

A Study on the Need of Women Empowerment with Special Reference to Threats to Women's Rights, Issues and Challenges.

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ABSTRACT

Since men have been dominating women from the very beginning of civilization, there is a great need of women empowerment in India. Women's empowerment" refers to giving women equal position as men, permitting them to make important decisions of their lives and allowing them to do anything that they like to do. In other words, women should be free from internal barriers (family and relatives) and external barriers (society). Although the Government has initiated many schemes for women empowerment, still women are not treated equally to men in our society. They face domestic violence, gender discrimination, inequality of pay at the workplace, freedom of movement, etc. The present study reveals different types of threats that women face in our country. One should never forget that no country can grow without empowering women as it is one of the main factors that help in the development of any country. It is essential to empower women to participate fully in family and society matters to build stronger economies. Women face various issues and challenges related to education, health and safety. This research paper throws light on issues and challenges of women empowerment. The present study is conceptual and is based on secondary data. Some suggestions have also been given which will be helpful to empower women in a developing country like India.

Keywords-Women empowerment, issues, challenges

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment is related to permitting women to make their own choices and decisions. In Indian society, which is male-dominated and women differ from men in their social positions; most of them do not have the freedom to do what they want to do. Even though they are capable of doing anything, they have to look at male members of the family and society for permission. Women empowerment is related to giving women opportunities that allow them fully to realize their potentialities. They should enjoy their rights and get the same benefit from the resources as men get in our society. In fact, it is a fundamental human right that helps in promoting women's sense of self-worth. Thus, women empowerment includes not only women's sense of self-worth where they can make choices and have a chance to do anything of their choice but also their rights to control their own lives. In short, they should be entitled to get benefit from the resources and should have full freedom of movement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Shettar (2015), Women empowerment is related with the increasing strength of women spiritually, politically, economically and socially. In India, women's empowerment is dependent on many

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variables, which include geographical location, the status of education, social status and age. Women empowerment is the process of protecting them against all forms of violence. Thus, it is related with building up a society where women have full freedom without having any fear of ill-treatment, discrimination, exploitation, nervousness and anxiety. In a developing country like India, they are not treated as equal to men in all places. Gender inequality and differences are found in India. The paradoxical situations are such that at one time she is concerned as Goddess and at other times as a slave.¹

Nayak and Mahanta, (2009) have analyzed the status of women empowerment in India. For the analysis, they used some indicators like the decision making power of women, financial freedom, participation in politics, gender inequality, exposure to media, access to education, etc. According to them, women of India are relatively disempowered and they do not enjoy an equal status that of men in society. Although the government has taken various steps, still the gender gap exists. Women's household decision-making power and freedom of movement vary considerably with their age, education and employment status. In fact, women living in the rural areas are more prone to domestic violence than women living in the urban areas.

Dr Devi (2017) has found out some issues which need to be tackled for women empowerment and gender equality. He found out that women are put at a disadvantage at every level of society in India. It may be access to education or access to resources. The majority of women are poor and uneducated and they spend their time arranging necessary things for their family and are not in a position to even make choices for themselves or availing any opportunity. They are not conscious about their welfare and better health. To make them aware of this, they should be provided with proper remuneration and work at par with men so as to boost their status in society. A woman should be physically healthy to know her rights and to take challenges of equality. Women must be provided with complete, affordable and quality health care.³

Agnihotri and Malipatil, (2017) -In India, there is a tradition of worshipping female goddesses (Lakshmi, Durga, Saraswati) and also giving respect to women, particularly to mother. In spite of that, there are some demons in India who are killing women's rights in society. These are the dowry system, illiteracy, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, domestic violence and many more. To empower women, these devils should be killed. Women have been facing many types of violence and discriminatory practices particularly by the male members of the family and society. Wrong practices for women in society have slowed the process of women empowerment. There is a great need for empowerment of the Women physically, mentally and socially. Almost half population of India is covered by the female. Without empowering its half population means women, our country won't develop.⁴

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The proposed study is exploratory in nature. It is based on secondary data only. The documents of articles and websites have been used in this study. For the purpose of research, only secondary data has been collected.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To find out the need for women empowerment in India
- 2) To understand threats to women's rights
- 3) To study the issues and challenges of women empowerment

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Need of women empowerment and threats to women's rights-There is a great need of women empowerment in a developing country like India. Equal rights for men and women are given under Articles 14 to 16 in the Indian constitution. Discrimination based on gender is strictly prohibited. India is the second country in modern history to have a female leader, Indira Gandhi, in 1966 after Sri Lanka, elected Sirimavo Bandaranaike in 1960. The Women's Reservation Bill of giving 33 per cent reservation for women seats in all levels of Indian politics is also a strong step for women empowerment.

One of India's major problems gender inequalities can be seen in a wider context of South Asia where gender disparity is still significant, especially in the rural area. Women continue to do household chores and do not have a right to participate in economic decisions. It has been found that levels of literacy, nutrition and access to health care, etc. continue to be poor for women. Further, social welfare parameters are lower than our neighbouring country Bangladesh. Women empowerment is the only weapon that will help in achieving gender equality. When men and women both will have equal rights and opportunities for education, healthcare, economic participation and personal development, gender discrimination will reduce. Some Scandinavian countries are the best example. The countries such as Iceland, Sweden, Finland and Norway in Northern Europe have made strides in narrowing the gender gap.⁵

Not only this, empowered women can contribute to the health and productivity of the entire family and society and also for the next generation's development. Education is one of the most important means of empowering women. More than 40 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared "everyone has the right to education". But in most regions, women get less formal education than men, as a result women's knowledge, potentials are not recognized. We should not forget that empowering a woman today will give us a progressive society for tomorrow; hence there is a great need for women empowerment in India.

Threats, Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment- – Here are some important issues to be tackled for women's empowerment. Gender inequality/discrimination which refers to unequal treatment of male and female by our society. Due to gender inequality, they are not provided proper remuneration and work at par with men hence are not able to increase their status in society. In India, women are discriminated against in terms of payment for their jobs not only in rural areas but also in urban areas. Not only this, women often have to deal with more complications in getting credits to start their independent business.

They have fewer opportunities in society. Due to these fewer opportunities, they contribute more to their household and almost ignore themselves. For example, Beaman et al. (2011) found that, in West Bengal, in places where no woman had ever been the local leader, 86% of parents wanted their daughters to be either a housewife or whatever their in-laws would decide for her.

Esther Duflo, "Women's Empowerment and Economic Development" Working Paper 17702, retrieved on 31st December from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w17702>The following are the threats issues and challenges of women empowerment.

Another serious issue is domestic violence which has taken the form of psychological and physical abuse against women like slapping, beating, hitting, public humiliation, etc. In India, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act comes under Section 498 A of the Indian Penal Code but the provisions of the Act are not followed strictly.

Not only this, 'The Dowry Prohibition Act' is not effective in India. In the prevailing dowry system, the parents of women have to make payment to the bridegroom in the form of capital, durable goods, real estate, vehicles, etc. as a condition for marriage. Deaths due to the dowry system are quite alarming. The reported dowry death cases in India amounted to more than 7100 in 2016. Section 498A of the Indian Penal code has declared taking and giving of dowry as a crime but it is still in practice.

Women form 48% of India's population, only 26% of women have access to formal credit. Last but not the least, there is a very serious issue of rape cases in India where there are no strict rules and regulations. The report says that an Indian girl child aged 1-5 years is 75% more likely to die than a boy child, a woman is raped every 20 minutes.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

No country can develop without empowering Women and in a developing country like India women constitute almost one-half of India's population. The Government has launched various schemes for women empowerment like the Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) (2010), the Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP), Dhanalakshmi (2008), Ujjwala (2007), National Mission for Empowerment of Women. In spite of the effective implementation of all these schemes and programs, there are significant gaps between policy achievements and actual practice. Economic progress is not possible without the engagement and empowerment of women. The empowerment of women is of the utmost value for achieving sustainable economic development. Still, a large number of women do not get sufficient autonomy regarding the value choices for their own life.

Eliminating gender differences is a key element for women empowerment. There should be access to education for all, particularly higher education of women. Special measures should be taken to improve the quality of education. According to research women, unemployment and unequal opportunities at the workplace can be eliminated with the help of women empowerment. Whenever women are unemployed, their strengths and potentials are not used. Women empowerment will provide equal opportunities to them.⁸

There should be proper implementation of "The Dowry Prohibition Act and Domestic Violence Act. Those who cause harm to women physically or mentally should get severe punishment.

Limitations of the Study- The study is based on secondary data only. A few women were approached for discussion. Further, all the issues of women empowerment have not been taken.

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