



Research Paper

## Women Empowerment - Education, Social, Economic Challenges in India

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### ABSTRACT

*The most conspicuous feature of the term empowerment is that it contains the word power. The sidestep philosophical debate, it may be broadly defined as central over material assets intellectual resources and ideology. Empowerment in its simplest form means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance. It is both a process and the result of the process.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of women's empowerment, throughout the world; has its roots in women's movement. It is since the mid 1980s that this term became popular in the field of development, especially in reference to women and development was introduced for the first time. The mid 1980 saw the term empowerment becoming popular in the field of development especially in reference to women. In short, empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action. Power means being able to make a contribution at all levels of society and not just in the home. Power also means having women's contribution recognized and valued. Women's empowerment is very essential for the development of society.

### Empowerment and Education

Education as means of empowerment of women can bring about a positive attitudinal change. In words of Brigham Young- "You educate a man, you educate a man, You educate a woman, you educate a generation". Education as means of empowerment of women can bring about a positive attitudinal change. It is therefore, crucial for the socio-economic and political progress of India. Education significantly makes difference in the lives of women. There can be direct or indirect. Few are being mentioned here.

**(a) Improved Economic Growth :** Education increase the economic, social and political opportunities available to women. It leads to direct economic benefits in the form of higher lifetime earnings for women. The society and community also benefit from the higher productivity of its labour force. Besides improving human capital and increasing economic growth, female education also reduces the fertility rate. The lowering in the number of dependants is referred to as the demographic gift.

**(b) Lower Population Growth :** Education increases Women's knowledge about controlling fertility and access to family planning services and often encourages them to delay the age at which they marry.

Impact of Education on Women - Education is a powerful tool of social transformation. Education is one of the most critical factors responsible for the development of a human person right to education, therefore, is held as a very important human right. It is the very foundation of Good Citizenship. Today it is the principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training and helping to adjust normally to his environment. The constitution of India was recently amended to provide for the right to compulsory elementary education to children falling between the age group of 6 to 14 years.

**Social Empowerment of Women** - Under the social empowerment of women steps need to be taken to improve the health status of women, reduce material mortality especially in the areas which do not have good medical facilities. A programme for checking the spread of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS and infections / communicable diseases like T.B. need to be launched. Woman face high risk of malnutrition hence focussed attention would have to be given to meet the nutritional needs of women at all stages of their life cycle. The problem in the country is serious about the women belonging to disadvantaged groups. They are the most exploited lot. The social activist should keep a vigil on the atrocities committed on woman belonging to weaker

sections and help them to fight the legal battle for obtaining justice. schemes need to be introduced for helping women who are victims of marital violence, who deserted and those engaged in sex professions. Awareness programmes need to be organised for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights. Government has to be vigilant for ensuring that there is no discrimination against the girl child and her right are protected.

The social stigma like child marriage. Female feticide, child abuse and child prostitution must be eradicated immediately. India is both a source and destination for trafficked women and girls into prostitution and banded labour while exact numbers of trafficked women and girls are difficult to ascertain, there have been figures projected by various national and international NGOs. Anti-trafficking measures in India have increased with India's commitment to international human rights protocols and through strict legal provisions at the national level. The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act 1956 (ITPA) is the widely used law to prosecute traffickers, but also is invoked to target prostitution. Sex work is debated subject in the women's movement in India. The anti-prostitution law is seen by many to criminalize and further marginalize women who are in the sex trade. Women's rights organizations, activists and organizations such as the Durbar Mahila Samanway Committee have long supported legalization of the sex trade in India. The debate over legalization of sex work continues today and sex-work supporters are lobbying to change the ITPA for better rehabilitation measures for those who have been rescued during brothel and street raids. The ITPA also does not give adequate measures for those who are trafficked for purposes other than sex work, and disproportionately targets women, making them further vulnerable to poverty and exploitation.

**Economic Empowerment of Women :** In rural India, women's economic opportunities remain restrict by social cultural and religious barriers. Most notably inheritance laws embedded in Hindu and Shariat Civil Codes continue to marginalize women in the household and the larger community. Rural Women particularly of lower caste and class have the lowest literacy rates, and the therefore do not have the capacity to negotiate pay or contracts and most often engage in the unorganized sector, self-employment or in small scale industry. Self Help Groups (SHGs) are a widely practiced model for social and economic mobility by NGOs and the government. SHGs provide women with the opportunity to manage loans and savings that can be used by members for varying needs.

Rural, low caste and tribal women also make up 70% of domestic workers in India, a sector which is largely unregulated and unorganized. India's growing economy has allowed for many upper and middle-class women to enter the workforce and while poor rural woman have little access to education and training, there is a high demand for domestic workers in urban hubs. Domestic workers are mostly illiterate, with little or no negotiating power for wage equity, and are highly vulnerable to exploitation and sexual and physical abuse. There is a movement at the policy level to organize domestic workers and to create laws to regulate minimum wage, working hours, and other measures such as life and health insurance. Currently a national level Taskforce on Domestic Workers has been formed that will present recommendation to the central government on better enforcement of rights for the many undocumented domestic workers in India. Women are also very visible in the construction sector in India and like domestic workers are largely unorganized and rely on daily wagers. Women construction workers are mostly poor and illiterate and have little negotiating power. Women workers also earn significantly less than men, although women are the ones who do most of the backbreaking work like carrying bricks and other heavy materials on site. On the other end of the spectrum, while India has one of the highest percentages of professional women in the world, those who occupy managerial positions are under 3%. Most women work in low administrative positions and many of the young women migrating to urban centres mostly work in service and retail industries, although more and more women are entering the IT and other technical sectors.

**Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights :** The movement to assure Women's economic, social, and cultural right, (ESCR) as basic human rights is just emerging in India. The movement aims to locate women's rights within the larger human rights frame work, and by doing so moves away from looking at women's issues only within the framework of Violence against women and reproductive rights.

ESCR attempts to look at the broader issues facing women, namely poverty, housing, unemployment, education, water, food security, trade etc. While the human rights movement on ESCR is largely contained at the international policy level, there are emerging social movement around the world. In the Indian context, projects like the Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (PWESCR) for example, is creating linkages between the international human rights movement in India that creates equality all spheres of women's lives. By empowering women economically and socially, ESCR provides for a broader discourse on rights that moves women's rights from a victim-centered approach to one that cuts across other fundamental human rights issues Women's economic opportunity in India is a rapidly changing landscape.

Women are increasingly entering the workforce particularly women professionals - and are creating change but there remains a large number of invisible Women workers in unorganized and volatile sectors. However, organizing at the local level is widespread. Implementation of national and state level policies lags behind in ensuring that women workers have equal pay and are free from exploitation.

### **Solutions by Government :**

Governmental Organization are formal agencies working for the empowerment of women. But this work required multidimensional approach and hence a large number of voluntary organizations have gained increased attention in the field from grass-root level of national international level. The working style of NGO's is open, transparent and personal. They organise workshops for empowering womens. All programmes of NGO's contribute towards the realization of sustainable community development and hence women empowerment.

In a review meet on women safety, the Home Ministry has decided to soon start a comprehensive 'safe city' plan for women in eight cities where a robust emergency response system and police verified public transport will come into place. The plans will be implemented in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Lucknow and Hyderabad. At the meet issues which have come up for discussion include 33% reservation for women in police installation of CCTV cameras, deployment of women in police stations, prevention of cyber crime, infrastructure issues, mapping of dark spots and crime-prone areas and involvement of educational institutions among others. The use of social media platform for women's safety will help in providing prompt and quick response to the woman in distress. 'Targetted Intervention' by the police and civil administration, will have larger impact on women's safety.

Now the Government have taken many steps for women empowering. The Union Cabinet gave approval for setting up of Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra (PMMSK). Which is expected to be a one stop convergence support service for empowering rural woman with opportunities for skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition.

It will aim to improve declining child sex ration, ensure survival and protection of the girl child, ensuring her education and empowering her to fulfill her potential.

- It will provide an interface for rural women to approach the government for getting their entitlements and for empowering them through training and capacity building.
- At the national level, the Mahila Shakti Kendra will provide domain - based knowledge support while at the state level, it will cater to the State Resource Centre for women that will provide technical support to the respective government on issues related to women, the district and block level centres, and will provide support to the PMMSK and also give a foothold to Beti Bacho, Beti Pado in 640 districts.
- The government plans to reach the 15 most backward districts in the country with 920 Mahila Shakti Kendra.
- The government plans to involve student volunteers who will serve as "agent of change". The activities of student volunteers will be monitored through web-based system and they will provide with certificates for community service.

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. 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 the social, political and Economic life of the country with a sense of equality. Then only the vedic verse 'Wherever women is respected God resides there' would come true. At last not least in words of UN Secretary General - We empower women, we empower communities, nations and the entire human family.

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