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A critical analysis about challenge of 21st century of women empowerment in India

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Abstract

A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. The roles that men and women play in society are not biologically determined; they are socially determined and changeable. The Constitution of India grants equality to women in various fields of life. The discrimination and deep-rooted gender bias still exists in all sectors on the basis of caste, community, religious affiliation and class. A large number of women are either ill equipped or not in a position to propel themselves out of their traditionally unsatisfactory socio-economic conditions. They are poor, uneducated and insufficiently trained. They are often absorbed in the struggle to sustain the family physically and emotionally and are discouraged from taking interest in affairs outside home. Female infanticide continues to be common. Statistics show that there is still a very high preference for a male child in states like UP, MP, Punjab etc. The male to female ratio is very high in these states. The empowerment of women is located within the discourse and agenda of gender equality and is increasingly being taken in the agendas of international development organizations, perhaps more as a means to achieve gender equality than as an end in itself.

Keywords: women empowerment, 21st century of women empowerment

1. Introduction

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. Efforts by the Govt. are on to ensure Gender equality but Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Women empowerment is a debatable subject. At earlier time they were getting equal status with men. But they had faced some difficulties during post-Vedic and epic ages. Many a time they were treated as slave. From early twenty century (national movement) their statuses have been changed slowly and gradually. In this regard we mentioned the name of the British people. After then, independence of India, the constitutional makers and national leaders strongly demand equal social position of women with men. Today we have seen the women occupied the respectable positions in all walks of the fields. Yet, they have not absolutely free some discrimination and harassment of the society. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India even today. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave. One statement says by Swami Vivekananda

” There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the Condition of women is improved.” —Swami Vivekananda

2. Literature Review

The origins of the concept of empowerment go back to the civil rights movement in the USA in the 1960. It has since then been interpreted differently and filled with new meanings and is today used in such different sectors as business, social work, development discourse and by advocates of very different political agendas.

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The different definitions of empowerment range between defining it as a largely individual process of taking control of and responsibility for one's life and situation, and defining it as a political process of granting human rights and social justice to disadvantaged groups of people. At the former end of the continuum, where empowerment is defined largely as an individual process, empowerment can be used in the conservative political rhetoric of freeing the government of responsibility for injustices and for granting social security.

Sabharwal Sagun, and Shireen J *et al*; (2013) ^[14] The women's organizations must try to empower women by changing the attitudes of the society towards the harmful traditional practices. One of the most vital tasks of the various women organizations and NGOs is to help women in rebuilding their lives and confidence.

Singh, Surinder Pal. (2008) ^[13] Women are unable to voice their specific requirements even though the impact of climate change affects women and men differently. In several rural areas of the South, although women are responsible for feeding their families and are therefore more dependent on natural resources such as land, wood and water, their access to these resources is limited. They are also denied full access to loans, ducation and information.

Baruah, B. (2013) ^[7] There should be a better and fuller understanding of the problems peculiar to woman, to make a solution of those problems possible. As these problems centre round the basic problem of inequality, steps should be taken to promote equality of treatment and full integration of woman in the total development effort of the country.

Kidwai, A. R (2010) ^[3] 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 favor of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities.

Hasnain, Nadeem (2004) ^[1] Violence against women can be curtailed only when cultural norms and attitudes towards the women can be changed for which change should be made in the school curriculum. Curriculum that educates the students at the school, college and university level on issues like human rights and gender issues should be included in their study material.

S. Manikandan, V. Raju and T. Taghu, (2008) ^[4] It's difficult for a woman to start and run a business in India as there are lots of obstacles. But if they got their family support fully, the obstacles come down to half of it. And for the rest of half she can overcome easily. By passion, daring and dedicated efforts women can start the business. Government has introduced certain programs and scheme to develop women entrepreneurship.

3. Objectives of the study

1. To identify gaps in the empowerment of women, development of children and adolescents;
2. To improve accessibility and quality of maternal and child health care services;

4. Methodology

Active participation of any community in the development process is recognized as a tool for its empowerment. In

Indian social set up, the participation of women in the development process has to be ensured through tangible measures taken at various levels for their overall development. The government has taken a conscious view to make adequate provisions in its policies and programmes, through which it is to be ensured that the women of the country are not only empowered but also become active participants in the development process in the country. Various programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development are formulated keeping in view the above perspective.

4.1. Women's Empowerment Principles in Brief

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.
3. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women
5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.

4.2 Education and Women Empowerment

Education is a powerful tool of social transformation. Hence, education for Women has to be paid special attention. Greater access for women to education must be ensured in the educational system. Gender sensitivity must be developed. A watch has to be kept on dropout rate of girls and corrective measures should be taken to check the dropout rates.

4.3 Conceptualizing women's empowerment

While concerns with women's empowerment have their roots in grassroots mobilizations of various kinds, feminist scholars helped to move these concerns onto the gender and development agenda. Their contributions drew attention to the unequal power relations which blocked women's capacity to participate in, and help to influence, development processes and highlighted the nature of the changes that might serve to promote this capacity at both individual and collective level. There were a number of features that distinguished these early contributions.

4.4 Gender based violence

Gender based violence is a human rights violation and main cause of women's and girls' reduced wellbeing and poverty. In times of war, sexual violence and rape are frequently used as weapons of war. Violence causes general destruction, including at the individual psychological level. Our integrated programmes work on the individual and community levels. We support women and girls victims/survivors of gender based violence with feminist psychosocial counseling and also raise awareness about women's and girls' rights and legal regulations. We advocate against the stigmatization of victims of violence in their communities and for the formulation and implementation of laws against violence against women.

4.5 Why is there still a Need for Women Empowerment?

Inspite of the various measures taken up by the government after Independence and even during British rule the Women

haven't been fully empowered. We may be proud of women in India occupying highest offices of President, Prime Minister, Lok Sabha Speaker, Leader of the Opposition or women like Ms. Chandra Kochar occupying highest positions in the Corporate Sector but the fact remains that we still witness dowry deaths, domestic violence and exploitation of women. The female foeticide is not an uncommon phenomenon. The male female ratio though improved over last few years is still far from satisfactory. It is 940 women per 1000 men for India in some states it is as much lower as 877. These are the states where female foeticide is maximum. The female literacy rate is also lower than the male literacy rate. The ground reality is deprivation, degradation and exploitation of women specially women from rural areas and those belonging to deprived sectors of the society. The Urban elite class women have no doubt been benefitted by the efforts of women empowerment.

In 21st Century, the transformation of social fabric of the Indian society, in terms of increased educational status of women and varied aspirations for better living, necessitated a change in the life style of Indian women. Woman constitutes the family, which leads to society and Nation. Social and economic development of women is necessary for overall economic development of any society or a country. Entrepreneurship is the state of mind which many women have in her but has not been capitalized in India in way in which it should be.

4.6 A Critical issues faced by Women Entrepreneurs in India

Thus road map for women empowerment is there but still we have miles to go on this path of empowerment. We hope that in coming years ahead women empowerment will prove its worth. Women are an integral part of a society. They play an important role in determining the destiny of a nation. It has been rightly said by Swami Vivekanand, "The Best thermometer to the progress of nation is its treatment of women". Therefore, due recognition to them in the society and their greater involvement in socio-economic and political affairs becomes all the more important.

4.7 Major Constraints on Women's Options

Women make up 52% of our country's population. Hence there can be no progress unless their needs and interests are fully met. The stress on choice and preferences as the explanation for women's choices needs to be problematized. A series of factors, including literacy and education, language, time, cost, geographical location of facilities, social and cultural norms, and women's computer and information search and dissemination skills constrain women's access to the outside world. Frequently minority women face double or intersectional discrimination due to their status as women and members of minorities, which can result in unique challenges and barriers to their full enjoyment of their rights, including their rights to education, to participation in decision making and political life, and their effective participation in economic and social life.

4.8 Protection of Women's Human Rights by the Constitution of India

The constitution of India confers special rights upon women. The constitution makers were well aware of the subordinate and backward position of women in the society. They made some efforts for uplift of women in our society.

The state is directed to provide for maternity relief to female workers under Article 42 of the Constitution, whereas Article 51-A declares it as a fundamental duty of every Indian citizen to renounce practices to respect the dignity of women. Indian Parliament has passed the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 for the proper implementation of Article 51-A. Indian Parliament over the years have taken significant steps for through legislations to achieve the goal of empowering the women in India.

4.9 Strategies of Women's Empowerment in India

The women in India are positioned at a receiving end primarily because they have remained ignorant of their fundamental civil and constitutional rights. Patriarchal system impinges on every sphere of a woman's life. In such a situation often majority of them are forced to accept the traditional practices that are detrimental for both their and their children's development. Although women have acquired a level of financial and political autonomy and consciousness about their rights, yet they experience helplessness in bringing about basic changes for eliminating gender inequalities from the society.

5. The main obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs are as follows.

1. The biggest turning point of a woman's life is marriage. She turned into a daughter-in-law from a daughter. The priority is also changed with this. The dream of a woman has ripped like a fruit. Expectation from the family and personal commitment are mostly a great barrier for succeeding in business career. In such circumstances, it will be very much complicated to focus and run their enterprise successfully. Because Indian women are much conscious about their family obligations compare to business responsibility.
2. Cast and religions dominator also hinder women entrepreneur. For this women entrepreneur cannot overcome the obstacle before them to grow and flourish. In rural areas, women face more social and political obstacle.
3. Though our constitution speaks of equality between sexes, male patriot is still the order of the day. Male dominated society destroys a female capability ability shows much less than male.
4. In our India 60% of total women are illiterate. They are far behind in the field of education. Due to lack of appropriate education, women 5entrepreneurs are in dark about the rapidly growing new technology, new methods of production, marketing techniques, and other governmental policy.

6. Mapping of Women's Rights Violations in India:-

This section sets out a range of areas of human rights abuse of women in India.

Missing of girl child:- The idiom "missing women" was for the first time used by Prof. Amartya Sen. when he showed that in many developing countries the proportion of women as compared to men in the population is suspiciously low.

Dowry deaths: In India the unusual dowry deaths of the women at their matrimonial home has been increasing at a startling rate. Dowry disputes are quite a serious problem.

Domestic Violence: In spite of the fact that in India we have 'Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005', domestic violence still remains a serious problem. Infact a major scale of violence that a woman is subjected to in India is linked to the domain of domesticity.

Preference for a son: The preference for a son is a phenomenon which is historically rooted in the patriarchal system of the Indian society. The strong preference for having a son emerged with the transition of the Indian society from primitive stage which used to be primarily a matrilineal to feudal stage where agriculture emerged as the primary established occupation of the people to be controlled by the male.

Female foeticide: The low status of women goes on with the practice of infanticide, foeticide, sex-selective abortion which has become common due to the amniocentesis technology, and mal-nourishment among girl children.

Sexual harassment at the workplace: The initiative on a discourse on sexual harassment of women at their workplace in India started with Supreme Court's Vishaka guidelines in 1997.

7. Conclusions

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.

It may be concluded that women have shifted traditional assumptions about their roles and capabilities. There has been a marked change, and it has been for the better. Many of its benefits however have yet to touch the majority and all of us continue to experience various forms of gender discrimination. If laws designed to address the concerns of women are to have a dramatic and positive impact on womens lives, they must be sensitive to the social, economic and political disempowerment of women throughout the world.

The most important measure of their success should be the extent to which they enable woman to interpret, apply and enforce laws of their own making, incorporating their own voices, values and concerns.

"Woman is an incarnation of 'Shakti'—the Goddess of Power. If she is bestowed with education, India's strength will double. Let the campaign of 'Kanya Kelavni' be spread in every home; let the lamp of educating daughters be lit up in every heart" —Narendra Modi

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