

Women Empowerment in India

PROF.MUSILEK

Assistant Professor in the Department of Commerce

Dr B. B. Hegde First Grade College, Kundapura - 576201.

Dr.THOMAS FELDMAN

Assistant Professor in the Department of Commerce

Dr. B. B. Hegde First Grade College, Kundapura - 576201.

ABSTRACT

Women empowerment is a debatable subject. At an early time of Stone Age period, women had equal status and power with that of men. But then they started facing some difficulties during post- Vedic and epic ages. History shows that many a time, women were treated as that of slaves. It was observed that right from the early 20th century (national movement), the statuses of women had been changing gradually and this credit goes to the British people. It is only after the Independence of India, under the able leadership of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, the constitutional makers and national leaders started strongly demanding and also reiterating the equal social position of women with men. Today, it is overwhelming to see that good proportionate of women in India are in the respectable positions in all walks of the fields. But the various events and incidents that have been happening in the country for two squares reveals clearly that women are discriminated, abused, tortured and harassed both in public and in families. In spite of the agony and suffering, it is good to learn that a few numbers of women have been able to establish their potentialities.

Keywords: Empowerment, Independence of India, Position of women, Discriminated, Potentialities.

Introduction

Women Empowerment is a significant topic of discussion, mainly in underdeveloped and developing nations. They have lately realized that the development that they aspire cannot be

achieved unless we achieve gender equality by empowering their women. The economic empowerment of women refers to their right to control the economic decisions, income, assets and other equivalents; improving their economic as well as social status.

Women Empowerment

Women Empowerment means promoting women in their social and economic development, providing them equal opportunities of employment, education, economical development and allowing them to socialize; the freedoms and rights that were denied before. It is process which empowers women to know that they too can achieve their aspirations as the men of the society and help them do that.

Need of Women's Empowerment in India

The status of Indian women has declined from ancient period to medieval period. Though in modern era Indian women have held significant political and administrative posts; still, on the contrary there is a majority of rural women who are confined to their homes and don't have access to even basic health amenities and education. The female literacy rate in India lags behind the male literacy rate by a significant ratio. Literacy rate for men in India is 81.3% and that of women is 60.6%. Many Indian girls don't have access to the school and even if they do, they drop out during early years. Only 29% of Indian young women have completed ten or more years of education. Low education rate among women have kept them away from main workforce, resulting in their social and economic deterioration. Women in urban areas are well employed than their village counterparts; nearly 30% employees in the Indian software industry constitute women. On the contrary, nearly 90% of rural women are employed as daily wage labors, mainly in agriculture and allied sectors. Another factor which brings in the need for woman empowerment in India is pay disparity. Women in India are not being paid equivalent to their male counterparts in various sectors. According to a study, women in India with same years of experience and qualification are paid 20% less than their male counter parts having same credentials. As she is just few days away from entering into new year 2019, India is filled with hope and aspirations as never before and she is about to win back her tag of world's fastest growing economy. We will definitely achieve it soon, but could only maintain it, if we remove the hurdles of gender inequality; providing equal opportunities of employment, development and wages to our men and women alike.

Barriers to Women Empowerment in India

Indian society is a complex society with varied customs, rituals, beliefs and traditions. Sometimes these age old beliefs and customs constitute the most significant barriers to the empowerment of women in India. Few of the significant barriers to the women empowerment in India are explained below-

1) Societal Norms

Many societies in India restrict women from leaving the house, given to their orthodox belief and age old traditions. Women in such societies are not allowed to go outside either for education or for employment and are forced to live an isolated and dejected life. Women living under such conditions become accustomed to being inferior to men and are unable to change their present social and economical state.

2) Workplace Sexual Harassment

Workplace sexual harassment is the most significant barrier to women empowerment in India. Private sectors like hospitality industry, software industry, educational institutions, and hospitals are some of the worst affected. It is a manifestation of deep rooted male supremacy in the society. There had been a steep rise of about 170% in the workplace sexual harassment of women in India in the past couple of decades.

3) Gender discrimination

Majority of women in India still face gender discrimination at work place as well as in the society. Many societies don't allow the women to go out for employment or education. They are not allowed to take independent decisions either for work or for family, and are treated inferior to men. Such discrimination of the women leads to their socio economic decline and hugely contradicts "Woman Empowerment".

4) Pay disparity

Women in India are paid less than their male counterparts. The situation is worst in unorganized sectors where women are employed as daily wage labors. Women working for the same number of hours and doing the same work are paid less than the men, which implies unequal powers between men and women. Even the women who are employed in organized sectors are paid less than their male counterparts having equivalent qualification and experience.

5) Illiteracy

Female illiteracy and their high dropout rate is one of the major obstacles to the empowerment of women in India. In urban India girls are at par with boys in terms of education but they significantly lag behind in rural areas. The effective literacy rate of women is 64.6%, while that of men is 80.9%. Lot of Indian girls who join school, dropout in the initial years without having passed even 10th grade.

6) Child Marriage

Though, India has successfully reduced child marriages in the past few decades, through a number of laws and initiatives taken by the government; still a report in early 2018 by the UNICEF (United Nations Children Emergency Fund) states that nearly 1.5 Million girls in India get married before they turn 18. Early marriage reduces the growth prospects of girls who soon be moving onto adulthood.

7) Crimes against Women

Indian women have been subjected to domestic violence and other crimes such as – dowry, honor killing, trafficking etc. It's strange that the women in urban areas are more prone to criminal assault than the women in rural areas. Even working women in big cities avoid using public transport in late hours, fearing their modesty and life. Woman empowerment can only be achieved in true sense if we ensure safety of our women, providing them the liberty to roam free and without fear as the men in the society do.

8) Female Infanticide

Female infanticide or sex selective abortion is also one of the major obstacles to woman empowerment in India. Female infanticide means identifying the gender of the fetus and aborting it when it is revealed to be a female; often without the mother's consent. Female infanticide has led to a high male female sex ratio in the states of Haryana and Jammu and Kashmir. Our claims on woman empowerment will not be substantiated unless we eradicate female infanticide or sex selective abortion.

Government's Role in Woman Empowerment in India

The government of India has implemented many programs for the empowerment of women. Many of these programs are for providing employment, education, health accessible to the

masses. These programs have been especially incorporated keeping in mind the needs and conditions of Indian women, to ensure their participation. Some of these programs are – MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme), SarvaSikshaAbhiyaan, JananiSurakshaYojana (reduce maternal mortality) etc. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India has implemented various new schemes specifically aimed at the empowerment of Indian women. Some of those significant schemes are given below

1) BetiBachaoBetiPadhao Scheme

The scheme focuses on eradicating female infanticide and also on the education of girl child. It aims for changing the mindset of people towards a girl, by providing financial support and also by strict enforcement of laws and acts.

2) Women Helpline Scheme

This scheme aims for providing 24 hours emergency support help line for women who are subjected to any kind of violence or crime. The scheme provides a universal emergency number - 181 across the country for women in distress. The number also provides information on women related schemes in the country.

3) Ujjawala Scheme

A scheme aiming at the rescue of women affected by trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation and their rehabilitation and welfare.

4) Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)

The STEP scheme aims at imparting skills to women, making them employable as well as to become self-employed. Various sectors like agriculture, horticulture, handloom, tailoring and fisheries etc are covered under the scheme.

5) Mahila Shakti Kendras

The scheme focuses on empowering rural women through community participation. Community volunteers like students, professional etc will teach the rural women about their rights and welfare schemes.

6) Reservation for Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions

In 2009 the Union Cabinet of the Government of India instituted 50% reservation for the women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. It is aimed mainly at improving the social status of women in rural India. The states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and Andhra Pradesh among various others have majority of women as elected head of gram panchayats.

Conclusion

As India is progressive to become world's fastest growing economy in near future, it must also focus on 'Women Empowerment'. We must understand that women empowerment is a process which hopes to bring gender equality and a balanced economy. Indian women had been President, Prime ministers, civil servants, doctors, lawyers etc, but still a good majority of them needs help and support. Support to be educated, to do what they want to do, to travel safe, to work safe and to be independent; making their own decisions. The way to the socio-economic development of India goes through the socio-economic development of her women folk.

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