. Women must have the right to empower. Their rights to contribute to society, the economy, education, and politics should be balanced. They are permitted to pursue higher education and are provided the same treatment as males. So it is important to know the barriers to achieving women's empowerment and also the measures to empower women in the Indian context. Under the circumstances, this study is significant.

6. METHODOLOGY:

This study is qualitative in nature. It has been done on the basis of the secondary sources of data like books, research journals, news paper articles and different websites. Collected data were analyzed qualitatively.

7. DISCUSSION:

Barriers to achieving women's empowerment-

Malala Yousafzai said 'We cannot all succeed if half of this (women) are held back'. So it is important to increase and improve the social, economical, political and legal strength of women. It will be possible when the country will provide proper education to women.

Women in Indian society usually face a variety of challenges and difficulties. These are some of the barriers to achieving women's empowerment.

- **Gender inequality:** It is a social process in which individual are not treated equally on the basis of their gender. It affects various aspects of life like culture, education, employment and politics. In Indian society specifically in rural and tribal areas women are mostly deprived from their rights. Now a days, globally it is a significant problem. According to World Economic Forum's report (2022) India has ranked 135 out of 146 countries with the score of 0.629. In this case Women Empowerment is so relevant. It helps the women to achieve their knowledge and skills to improve their socio-economic status.
- **Illiteracy:** It is a state where people are unable to read and write anything. It is one of the major obstacles of women empowerment. Illiteracy makes women unaware about their rights. According to National Statistical Office (NSO) data (2021) **India's average literacy rate is 77.70%** with literacy rates of 84.40% for men and 71.50% for women.
- **Poverty:** Women's empowerment can be greatly affected by poverty. Women who are living in poverty may encounter several obstacles which prevent them from achieving their full potential and participating in decision-making processes.
- **Child marriage:** Child marriage raises a lot of issues, such as a girl's overall development. It often leads to negative consequences such as limited education and economic opportunities, increased risk of domestic violence, and poor health outcomes. So, early marriage of girl child significantly affects women empowerment process. According to UNICEF (2020), 27% of girls in India were married before the age of 18 years. This tendency can be seen more among the girls of rural and tribal areas.
- **Gender-based violence:** Gender-based violence consists of many categories such as physical, mental, and economic harm that is done in public or in private sphere (UNHCR, 2021). Empowering women is an important strategy for reducing gender-based violence. When women understand their rights properly, then they can protect themselves against violence. In 2022, the National Commission for Women (NCW) received approximately 31,000 complaints of crimes against women.
- **Health related Issues:** There are so many health-related issues that can impact women empowerment. Malnutrition, a lack of maternal health, diseases like AIDS, and breast cancer are related to this issue. The women in rural and poor families in India mostly suffer from malnutrition, a high death rate, and different medical problems. Most of them are neglected, ignored, and exploited. Those health-related issues have played a crucial role in promoting women's empowerment.
- **Patriarchy:** Patriarchy refers to a social system in which men hold more power and authority than women in all aspects of life. On the other hand, women's empowerment refers to the process of giving women more power, rights, and opportunities in society. Through proper education, women can realize their equal access to resources and opportunities and manifest their innate potential.
- **Physical abuse in the workplace:** It is a serious matter in the field of women's empowerment that can have a significant impact on women's physical and emotional health, as well as their work skills. Women working in private sectors such as IT, educational institutions, and hospitals are the most affected by this problem. According to a survey conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2018, about one out of three women in India have experienced sexual harassment at the workplace.
- **Lack of representation:** Women's empowerment and a lack of political representation are two important issues that have an impact on women's ability to engage fully in society and enjoy their rights. Despite progress in other fields, women are often underrepresented in political leadership roles, both nationally and globally. It is difficult for them to raise their voices and enjoy their rights properly. According to the UN Women in Politics (2019) report, India came in at number 149 in terms of the participation of women in the executive branch and Parliament. In India, women's representation still make up little less than 15% of the Lok Sabha (2019).
- **Inequality in wages:** When women are paid less than males for performing the same work, this is referred to as unequal pay. According to the Monster Salary Index (MSI, March, 2019) , Indian Women earn 19% less money than men, According to the report, men in India earned a median gross hourly wage of 242.49 in 2018, compared to 196.3 for women, representing a difference of 46.19.

- **Cultural norms and traditions:** Women's empowerment can be significantly impacted by cultural norms and traditions. Women are forced to conform to specific gender roles and stereotypes in many communities, which might restrict their prospects and prevent them from achieving their full potential. For instance, in some societies, women are expected to put their household duties before their academic or professional goals.
- **Dowry, rape, trafficking:** The issues of dowry, rape, trafficking, and women's empowerment are all interconnected and have significant effects on the lives of women. Every day in India, dowry sharks take the deaths of twenty women (NCRB, 2021). Violence against women, such as rape, can have serious physical and psychological effects. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reported that 31,677 rape crimes, or an average of 86 cases per day, were reported countrywide in its 2021 annual report. Human trafficking is a serious offence and a serious violation of human rights. Each year, both domestically and internationally, hundreds of women and children are trafficked. In 2020, more than 4,700 persons were trafficked, including 1,377 minor boys and 845 minor girls (NCRB, 2021).

Measures to empower the women-

Through the years, men have systematically oppressed women. Women became more powerful as time went on. Here are some essential strategies for empowering women.

- **Providing access to education:** Education is essential for empowering women because it gives them the knowledge, abilities, and self-assurance to pursue their dreams. To help women fulfill their full potential, public institutions can offer scholarships, mentorship programmes, and a high-quality education.
- **Encouraging women to participate in the workforce:** By increasing women's participation in the workforce, nation can not only improve their economic status but also promote gender equality. This can be achieved by passing a law that support equal pay, appropriate work schedules, and supports for female entrepreneurs.
- **Stop violence against women:** Women's empowerment is significantly hampered by gender-based violence. Governments can implement policies and programs that prevent violence against women and girls and provide support for survivors.
- **Legal reforms:** Revisions in the legislation that support gender equality, such as prohibitions on discrimination and gender-based violence, can give women more legal protection and rights.
- **Increasing access to healthcare for women:** Women's health needs are frequently neglected. Access to high-quality medical care, specifically reproductive health care, can strengthen women's overall wellbeing.
- **Political representation:** Women's voices are recognized, and their interests are taken into consideration in decision-making processes by increasing women's representation in political leadership.

India has implemented a number of programmes and initiatives aimed at empowering women in a number of areas, including as politics, employment, health, and education. The following are some of the important programmes and initiatives towards women's empowerment:

- ❖ **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao:** This initiative, which was introduced in 2015, aims to promote the welfare and education of girls while halting female infanticide, female feticide, and other types of discrimination against girls.
- ❖ **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana:** This programme offers pregnant and lactating mothers financial support for their nutritional and health needs.
- ❖ **Mahila Shakti Kendra Program:** This programme aims to empower rural women through community involvement and create an environment that is helpful of their overall development.
- ❖ **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:** This is a programme that offers free LPG connections to women who are below the poverty line in an effort to promote clean cooking fuel and reduce indoor pollution.
- ❖ **National Nutrition Mission (Poshan Abhiyaan):** Introduced in 2018, this programme aims to enhance the nutritional status of women and children throughout the nation through a number of strategies, including behaviour change communication, capacity building, and coordination with other initiatives.
- ❖ **Sukanya Samridhi Yojana:** This programme was introduced in 2015 to encourage parents to save money for their girl child's education and future marriage.
- ❖ **Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme:** This scheme has been approved by the Indian government for implementation from 2017–18 to 2019–20. Its goal is to empower rural women through community participation and to create an environment where they can fulfill their full potential.
- ❖ **Kanyashree prakalpa:** The West Bengal government launched the Kanyashree prakalpa in 2012 to support economically disadvantaged families so that they do not arrange for their girl child to get married before the age of eighteen because of financial problems

8. FINDINGS:

- Empowerment of women must be a top priority if India is to become a superpower and their development must be encouraged. In order to create a sustainable world, the government must begin to empower women.
- Gender inequality, illiteracy, poverty, and physical abuse are some of the major obstacles to women's empowerment.
- They should get the same pay as men for equal work. The nation as a whole should be free of child marriage and the dowry system in order to empower women.
- There are various ways to empower women. To make it happen, the people and the government must work together. Girls' education must be made mandatory so that they can become illiterate and defend themselves.
- Empowerment of women can also be achieved if their economic and social statuses are improved. This could be possible only by adopting social and economical policies with a view of overall development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings.
- There are so many schemes that have been adopted for women's empowerment, but they do not fully achieve the ultimate goal.

9. SUGGESTIONS:

- 1 It is essential to highlight that the issue is rooted in women's education. Therefore, it is expected that women's education will get special attention.
- Especially for members of disadvantaged groups, awareness campaigns on women's rights are so important.
- Women should be allowed to pursue jobs and given the security and support they need to do so. To succeed in life, they must receive equal pay and be allowed to work alongside men.
- To prevent the widespread immoral behaviour in society, rules and regulations should be properly implemented.

10. CONCLUSION:

Women in India make up 7.5% of the world's total population. While quality of life is improving- maternal mortality rate is declining, literacy rate is increasing and more women are getting access to healthcare and education. Now with all these changes, the 21st century women are elevated from the bondages of the past and they now stand on a desirable position in our society. Women have now acquired higher education and skill training which have greatly increased their productivity in the workplace.

Though at some levels crimes like dowry, rape, sexual harassment at office or public place and molestation, eve-teasing, even after over seventy five years of independence are exploiting women, which is the most shameful side of our society. Yet one can't deny that from 2000 to 2005 Programmes like 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' and 'Saakshar Bharat Mission for Female Literacy' have helped to increase the literacy rate from less than 10% to more than 50% today. India proudly possesses a glorious picture of women empowerment as stalwart women like Kalpana Chawla (first woman to go space), Arundhuti Bhattacharya (first woman to become the chairperson of the State Bank of India), Indira Krishnamurti Nooyi (Chairperson & CEO of Pepsi Co.), Medha Patkar (Social Reformer), Kiran Bedi (first woman IPS officer) and many more with their outstanding achievements. Lastly it may conclude according to Brigham Young, 'You Educate A Man; You Educate A Man. / You Educate A Woman; You Educate A Generation.'

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