
WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

DR.GEETHA SACHDEVA

Abstract: The present paper efforts to examine the position of Women Empowerment in India and draws attention towards the Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment. In the present day the empowerment of women has become one of the most vital concerns of 21st century.

But virtually women empowerment is still a delusion of actuality. We monitor in our day to day life how women become victimized by a range of social evils. Women Empowerment is very important instrument to enlarge women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. Empowerment of women is basically the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the conventionally disadvantaged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence.

The present investigation is based on solely from secondary sources. The study discloses that women of India are comparatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of lots of efforts undertaken by Government. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women still exist in the society. The study ends by an observation that access to Education, Employment and Change in Social Structure are only the enabling factors to Women Empowerment.

Key Words: Women Empowerment, Education, Health, Socio-Economic Status. Policy implications.

Introduction: Most recent definitions of empowerment in the development literature draw upon Amartya Sen's expression of "Development as Freedom" (1999) where development is about increasing people's choices. For example, Bennett (2002) describes empowerment as "the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them." Sen (1993) describes empowerment as "altering relations of power which constrain women's options and autonomy and adversely affect health and well-being." For Batliwala (1994) empowerment is "how much influence people have over external actions that matter to their welfare." Kabeer (2001) defines it as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.

It refers to escalating the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Women's empowerment in India is deeply reliant on numerous different variables that comprise geographical locality (urban / rural), educational status, social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment survive at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in lots of sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender based violence and political participation. However there are noteworthy breach between policy advancements and real practice at the community level. Empowerment of women is fundamentally the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the conventionally deprived ones, in the society. It is the process of safeguarding them against all forms of violence. Women empowerment engrosses the building up of a

society, a political environment, wherein women can respire without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. Women comprise approximately 50% of the world's population but India has shown unequal sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. Population; female (% of total) in India was last measured at 48.16 in 2014, according to the World Bank.

As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equivalent 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.

In the history of human development, woman has been as imperative as man. In fact, the status, employment and work performed by women in society are the pointer of a nation's overall progress. Without the contribution of women in nationwide activities, the social, economical or political progress of a country will be declined.

Women comprise half of the humanity, even contributing two-thirds of world's work hours. She earns only one-third of the total income and owns less than one-tenth of the world's resources. This illustrates that the economic status of women is in feeble condition and this is more so in a country like India. Among total Indian population of 1027.10 million, women constitute 495.73 million. Therefore, "women constitute nearly 50 per cent of population, perform two-thirds of the work and produce 50 per cent of food commodities consumed by the country.

They earn one third of remuneration and own 10 per cent of the property or wealth of the country” (Reddy et al., 1994).

Review of Literature: According to H. Subrahmanyam (2011) there has a fine advancement in overall enrolment of girl students in schools. The term empowers means to give lawful power or authority to act. It is the process of acquiring some activities of women.

M. Bhavani Sankara Rao (2011) has highlighted that health of women members of SHG have surely taken a turn to better. It visibly shows that health of women members discuss among themselves about health related problems of other members and their children and make them aware of various Government provisions specially meant for them.

Doepke M. Tertilt M. (2011) Does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development? This study is an empirical analysis suggesting that money in the hands of mothers benefits children. This study developed a series of non cooperative family bargaining models to understand what kind of frictions can give rise to the observed empirical relationship.

Duflo E. (2011) Women’s Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge study argues that the inter relationships of the Empowerment and Development are perhaps too weak to be self sustaining and that incessant policy commitment to equally for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women.

Sethuraman K. (2008) The Role of Women’s Empowerment and Domestic Violence in child Growth and under nutrition in a Tribal and Rural Community in South India. This research paper explores the relationship between Women’s Empowerment and Domestic Violence, maternal nutritional status and the nutritional status and growth over six months in children aged 6 to 24 months in a rural and tribal community. This longitudinal observational study undertaken in rural Karnataka. India included tribal and rural subjects.

Venkata Ravi and Venkatraman (2005) focused on the effects of SHG on women participation and exercising control over decision making both in family matters and in group activities.

The study by Vianello, Mino and Siemienska Renata, (1990) , ‘Gender Inequality: A comparative study of discrimination and participation’ shows that a husband’s power within marriage tended to augment in proportion to the resources that he can gather viz. education, income, prestige, social status and so on.

Malhotra Anju, Schuler, S. R. and Boender, C. (2002), on the topic titled ‘Measuring women’s empowerment as a variable in international development’, identifies the methodological

approaches or indicators in measuring and analyzing the empowerment of women are - domestic decision-making, finance and resource allocation, social and domestic matters, child related issues, access to or control over resources, freedom of movement and so on.

Objectives of the Study: The objective of present investigation is to comprehend the conceptual framework of women empowerment in Indian context, a range of policies and programmes, basic issues and key challenges. The present paper also gives special importance on a variety of efforts initiated towards women empowerment and also pay due attention to make some suggestion for speeding up the women empowerment drive in India and thereby pave the way for more study in the area.

Research Methodology: The present research paper is fundamentally descriptive and analytical in nature. In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the empowerment of in India. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources as per the need of this study.

Present Situation of Women: New Delhi: Being equal to their male counterparts is still a far cry for Indian women. Not only are they marginal as public figures an average Indian women can hardly call the shots at home or outside. India ranks below countries like Haiti, Rwanda, Congo, Chad and Zambia when it comes to number of women occupying ministerial posts. The map shows that out of the 43 ministers in India, only 4 are women.

There is only 1 women judge out of 27 judges in the Supreme Court and there are only 54 women judges out of 634 judges in various high courts.

Shocking Facts: As per UNDP report 2013 on Human Development Indicators, every south Asian Countries apart from Afghanistan, were ranked better for women than India It forecasts: an Indian girl child aged 1-5 years is 75% more probable to pass away than the boy child. A woman is raped once in every 20 min and 10% of all crimes are reported. Women form 48% of India’s Population, only 29% of the National workforce, only 26% women have access to formal credit.

Status of Women Empowerment: As per 2011 Census, India has attained the population of 1210 million, as against 301 million in 1951, of which 48.5% were females. The sex ratio was 930 in 1971 and it has enlarged to 940 according to 2011 Census. The female literacy also increased from 18.3% in 1961 to 74.0% in 2011 and a decrease in male-female literacy gap from 26.6% in 1981 to 16.7% in 2011. The condition of women in India has certainly enhanced since independence. But as revealed by the Global Gender Gap Report 2014, released by the World Economic Forum, India ranks pathetically at 114 among the 142 countries considered.

Moreover, India's ranking has been declining gradually since 2006 when the Index was launched. In 2006, India was ranked 98th. It points out that India is just not doing sufficient for its women to perk up access to resources and freedom of movement. In spite of repeated claims of progress by the Government, there was no noteworthy development in access to health care and education. There is an urgent need to rethink as how to accelerate the process of empowerment with countless impediments.

The status of Women Empowerment cannot be visualized with single dimension rather multidimensional assessment in terms of various

Table-1

	2012		2013		2014	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
Overall rank	105	0.6442	101	0.6551	114	0.6455
Economic participation and opportunity	123	0.4588	124	0.4465	134	0.4096
Educational Attainment	121	0.8525	120	0.8574	126	0.8503
Health and Survival	134	0.9612	135	0.9312	141	0.9366
Political Empowerment	17	0.3343	09	0.3852	15	0.3855

From above table we can see that overall rank has fallen in 2014(114) in comparison to 2012(105) and 2013(101). Among all other sub indices namely economic participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment only the rank of Political empowerment has made a progress.

The four pillars: The Global Gender Gap Index inspects the gap between men and women in four primary categories (subindexes): *Economic Participation and Opportunity*, *Educational Attainment*, *Health and Survival* and *Political Empowerment*. Above table shows all four of these sub indexes for each.

Economic Participation and Opportunity: This sub index is captured through three concepts: the participation gap, the payment gap and the progression gap. The participation gap is captured using the difference in labor force participation rates. The payment gap is captured through a hard data indicator (ratio of estimated female-to-male earned income) and a qualitative variable calculated through the World Economic Forum's Executive Opinion Survey (wage equality for similar work). Finally, the gap between the progression of women and men is captured through two hard data statistics (the ratio of

components of women's life and their status would bring a clear conception. So, this paper tries to give a basic idea about the condition and status of women in terms of employment, education, health and social status. Before going to elaborate individually let us have a fast view of the overall status of women in terms of gender gap index prepared by World Economic Forum from 2012 to 2014.

Details of India's Gender Gap Index: According to the latest statistics released by **World Economic Forum (2014)**, indicates that the current circumstances of gender gaps in India is alarming as shown below -

women to men among legislators, senior officials and managers, and the ratio of women to men among technical and professional workers).

Educational Attainment: In this subindex, the gap between women's and men's current access to education is captured through ratios of women to men in primary-, secondary- and tertiary-level education. A longer-term sight of the country's capability to educate women and men in equivalent numbers is captured through the ratio of the female literacy rate to the male literacy rate.

Health and Survival: This sub index gives an overview of the differences between women's and men's health. To do this, there are two indicators. The first is the sex ratio at birth, which aspires at specifically to capture the phenomenon of "missing women" prevalent in various countries with a strong son preference. Second, gap between women's and men's healthy life expectancy, calculated by the World Health Organization. This measure gives an estimation of the number of years that women and men can expect to live in good health by taking into account the years lost to violence, disease, malnutrition or other relevant factors.

Political Empowerment: This sub index measures the gap between men and women at the highest level

of political decision-making, through the ratio of women to men in minister-level positions and the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions. In addition, we include the ratio of women to men in terms of years in executive office (prime minister or president) for the last 50 years. A clear drawback in this category is the absence of any indicators capturing differences between the participation of women and men at local levels of government. Should such data become available at a global level in

future years, they will be considered for inclusion in the Global Gender Gap Index.

Crime against Women: The crimes against women fly straightly against orchestrating Women Empowerment in India. A report on the crimes against Women by the National Crime Records Bureau comes up with upsetting statistics. The Crime Head Wise details of reported crimes during the year 2009 to 2013 along with percentage variation are presented in following Table no.2

Crime Head - Wise Incidents of Crime against Women During 2009-2013 and Percentage Variation in 2013 over 2012

Table-2

Sl. No.	Crime Head	Year					Percentage Variation in 2013 over 2012
		2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	
1.	Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)	21,397	22,172	24,206	24,923	33,707	35.2
2.	Kidnapping and abduction (Sec. 363 to 373 IPC)	25,741	29,795	35,565	38,262	51,881	35.6
3.	Dowry Death (Sec. 302 / 304 IPC)	8,383	8,391	8,618	8,233	8,083	-1.8
4.	Cruelty by husband or his relatives (Sec. 498-A IPC)	89,546	94,041	99,135	1,06,527	1,18,866	11.6
5.	Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty (Sec. 354 IPC)	38,711	40,613	42,968	45,351	70,739	56.0
6.	Insult to the modesty of women (Sec. 509 IPC)	11,009	9,961	8,570	9,173	12,589	37.2
7.	Importation of girl from foreign country (Sec. 366-B IPC)	48	36	80	59	31	-47.4
A.	Total IPC crime against Women	1,94,832	2,05,009	2,19,142	2,32,528	2,95,896	27.3
8.	Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
9.	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956	2,474	2,499	2,435	2,563	2,579	0.6
10.	Indecent Representation of Women (P) Act, 1986	845	895	453	141	362	156.7
11.	The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	5,650	5,182	6,619	9,038	10,709	17.9
B.	Total SLL crime against Women	8,969	8,576	9,507	11,742	13,650	16.2
	Total (A+B)	2,03,804	2,13,585	2,28,649	2,44,270	3,09,546	26.7

Source: Crime in India-2013

A total of 2,44,270 Incidents of Crime against Women (both under IPC and SLL) were reported in the country during the year 2012 as compared to 2,28,649 in the year 2011 recording an increase of 6.4% during the year 2012. These crimes have incessantly enlarged during 2008-2012 with 1, 95,856 cases in the year 2008. 2, 03,804 cases in 2009 and 2, 13,585 cases in

2010 and 2, 28,650 case in 2011 and 2, 44,270 cases in the year 2012. The proportion of IPC crimes committed against women towards total IPC crimes has increased during the last 5 years from 9.2% in the year 2009 to 11.2% during the year 2013. Variations are presented in following table 3.

Table-3

Proportion of Crime against Women (IPC) Towards Total IPC Crimes

Sr. No.	Year	Total IPC Crimes	Crime Against Women (IPC) Cases	Percentage to Total IPC Crimes
1.	2009	21,21,345	2,03,804	9.2
2.	2010	22,24,831	2,13,585	9.6
3.	2011	23,25,575	2,28,649	9.4
4.	2012	23,87,188	2,44,270	10.2
5.	2013	26,47,722	3,09,546	11.2

Source: Crime in India-2013

Why Need of Women Empowerment? Reflecting into the “Vedas Purana” of Indian culture, women is being worshiped such as LAXMI MAA, goddess of wealth; SARSWATI MAA, for wisdom; DURGA MAA for power. The status of women in India chiefly in rural areas needs to address the issue of empowering women. About 66% of the female population in rural area is unutilized. This is generally due to existing social customs. In agriculture and Animal care the women contribute 90% of the total workforce. Women compose approximately half of the population, perform nearly 2/3 of its work hours, receive 1/10th of the world’s income and own less than 1/ 100th the world property. Among the world’s 900 million illiterate people, women outnumber men two to one. 70% of people living in poverty are women. Lower sex ratio i.e. 933, existing studies show that the women are relatively less healthy than men though belong to same class. They constitute less than 1/7th of the administrators and managers in developing countries. Only 10% seats in World Parliament and 6% in National Cabinet are held by women.

Ways to Empower Women: Changes in women’s mobility and social interaction, Changes in women’s labor patterns Changes in women’s access to and control over resources and Changes in women’s control over Decision making, Providing education, Self employment and Self help group, Providing minimum needs like Nutrition, Health, Sanitation, Housing .Other than this society should change the mentality towards the word women Encouraging women to develop in their fields they are good at and make a career.

Government Schemes for Women Empowerment: The Government programmes for women development began as early as 1954 in India but the actual participation began only in 1974. At present, the Government of India has over 34 schemes for women operated by different department and ministries. Some of these are as follows;

1. Rastriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) 1992-1993
2. Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY) October,1993.
3. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) 1995.
4. Women Entrepreneur Development programme given top priority in 1997-98.
5. Mahila Samakhya being implemented in about 9000 villages.
6. Swayasjdha.
7. Swa Shakti Group.
8. Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women(STEP).
9. Swalamban.
10. Crèches/ Day care centre for the children of working and ailing mother.
11. Hostels for working women.
12. Swadhar.

13. National Mission for Empowerment of Women.
14. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) (1975),
15. Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescence Girls (RGSEAG) (2010).
16. The Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme for Children of Working Mothers.
17. Integrated Child Protection scheme (ICPS) (2009-2010).
18. Dhanalakahmi (2008).
19. Short Stay Homes.
20. Ujjawala (2007).
21. Scheme for Gender Budgeting (XI Plan).
22. Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP).
23. Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM).
24. Prime Minister’s Rojgar Yojana (PMRY).
25. Women’s Development Corporation Scheme (WDCS).
26. Working Women’s Forum.
27. Indira Mahila Kendra.
28. Mahila Samiti Yojana.
29. Khadi and Village Industries Commission.
30. Indira Priyadarshini Yojana.
31. SBI’s Sree Shakti Scheme.
32. SIDBI’s Mahila Udyam Nidhi Mahila Vikas Nidhi.
33. NGO’s Credit Schemes.
34. National Banks for Agriculture and Rural Development’s Schemes

The efforts of government and its different agencies are ably supplemented by nongovernmental organizations that are playing an equally important role in facilitating women empowerment. Despite concerted efforts of governments and NGOs there are certain gaps. Of course we have come a long way in empowering women yet the future journey is difficult and demanding.

Constitutional Provisions For Empowering Women In India: Equality before law for all persons (Article-14).

Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15(I)).

However, special provisions may be made by the state in favors of women and children Article 15(3).

Equality of opportunity for all citizens relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state (Article 16).

State policy to be directed to securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a); (v) equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)).

Provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42).

Promotion of harmony by every citizen of India and renouncement of such practices which are derogatory to the dignity of women Article 51A(e).

Reservation of not less than one-third of total seats for women in direct election to local bodies, viz; Panchayats and Municipalities (Articles 343(d) and 343 (T).

Reasons for the Empowerment of Women: Today we have noticed different Acts and Schemes of the central Government as well as state Government to empower the women of India. But in India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. A few women are engaged in services and other activities. So, they need economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men. Other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. According to 2001 census, rate of literacy among men in India is found to be 76% whereas it is only 54% among women. Thus, increasing education among women is of very important in empowering them. It has also noticed that some of women are too weak to work. They consume less food but work more. Therefore, from the health point of view, women folk who are to be weaker are to be made stronger. Another problem is that workplace harassment of women. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment, and so on. For these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. To sum up, women empowerment can not be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

Key Challenges: There are numerous restraints that verify the process of women empowerment in India. Social norms and family structure in developing countries like India, manifests and responsible for the subordinate status of women. One of the norms is the continuing preference for a son over the birth of a girl child which is present in approximately all societies and communities. The society is more biased in favor of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities. The root cause of this type of attitude lies in the belief that male child inherits the clan in India. Women often internalize the traditional concept of their role as natural thus inflicting an injustice upon them. Poverty is the reality of life for the vast majority women in India. It is the another factor that poses challenge in realizing women's empowerment. There are a number of

challenges that are plaguing the issues of women's right in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India

Several challenges that are plaguing the issues of women's right in India are -To change the attitude of society towards women. To develop the qualities of inferiority, subservience and domesticity among the girl child especially in rural, tribal and poor families for her education and development. The lower enrolment of girls in schools and playing the role of second mother by shouldering the responsibilities of household work such as looking after the siblings are the critical areas to be given attention to in India. Incompetent laws and amendments as the fundamental problems lie in the attitude of the society which is highly biased against women.

Findings of the Study: Globalization, Liberalization and other Socio - Economic forces have given a little relief to a big proportion of the population. Still, there are quite a few areas where women empowerment in India is mainly lacking. There needs to be a deep change in the mind set of the people in the country. Not just the women themselves, but the men have to wake up to a world that is moving towards equality and equity. There are a number of Government programmes and NGOs in the Country, there is still a broad gap that exists between those under protection and those not.

Poverty and illiteracy add to these complications, The Empowerment of Women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety. Empowerment of Women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved. This could be possible only by adopting definite social and economic policies with a view of total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings. In order to create a sustainable world, we must begin to Empower Women.

Suggestions: Empowerment of women can only be attained if their economic and social status is enhanced by accepting specific social and economic policies with a view for bringing phenomenal change in the plight women's education and empowerment in India. The primary priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grassroots problem. Therefore, education for women has to be paid special attention. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women particularly belonging to weaker sections about their rights. Women should be permissible to work and should be provided sufficient security and support to work. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in the society. Strict implementation of Programmes and Acts should be there to curb the mal-practices widespread in the society.

Thus, the achievement in the field of income / employment and in educational front, the scenario of women empowerment seems to be relatively poor. The need of the hour is to recognize those loopholes or limitations which are observing the realization of empowerment of women and this inventiveness must be started from the women folk itself as well as more importantly policy initiative taken by the state and society. Let us take the oath that we want an egalitarian society where everybody whether men or women get the equal opportunity to express and uplift one's well being and well being of the society as whole.

Women's empowerment is not a Northern concept women all over the world, including countries in South, have been challenging and changing gender inequalities since the beginning of the history. These struggles have also been supported by many men who have been outraged at injustice against women. Women represent half the world's population and gender inequality exists in every nation on the planet. Until women are given the similar opportunities that

men are, whole societies will be intended to carry out below their factual potentials. The greatest need of the hour is alteration of social attitude to women. It is vital as their thought and their value systems lead the development of a good family, good society and eventually a good nation. The finest way of empowerment is possibly through inducting women in the mainstream of development. Women empowerment will be genuine and effectual 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 Empowerment of Women has become one of the most imperative concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Government initiatives alone will not be enough to attain this goal. Society must take initiative to make 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.

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Dr.Geetha Sachdeva/Asst. Professor/Dept. of Human & Social sciences, NIT Kurekshetra/