



CHALLENGES IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract:

Women have been suppressed since centuries. India particularly has a patriarchal set up where women are seen second to men. While there is a section of our society that encourages women empowerment, people largely continue to suppress and oppress them. There are numerous barriers to the empowerment of women in India because of the mindset of some of the narrow-minded people living here. In India, women are expected to act and behave in a certain manner. Even as our nation has progressed over the time, women in our country are not truly liberated. They are still expected to stay in limits and act as per the rules defined by our patriarchal society. All this acts as a barrier to the empowerment of women in India. Day in and day out, our conscience is shocked by news of the violation of human rights of women. Such an approach provides the women with a constitutional platform to stand up to men, to raise their voice on issues concerning women oppression, subjugation and related issues and thus in effect, providing them with an identity in an orthodox male dominated socio-political set up. The decision-makers and the hierarchy below them are also male- dominated and hence women are not considered a part of society, and the rules made only favour the men. Not just India, the world is patriarchal, but unfortunately India today is now becoming a more and more unequal society and an unsafe and unharmonious place for women. The process of empowerment is multi-dimensional and it enables women to realise their full destiny and powers in all spheres of life. A woman's empowerment begins with consciousness—perceptions about herself and her rights, her capabilities and her potentials,

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INTRODUCTION:

Women's empowerment (or female empowerment) may be defined in several ways, including accepting women's viewpoints, making an effort to seek them and raising the status of women through education, awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment equips and allows women to make life-determining decisions through the different societal problems. They may have the opportunity to re-define gender roles or other such roles, which allow them more freedom to pursue desired goals.

Women's empowerment has become a significant topic of discussion in development and economics. Economic empowerment allows women to control and benefit from resources, assets, and income. It also aids the ability to manage risk and improve women's well-being. It can result in approaches to support trivialized genders in a particular political or social context. While often interchangeably used, the more comprehensive concept of gender empowerment concerns people of any gender, stressing the distinction between biological and



gender as a role. Women empowerment helps boost women's status through literacy, education, training and awareness creation. Furthermore, women's empowerment refers to women's ability to make strategic life choices that were previously denied them.

In context of women, empowerment essentially refers to a feeling of awareness of one's own situation backed up with the knowledge, skills and information which could enable women to gain higher self-esteem and facilitate their role as decision makers in the current patriarchal society where women have always been subordinate to men.

CHALLENGES:

One of the biggest barriers in women empowerment is the general mindset of our society, according to which women are expected to take care of their family and household chores. A woman is considered virtuous only if she keeps her house clean, cooks for her family, takes good care of her kids and husband and serves the elders in the family. As the women begin to go out and work, they are burdened with the numerous duties of their family as well as the job responsibilities. Many find it hard to cope-up with the situation and end up giving up on their job. Those who try to manage both hand in hand often live in extreme stress as they are criticized for neglecting the needs of their family and spending time outside even if it is only for work. This stereotypical mindset of the people of our country is thus a great hindrance in the empowerment of women.

Gender roles are set, how a woman speaks, dresses and chooses a way to live her life is also decided by someone who is not a woman but still perceived to have some sort of power over women. Some rules

that the women are expected to abide by, they must be accommodating, they should always compromise even when they are in an unhappy and unsafe environment there is no safe place for women to seek help, and they should learn all the domestic chores.

ISSUES AND PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN IN INDIA:

There are various issues and problems which women generally face in the society in India. Some of the problems are mentioned and described below:

- Selective abortion and female infanticide: It is the most common practice for years in India in which abortion of female foetus is performed in the womb of mother after the foetal sex determination and sex selective abortion by the medical professionals.
- Sexual harassment: It is the form of sexual exploitation of a girl child at home, streets, public places, transports, offices, etc by the family members, neighbours, friends or relatives.
- Dowry and Bride burning: It is another problem generally faced by women of low- or middle-class family during or after the marriage. Parents of boys demand a lot of money from the bride's family to be rich in one time.
- Disparity in education: The level of women education is less than men still in the modern age. Female illiteracy is higher in the rural areas.
- Domestic violence: It is like endemic and widespread disease affects almost 70% of Indian women according to the women and child development official.
- Child Marriages: Early marriage of the girls by their parents in order to be escaped from dowry. It is highly practiced in the rural India.
- Inadequate Nutrition: Inadequate nutrition in the



childhood affects women in their later life especially women belonging to the lower middle class and poor families.

- Low status in the family: It is the abuse or violence against women.
- Status of widows: They are treated poorly and forced to wear white clothes. Women are continuously facing many problems even after having self-confidence, individuality, self-respect, personality, capacity, talent, and efficiency more than men. They are facing problems in their daily life even after they are given equal rights and opportunities like men by the Constitution of India.
- Violence against women: Women are getting affected by the various violence almost every day which is disrupting the society. Women are being victims of violence at huge level day by day because of increasing crimes against women (according to the report of Crime Record Bureau of the Central Home Ministry). Woman is getting kidnapped at every 44 minutes, raped at every 47 minutes, 17 dowry deaths every day, etc. They may face violence within the family (dowry related harassment, death, marital rape, wife-battering, sexual abuse, deprivation of healthy food, female genital mutilation, etc) or outside the family (kidnapping, rape, murder, etc).
- Gender discrimination: Women are considered as weaker section of the society than men and given less importance. Girls' children are becoming real victims of the discrimination. There are also discrimination of power and work between men and women because of the patriarchal system families in India. Gender discrimination affects women in the areas like nutrition, education,

health, care, decline of female population, job, public life, etc.

- Problems of female education Women education percentage is low in India especially in the rural areas because they are discouraged for higher education like professional and technical education.
- Problems related to unemployment Women are getting more problems in searching their suitable work. They become more prone to the exploitation and harassment in the work areas.
- Discrimination at Work: They are given more work and hard tasks by their boss intentionally. They have to prove their devotion, seriousness and sincerity towards work time to time.
- Unbearable Conditions: Women who are uneducated more prone to divorce and desertion by their husbands on any stage of life. They have to live whole life with fear of divorce. In some cases, they have to finish their life because of unbearable conditions.
- Increasing Dowry system is another huge women problem in the society which is increasing day by day. Women are ill-treated, man-handled, disrespected, tortured and suffer other cruelties (violence, murder and suicide) because of the lack of dowry at the time of marriage. It causes degradation of women status to a great extent.
- Women are not allowed to have self-respect, efficiency, personality, individuality capacity and talent. They are blamed on their mental health, and their parents are humiliated and harassed for growing up self-made women who can empower others. They are not allowed to take leadership roles and make futuristic policies. Similarly, if women are ground-breaking or



discoveries are hidden and given less importance, they are not encouraged and honed to further the new knowledge.

- There are not enough schools especially for girls in rural areas. As women reach puberty their freedom and right to education are snatched away and they are prohibited from going to school. Due to a lack of proper sanitation facilities, many women unwillingly drop out of school. Even after a woman gains an education and a degree and enters the workplace, the problems and issues do not stop. At most workplaces be it corporate or even in a government office, the power play dynamic is exploited. Many male superiors take advantage of their juniors and harass them for pleasure and engage in unlawful activities.
- Financial exclusion, the women are not considered when deciding the pay. The women's contribution at the workplace is underestimated and they are paid far lesser than their male colleagues. The women in powerful positions are also pulled down bypassing negative comments. Lack of women representation in every field creates a void in society and a nation does not progress.

SOLUTIONS

- **Poverty Eradication** Since women comprise the majority of the population below the poverty line and are very often in situations of extreme poverty, given the harsh realities of intra-household and social discrimination, macro-economic policies and poverty eradication programmes will specifically address the needs and problems of such women. There should be improved implementation of programmes which are already women oriented with special targets

for women. Steps must be taken for mobilization of poor women and convergence of services, by offering them a range of economic and social options, along with necessary support measures to enhance their capabilities.

- **Globalization:** Globalization has presented new challenges for the realization of the goal of women's equality, the gender impact of which has not been systematically evaluated fully. However, from the micro-level studies that were commissioned by the Department of Women & Child Development, it is evident that there is a need for re-framing policies for access to employment and quality of employment. Benefits of the growing global economy have been unevenly distributed leading to wider economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, increased gender inequality through often deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in the informal economy and rural areas. Strategies must be designed to enhance the capacity of women and empower them to meet the negative social and economic impacts, which may flow from the globalization process.
- **Education:** Equal access to education for women and girls must be ensured. Special measures should be taken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupation/vocation/technical skills by women. Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education would be a focus area. Gender



sensitive curricula should be developed at all levels of educational system in order to address sex stereotyping as one of the causes of gender discrimination.

- **Health:** A holistic approach to women's health which includes both nutrition and health services must be adopted and special attention will be given to the needs of women and the girl at all stages of the life cycle. The social, developmental and health consequences of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases should be tackled from a gender perspective. To effectively meet problems of infant and maternal mortality, and early marriage the availability of good and accurate data at micro level on deaths, birth and marriages is required. Strict implementation of registration of births and deaths would be ensured and registration of marriages would be made compulsory.
- **Nutrition:** In view of the high risk of malnutrition and disease that women face at all the three critical stages viz., infancy and childhood, adolescent and reproductive phase, focused attention should be paid to meeting the nutritional needs of women at all stages of the life cycle. This is also important in view of the critical link between the health of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women with the health of infant and young children.
- **Housing and Shelter:** Women's perspectives must be included in housing policies, planning of housing colonies and provision of shelter both in rural and urban areas. Special attention should be given for providing adequate and safe housing and accommodation for women including single

women, heads of households, working women, students, apprentices and trainees.

- **Violence against women:** All forms of violence against women, physical and mental, whether at domestic or societal levels, including those arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices should be dealt with effectively with a view to eliminate its incidence. Institutions and mechanisms/schemes for assistance should be created and strengthened for prevention of such violence, including sexual harassment at work place and customs like dowry; for the rehabilitation of the victims of violence and for taking effective action against the perpetrators of such violence.
- **Mass Media:** Media should be used to portray images consistent with human dignity of girls and women. The Policy will specifically strive to remove demeaning, degrading and negative conventional stereotypical images of women and violence against women.
- **Legislation** The existing legislative structure must be reviewed and additional legislative measures taken by identified departments to implement the Policy. Strict enforcement of all relevant legal provisions and speedy redressal of grievances will be ensured, with a special focus on violence and gender related atrocities. Measures to prevent and punish sexual harassment at the place of work, protection for women workers in the organized/ unorganized sector and strict enforcement of relevant laws such as Equal Remuneration Act and Minimum Wages Act will be undertaken,
- **Crimes against Women:** Crimes against women,



their incidence, prevention, investigation, detection and prosecution should be regularly reviewed at all Crime Review for a and Conferences at the Central, State and District levels. Recognized, local, voluntary organizations should be authorized to lodge Complaints and facilitate registration, investigations and legal proceedings related to violence and atrocities against girls and women. Women's Cells in Police Stations, Encourage Women Police Stations Family Courts, Mahila Courts, CounselingCenters, Legal Aid Centers and Nyaya Panchayats will be strengthened and expanded to eliminate violence and atrocities against women.

Widespread dissemination of information on all aspects of legal rights, human rights and other entitlements of women, through specially designed legal literacy programmes and rights information programmes will be done.

ADDITIONAL MEASURES:

- Promoting societal awareness to gender issues and women's human rights.
- Review of curriculum and educational materials to include gender education and human rights issues
- Removal of all references derogatory to the dignity of women from all public documents and legal instruments.
- Use of different forms of mass media to communicate social messages relating to women's equality and empowerment.

CONCLUSION:

A Vital need of the current age is to reform the social values and status of women. Society without women consider as body without heart. By providing

same opportunities and importance then only gender equality maintained. With these the good values and level of family, society and ultimately nation raised. The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the mainstream of development. Women empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed income and property so that they may stand on their feet and build up their identity in the society. The most important measure of their success should be the extent to which they enable women to interpret, apply and enforce laws of their own making, incorporating their own voices, values and concerns.

Women are more compassionate and empathetic than men and that often is considered as a sign of weakness, men must realize patriarchy and the ego that does no good by women is not helping them either. Women have so many issues that we cannot articulate and they are facing so much without complaining so there should be a collective effort by everyone to support women if they have a problem and fight against the wrong-doers for justice and equality. And also encourage young girls to speak up if any issue arises without fear. Equality for work contribution and pay must be a norm and at home, men must also contribute to the domestic chores. There is still a long way to go but we can go when we take a step together.

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