



Women Empowerment in India

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ABSTRACT

The census 2011, counts women population @ 48.5% of the total population in India, In the changing dynamics of the society women empowerment is much relevant and very important. Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji has also spoken for women empowerment on 82nd edition of Mann Ki Baat. Education plays an important role in building self-confidence among women it also enables to change she/ her status in the society. Education enables and builds confidence to take decisions in a better way. Skilling and Micro Finance can get women financially stable and therefore she is no longer dependent upon on others in the society. Giving education to women means giving education to the whole family. The Constitution of India has certain provisions that specifically focus on women empowerment and prevents discrimination against women in the society. Article 14 talks about equality before law. Article 15 enables the state to make special provisions for women. As the progress of humanity is incomplete without women therefore successive governments have launched number of schemes for empowerment of women in male dominated society. **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Andolan** has been launched for creating awareness among the people to educate all girl children in the country. Government is successfully able to promote this scheme by forming District Task Force and Block Task Force. The scheme was launched in Panipat district of Haryana with an initial funding of Rs. 100 crore. Before launching of this scheme, Child Sex Ratio of Panipat was 808 in 2001 and 837 in 2011. After launching of this scheme the Child Sex Ratio of Panipat is improving day by day. Massive publicity is made about the program in print and electronic medias, the logo of this scheme is very common in government buildings such as pillars of National Highway 44, Panipat District Court, bus stand and railway station of Panipat district etc.

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INTRODUCTION

Both earning and education are important factors for women empowerment. It might be possible that a woman is involved in unskilled work (for example: maids) but she is still not empowered. On the contrary, it might be possible that a woman is educated. But still she is not empowered because she is not earning. So, financial independence is important for women empowerment. Women, who are educated and earning, are in much better position in our society as compared to uneducated women worker.[1,2] Therefore, a scheme called working women hostels has been launched so that safe and convenient accommodation should be provided to working women. The benefit of this

scheme is given to every working women without any distinction of caste, religion, marital status etc. In order to take benefit of this scheme, the gross total income of women should not exceed Rs. 50,000 per month in case of metropolitan cities whereas in case of small cities, the gross total income should not exceed Rs. 35,000 per month. United Nation General Assembly adopted the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women' (CEDAW). CEDAW establishes an international bill of rights for women. Article 10 of CEDAW talks about providing right to education to women. India has ratified CEDAW for upliftment of women.[3,4]

The focus of the government has shifted from women development to women led development. In order to achieve this goal, government is working around the clock to maximize women's access to education, skill training and institutional credit. MUDRA Yojana (Micro Units Development and Refinance agency Ltd) is one such scheme which was launched in which loans upto Rs. 10 lakh are provided to women entrepreneurs, without any collateral. For instance: A woman namely Kamla daily wage labourer from Panipat has taken a loan of Rs. 45,000 from State Bank of India in order to start work of beauty parlour and she is engaged in gainful employment with dignity now. Earlier a lot of women left out their job after giving birth to children,[5,6] due to which lot of working women unemployed. Increased knowledge, self-confidence and awareness of gender equity are indicators of the empowerment process. These components get develop through education. Educated woman aware about their rights and when women aware about their rights then she/her will not face discrimination. Though the successive Governments have come up with various measures for the welfare and empowerment of women but still women are facing hurdles in our society. Therefore, there is a need to do much more, to protect women. Also, there is a need to uphold their dignity at par with the status of men in the society.[7,8]

Education-

- The girls right to education and their right to be free from discrimination within educational institutions. Also, should target young men and boys to positively change their attitudes towards girls and women.
- In order to curb higher dropout rate among girls, there is a need for providing relatively higher financial incentives for girls education until Class XII.
- Post Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship should be extended from Single Girl Child Scheme to families with two girl child.
- Reward should be given to villages/districts that are able to attain equal child sex ratio through education, information and communication campaigns.
- There is a need for strict implementation of statutes that emphasise on women empowerment through education.
- Additional emphasis should be laid on e-governance so that there is a timely check on

the expenditure released by the centre and various state governments for scholarships for girl students.

- For security purposes, gender-friendly facilities should be provided in hostels.[9,10]

Skilling-

- In order to make women self-dependent, there is need to promote skill development among women in non-traditional works like electricians, plumbers etc.
- Women can be organised into different professional groups so that there is improvement in their bargaining power.
- Platforms like Digital India should be used for marketing and branding purposes and to establish linkages with corporates, markets and consumers.
- In addition to government efforts, NGOs and other institutions should provide employable skills & training to women to help them find alternative and dignified occupations to earn decently.

Micro-Finance-

- NGOs working for the empowerment of women need to take interventions on livelihood development options related to the market and value chain.
- Policies and guidelines should be made in such a way that it is easy for women entrepreneurs to get credit facilities.
- Government should promote creation of Self Help group by women.
- There is need for industry-specific targets for women's employment and motivate their implementation by firm.
- Tax benefits should be given to companies that provide employment to 30 percent women workers.[11,12]

DISCUSSION

As India progresses economically, there are calls for the country to pay more attention to social and human development, including women empowerment. This paper defines women empowerment as efforts that include "advocating for women's and girl's human rights, combating discriminatory practices and challenging the roles and stereotypes that create inequalities and exclusion". Women empowerment is a critical aspect to achieving gender equality, where both

men and women have equal power and opportunities for education, healthcare, economic participation and personal development.

While the Scandinavian countries such as Iceland, Sweden, Finland and Norway have made strides in narrowing the gender gap, significant economic and social disparities run deep in the Middle East, South Asia and Africa. India's journey towards women empowerment has its share of highs and lows. It has made gains by ratifying international conventions and formulating domestic policies intended to end gender inequality. The government has created the space for international agencies to work with state governments, local non-government organisations and private corporations on a plethora of projects to support women from different socio-economic backgrounds. Despite these efforts, India's ranking on global surveys of gender equality has not improved significantly over the years.[13,14]

Equal rights for men and women are enshrined under Articles 14 to 16 in the Indian constitution, which came into effect on 26 January 1950. Discrimination based on gender is strictly prohibited. Indian women received universal suffrage during India's independence in 1947, long before several Western countries granted women the right to vote. India was the second country in modern history to have a female leader, Indira Gandhi, in 1966 after another South Asian state, Sri Lanka, elected Sirimavo Bandaranaike in 1960.

New Delhi has also taken a concerted effort to ratify key international conventions to end discrimination against women. It is a founding member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and has ratified 47 conventions and one protocol. It signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1980 and ratified it in 1993 with some reservations. It has yet to ratify the Optional Protocol of the CEDAW and National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. Within the country, the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 have been enacted to criminalise instances of dowry and domestic violence.

The Women's Reservation Bill gives 33 per cent reservation for women seats in all levels of Indian politics. This is an attempt to increase female political participation. The bill was first introduced on 12 September 1996 by the Deve Gowda government. Successive governments tried

to push for the bill but it took 14 years to get it passed in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Parliament). The bill has yet to be passed in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) and in all state legislative assemblies. The introduction of the bill was a historic attempt to alter gender demographics in the Indian polity. Proponents of the quota system argue that it is a necessary step to increase women's effective and meaningful participation in the political system. It could help to expedite a process that usually takes generations by incorporating women's voices in governance. In contrast, sceptics think that the bill would only benefit elite women.

Women in India are emerging in all sectors, including politics, business, medicine, sports and agriculture. Female leadership for a huge space mission challenged the meta narrative that rocket science is a profession reserved for men. Another milestone was reached when the Supreme Court upended the government's position on women serving as army commanders. Women were first inducted into the armed forces in 1992 and have served in a multitude of positions, including fighter pilots, doctors, nurses, engineers, signallers, etc. While the issue of women serving in combat roles continues to be a contentious one worldwide, these are instances where Indian women have overcome the glass ceiling in the armed forces.[15]

India's story on women empowerment is not complete without focusing on grassroots initiatives adopted by the government and civil society organisations. The federal and state governments have launched new schemes, policies and programmes to empower both urban and rural women. The Narendra Modi government has launched flagship schemes to promote gender equality, including Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter), Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (a scheme to provide gas connections to women from below the poverty line households) and Mahila-E-Haath The Bachao Beti Padhao Yojana scheme was launched to address the issue of a gender skewed ratio and generate greater welfare for the girl child. The focus is centred mostly on Northern India, including Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab and Uttarakhand where the gender ratio is wider.

The government has also created the space for international agencies to work with state governments, local NGOs and private corporations. For instance, the World Bank is working closely

with the federal government and the Andhra Pradesh government to improve the quality of public health services in the state, including maternal and child healthcare. Another initiative is by the United Nations (UN) India Business Forum which has partnered with the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) to set up the UN-India NITI Aayog Investor Consortium for Women Entrepreneurs to strengthen female entrepreneurship and create an ecosystem for investments.

RESULTS

While India has taken some measures on human development, its global standing on gender equality remains low. India's ranking in the Global Gender Gap Report, commissioned by the World Economic Forum, declined .

India has managed to close two-thirds of its overall gender gap, especially in areas of political empowerment. It was ranked 18th on the Political Empowerment sub index, given that a woman headed the government for 20 years. However, female legislators constitute only 14.4 per cent of the Indian parliament and 23 per cent of the cabinet, making overall political representation relatively low. Unfortunately, its performance on economic empowerment for women has widened since 2006. The survey concluded that only 25 per cent of women relative to 82 per cent of men are working or seeking employment. Moreover, their average income is around a fifth of what their male counterparts are earning. Even when Indian women secure jobs, there is a high propensity for them to be paid less than male employees. The ILO's Global Wage Report found that the average pay gender gap is the highest in India at 34.5 per cent, among the 73 countries studied in detail. Given that the female participation rate in informal jobs is greater than the formal sector, many women are at the receiving end of this pay disparity. Indian women make up merely 14 per cent of leadership roles. The economic empowerment of women will benefit everyone. The International Monetary Fund has estimated that equal female participation in the workforce could increase India's gross domestic product by 27 per cent.

There are lessons that India could draw from the Japanese model to increase economic empowerment for women. Tokyo's female labour force participation has visibly increased from

approximately 66.5 per cent in 2000 to 76.3 per cent in primarily due to policy, demographic and economic factors under the Womenomics plan. Its policies have changed considerably over time, including amending the existing labour laws, introducing new anti-discrimination provisions and enhancing child-care policies. The implementation and strengthening of new and existing legislation can incentivise women to join the workforce and continue working during marriage and early childrearing years. Although India has one of the most generous maternity leave policies, it is applicable to a small margin of working women. Its desire to replicate policies that have worked well elsewhere without taking the ground realities into account has resulted in few women actually benefiting from them. While studying these models closely could be useful, they need to be contextualised and fine-tuned to the Indian environment.[16]

The Indian legal system is also confronted with gaps between policy and practice. Despite existing legislation to protect women and girls, the enforcement of these laws and conviction of alleged perpetrators is weak. The gaps in these processes are widened by systemic bureaucracy and corruption. It took seven years to hang the perpetrators implicated in the notorious "Nirbhaya" gang rape case. There is also the issue of women empowerment being less visible in rural India than in urban settings. This should be a big concern in India, given that the rural population is around 65.97 per cent despite increasing urbanisation and the growth of cities. Women in urban areas have greater access to education, employment, healthcare services and decision-making power.

India's prevailing issues on gender inequality should be seen in a wider context of South Asia. In rural areas, especially in the Hindi heartland, gender disparity is still significant. Women continue to be relegated to household tasks, with little or no say in economic decisions. Levels of literacy, nutrition and access to health care continue to be poor, and social welfare parameters are lower than neighbouring Bangladesh. The region's gender gap is the second biggest after the Middle East and North Africa. Female parliamentary representation has remained low at 20 per cent or less in the region, except for Sri Lanka (33 per cent). These factors could be attributed to societal norms, meta narratives and gender stereotypes that are deeply embedded in the

South Asian culture. Researchers Jawad Syed and Edwina Pio have argued that efforts to achieve women empowerment in South Asia should be seen through the lens of religious, cultural and socio-economic particularities where new provisions in the legal sphere may not always be enforced and discrimination could continue within the societal and family structures. The patriarchal and patrilineal customs, with some exceptions, have impeded female mobility, access to basic healthcare and access to education and have led to forced marriages. Gender-based violence in the form of domestic, sexual and physical violence is particularly rampant in South Asia when the victims lack agency and power. In India alone, crimes against women are around 53.9 per cent. In the capital, New Delhi, 92 per cent of women have said that they have experienced physical or sexual violence in public areas.

CONCLUSIONS

India's journey on women empowerment and gender equality started when it became a sovereign state in 1947. While visible gains have been made through legal reforms, human development and grassroots initiatives, New Delhi still has a long way to go in many areas of women empowerment. A more concerted effort is needed to close the urban-rural divide and ensure that women in rural areas enjoy the same access to education, employment, healthcare and decision-making as their urban counterparts. The hardest challenge will be to change attitudes, given that many barriers to women empowerment are attributed to patriarchal and patrilineal traditions that are deeply entrenched in many South Asian societies.[17]

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