



Empowering Women for Sustainable Development

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to analyze the level of women's empowerment in India and highlights the issues and challenges of women empowerment. Although, empowerment of women, today has become one of the most important concerns of 21 century, but reality on the ground is far more different. We shall observe that how in our day to day life women's are being victimized. This study reveals that women of India are relatively disempowered than that of men despite of numerous efforts undertaken by government. And paper shall prove that access to education and change in social structure are the vital factors if women empowerment is to be realized.

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There is no denying the fact that we have made considerable progress in all walks of life, yet social evil likes gender discrimination, female foeticide, dowry system and domestic violence still persists in our society. A woman continues to lag behind in terms of educational level, entrepreneurship and employment due to lack of skills, lack of capacity building, training opportunities and financial support.

Twentieth century is hailed as the 'Peoples Century' but where are the women in this crowd of people. Standing on the threshold of the twenty first century as one look backs, a question that confronts us is where indeed are the women in India in terms of empowerment and socio-economic emancipation? Even a cursory look over a century of development and progress will show that a major component of the status-quo is the entrenchment of particular values in the Indian social structures and the acquiescence of women themselves to such a value orientation.

Women constitute one half of the world population and a visible majority of them are poor. Women either solely or largely supports on increasing number of families. Projects and programs aiming to improve the living condition of poor cannot, therefore, be effective unless women participate in their formulation and implementation, as contributors as well as beneficiaries. The following brief portrays the importance of enhancing women's involvement at all levels of management, including policy making and decision making –

Since Independence, Government of India has been making various efforts to empower women. Various plan periods, the issues regarding women empowerment has been given priority from fifth - five year plan onwards

To empower women is to increase their control over their decisions and affect their lives both from within and outside the household.

Women should be encouraged to bring their vision and leadership, knowledge and skills, views and aspirations into the levels of development agenda from the grassroots to international levels. Women should be assisted in conflict situations and their participation in peace process should be supported. Emphasis should be given to advocacy of gender responsive legislation and constitutional revisions to

increase women's opportunities to influence the direction of society and to remove obstacles to women's access to power.

Racial feminism in India in the last two decades has brought to the fore a realization that it has remained rather academic and theoretical more conceived with glossing over problems faced by women globally than the larger concerns of women at grassroots. The grassroots approach involves breaking out the literate framework and going into activism. This approval makes it imperative to analyze and assess women's struggle for survival from the perspective of women's movement. It demands a comprehensive plan of action to centre the problem of escalating violence against women and increasing propositions of female headed households in areas of economic, social and political tensions.

Mahatma Gandhi indicated the path to reach the goal of women's empowerment. Gandhi always had admits "a passion to serve womankind.....my experience has confirmed me in that real advancement of women can come only by and through their own efforts."

Gandhi was a great advocate of economic independence of women and articulated his views on this matter with great force and clarity. He firmly believed that a woman by staying at home contributes to the income of the home by cooking and managing the household. But he was not averse to women venturing out of her home if the situation so demanded.

It is indeed, unfortunate that after a century of adult franchise even though women form nearly half the electorate, the number of male politicians remains disappointingly small in most democracies.

The loss to society as a result of the continued bias against women is often overlooked in the desire to keep them out of the public sphere, denying them opportunity outside the walls of their houses and the worse captivity imposed on them by their gender. Our society continues to emphasize the tendency towards defining a primary role for women as homemakers as if they were the only ones entrusted with the reproduction and care of the human species and all the social structures have functioned in relation to the masculine norm.

One major point that emerges strongly from the long ensuing debate is that unless financial dictates be subordinated to social values, that economics be subordinated to politics and women's individual and collective rights be respected all talk about new world economic order will remain an empty jargon.

The process of globalization has hit the poor woman severely in terms of trafficking of women and prostitution, a steep rise in the incidents of female foeticide and female infanticides, dowry demands, domestic violence, harassment and dowry deaths.

In a nation where discrimination and violence against women begins in the womb itself, any agenda for empowerment must therefore, logically begin with the girl child and not with her mother. The hundred million "Missing Women" of India, as Amartya Sen has termed them goes missing as daughters and sisters but not widows and wives. These are all the hapless victims of that original discrimination a girl child faces at pre natal or post natal stage, which decides whether she is "empowered" to live at all. And the situation demands attention of the entire "civilized" society to ponder over the human rights of those who cannot fight for their right to live.

Education is the key to raise the status of women. Empowerment comes from education for which greater attention needs to be paid. More than higher education, primary and secondary education requires special attention and is the need of the hour.

Men and women do not and cannot exist as pure binary forms. The oppressor and the oppressed, they are already ordered and broken up through other categories such as race, religion, caste and class. A vexed problem thus form feminists in India is that of separating women's particular oppression from the

tangled matrix of several oppressive systems. The problems however, is “when” to separate it and “how” for experience demands that women’s “problems” must be addressed as separate category. The main goal to meet human rights challenges in the 21st century should be gender justice and empowerment of women rather than gender equality.

For Gandhi, the question of the empowerment of women was social issue and her concerns as human rights issue. He held that the need of the hour is to change the mindset of the society. Empowerment of women must also entail rights over property and access to credit. Land rights do not only mean mere control over a piece of property, it accords status to a woman so as to strengthen her economic position and social security. There should be an all comprehensive economic, social and political empowerment of women for all movement to reach its desired goal.

The need of the hour is to create an environment by launching effective programs where every member of the society irrespective of caste, creed and gender are looked upon as equal partners in working towards the upliftment of society. Human development should be the ultimate goal of women empowerment for it to be really meaningful. Empowerment is not a dole to be handed out in judicious doses. It is an ongoing process and more importantly, it is a method of creating a sensitive, balanced and efficient policy making framework. It is about finding a place on the agenda for a policy issue.

Here are some suggestions to make women’s empowerment more efficient

- First and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grassroots problem.
- Awareness programmes need to be organised for creating awareness among women belonging to weaker sections.
- Women should be allowed to be work and should be provided safety.
- Strict implementation of programmes and act should be there practices.
- Health and safety of women must be of paramount importance for creating a conducive and safe environment for women’s.
- Poverty is one of the greatest problems and its eradication must be a national goal. Due to abject poverty, women’s are exploited socially, physically and sexually.

At last when we see, the scenario of women empowerment currently in the nation, the efforts and agendas in this regard are comparatively very poor. The need of hour is to identify these loopholes and limitations which are observing the realization of empowerment of women and this initiative must be started by the state and society. The greatest need of hour, however, is to change the social attitude towards women. ‘When Women moves forward the family moves, village moves and the nation moves.’ The empowerment of women is not only a moral imperative but a pre-requisite for strengthening democratic traditions and fighting injustice and oppression against feminisms a matter of attitude which need not be inherent in every woman or absent in every mean. When a woman thrives her family thrives, when family thrive communities flourish and nation reaps the benefits.

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