



Women Empowerment: A focus

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1. Introduction

The subject of empowerment of women has becoming a burning issue all over the world including India since last few decades. Many agencies of United Nations in their reports have emphasized that gender issue is to be given utmost priority. It is held that women now cannot be asked to wait for any more for equality.

Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing individual to think, take action and control work in an autonomous way. It is the process by which one can gain control over one's destiny and the circumstances of one's lives. Empowerment includes control over resources (physical, human, intellectual and financial) and over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes). (Baltiwalla, 1994). It is not merely a feel of greater extrinsic control, but also grows intrinsic capacity, greater self-confidence and an internal transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barriers to accessing resources or changing traditional ideology (Pinto, 2001).

2. Present Status of women

The position and status of women all over the world has risen incredibly in the 20th century. We find that it has been very low in 18th and 19th centuries in India and elsewhere when they were treated like 'objects' that can be bought and sold. For a long time women in India remained within the four walls of their household. Their dependence on men folk was total.

3. Needs and important

The terms Women Empowerment refers to the increasing of the spiritual, social, political or economic strength of all women. It is frequently seen that the empowered in their capacities develop confidence. Empowerment of women is conceivably the sum total of the points listed below or parallel capabilities:

- Having the power of making decisions for self.
- Having access to resources and information for proper decision making.
- Having numerous options to choose from (instead of yes/no, either/or).
- Ability of showing assertiveness while making decisions collectively.
- Ability to think positively to bring about a change.
- Ability of developing new skills for group power and self improvement
- Ability of using democratic means to change perceptions of others.
- Adopting changes and a growth process that are self initiated and never ending.
- Overcoming stigma and staying focused on increasing positive self-image.

Today, women share equal status as men. More stress should be laid on empowering rural women and their development. A special focus should be on empowering girls and women, since it will lead to a change in the society which would be sustainable and will be in effect for ages to come... A united approach must be followed while empowering women it is a social cause that requires stewardship and

continuous attention from every individual. Society needs to enhance its efforts for women empowerment and to boost the progress being made by women. It is society's constitutional, moral and social responsibility to confirm women's progress giving women equal opportunities and rights.

Women today are ruling over the world and making their mark in various fields with the dedication and hard work shown by them to excel in their area of expertise. Women are not treated as an object or slave, rather they have now become independent of unethical societal norms imposed on them. As a result, companies are hiring are women force in more numbers since they have shown excellence in dedication towards their work as well as striking a perfect balance between their social, personal and professional life. Female job seekers were not given much preference earlier but now they are preferred candidates for many jobs.

In the simplest of words it is basically the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development as well as shine as equals in society. Women want to be treated as equals so much so that if a woman rises to the top of her field it should be a commonplace occurrence that draws nothing more than a raised eyebrow at the gender. This can only happen if there is a channelized route for the empowerment of women.

Thus, it is no real surprise that women empowerment in India is a hotly discussed topic with no real solution looming in the horizon except to doubly redouble our efforts and continue to target the sources of all the violence and ill-will towards women.

4. Crimes against Women

The crimes against women fly directly against orchestrating women empowerment in India. A report on the crimes against women by the National Crime Records Bureau comes up with some alarming statistics:-

Sr.	Crime Head	Year 2006	Year 2007	Year 2008	Year 2009	Year 2010	Year 2011	Year 2012	Percentage Variation in 2012 over 2011
1	Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)	19,348	20,737	21,467	21,397	22,172	24,206	24,923	3.0
2	Kidnapping & Abduction (Sec. 363 to 373 IPC)	17,414	20,416	22,939	25,741	29,795	35,565	38,262	7.6
3	Dowry Death (Sec 302/304 IPC)	7,618	8,093	8,172	8,383	8,391	8,618	8,233	-4.5
4	Torture (Sec. 498-A IPC)	63,128	75,930	81,344	89,546	94,041	99,135	1,06,527	7.5
5	Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC)	36,617	38,734	40,413	38,711	40,613	42,968	45,351	5.5
6	Sexual Harassment (Sec. 509 IPC)	9,966	10,950	12,214	11,009	9,961	8,570	9,173	7.0

Sr.	Crime Head	Year 2006	Year 2007	Year 2008	Year 2009	Year 2010	Year 2011	Year 2012	Percentage Variation in 2012 over 2011
7	Importation of Girls (Sec. 366-B IPC)	67	61	67	48	36	80	59	-26.3
8	Sati Prevention Act, 1987	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	-100.0
9	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956	4,541	3,568	2,659	2,474	2,499	2,435	2,563	5.3
10	Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986	1,562	1,200	1,025	845	895	453	141	-68.9
11	Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	4,504	5,623	5,555	5,650	5,182	6,619	9,038	36.5
	Total	1,64,765	1,85,312	1,95,856	2,03,804	2,13,585	2,28,650	2,44,270	6.8

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 2,28,650 in the year 2011 recording an increase of 6.4% during the year 2012. These crimes have continuously increased 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 cases in 2011 and 2,44,270 cases in the year 2012. West Bengal with 7.5% share of country's female population has accounted for nearly 12.7% of total crime against women by reporting 30,942 cases during the year 2012.

5. Empowerment and Education

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. The Constitution of India empowers the state to adopt affirmative measures for prompting ways and means to empower women. Education significantly makes difference in the lives of women. These can be direct or indirect. Few are being mentioned here.

[A] Improved Economic Growth

Education increases 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”.

Keeping women illiterate clearly retards economic growth. Societies that do not invest in girls' education pay a price for it in terms of slower growth and reduced incomes. Investments in female education start a virtuous cycle that leads to improved levels of income, growth and gender equality. Inequality in education is like a distortionary tax that misallocates resources, thereby reducing economic growth (Dollar and Gatti, 1999).

[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. In the field survey Table 5.2 indicates clearly that the higher literacy rate improves the monthly income of the family and vice-versa (Table 5.3). They also have more control over household resources (Table 5.6) and greater involvement in reproductive decisions. Women with more than a primary schooling had a smaller gender bias in sending children to school than women with less than primary schooling.

But the question arises if all sections of society do not have access to the right to education as a fundamental right, how can empowerment take place? And how can education lead to the promotion of other human rights? The political commitment behind many education campaigns has remained unfulfilled. Disparities in education between various social groups defined by region, area, caste, sex, class, disabilities etc. still exist. The lack of educational opportunities for girl is contrary to Article 10 of the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women) states that governments should undertake all appropriate steps towards the elimination of any stereotyped concepts in all forms of education. They are indicative of government's failure to deal with the problem of right to education. There is an urgent need to convert the government's commitments regarding education into action. Only then it will be possible to use education as a key instrument for bringing changes in social and cultural attitudes in relation to human rights.

6. What is Successful Empowerment?

Baldwin applauded Basu's message about expanding the traditional approach to empowerment, urging organizations to "unpack the concepts" behind their goals to determine what they define as successful empowerment.

The idea of women's empowerment is not clearly defined. For example, organizations should ask themselves when they start employment initiatives whether they are addressing working in the house or out of the house, in the formal sector or the informal sector, Baldwin said. "What is it about having that job or that income that makes a difference when [women] come home?" For organizations making these decisions, "it would be extra helpful to actually understand how these concepts knit together so that you would have half a chance that pushing on this part of the concept is actually going to give you the effect at the other end that you want," she said.

In Basu's eyes, empowerment is best defined as an expansion of agency throughout women's lives, not in individual sectors. "We mean expansion of choice according to [women's] rules," she said. "Even 'bad' behaviors can be an outcome of expanded choice."

Reference

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