

Challenges to Women's Empowerment

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Abstract

Empowerment is regarded to be a multi-dimensional process, which should enable women or group of women to realise their complete identity and power in all spheres of life. It consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in the decision making process, to enable them to have larger ability and planning for their own lives and to have better control over the circumstances that have influenced their lives in a negative manner. For any household, community or the country to progress and do well in all tasks, it is important to take into consideration the concept of women empowerment. The issue of women empowerment has been of immense discussion and scrutiny not only in India but in other countries of the world as well. Women are required to acquire empowerment to liberate themselves from any kinds of restrictions, and influence of the customs, beliefs and practices that have undermined their status and position.

There has been implementation of programs and policies and efforts have been made to recognize the significance of women within the society and take measures to bring about their empowerment. In the history of human development, women were considered as important as the men, in fact the work, jobs and tasks that women performed within the society were considered vital that led to the progress of the nation. If women will not be empowered in various aspects, social, political, economic and so forth, the progress of the nation will be weakened and there will be occurrences of number of barriers within the course of development.

Keywords: *Empowerment, Women, Challenges, Barriers, Measures, Strategies*

Introduction

Empowerment refers people having power and properly controls their lives. Women empowerment refers to increasing the women economical, social and educational rights, without any kind of discrimination based on gender, class, religion or social status. The empowerment of women in India is largely dependent on a variety of different variables that include geographical location in urban as well as in rural areas, educational status, social status which includes caste and class, and age. Programs on women's empowerment occur at the national, state, and local levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, employment, gender-based violence, and political participation. However, there are significant differences between the improvements in policies and definite preparations at the societal level.

The influence of the patriarchal structure can be observed in rural as well as in urban India, although women's empowerment in rural India is observed to a much lesser extent as compared to the urban areas. This is of particular concern, since over 70% of the country's population resides in rural areas, despite the increase in the rate of urbanization and growth of cities. Rural women, as opposite to women in the urban areas, experience problems such as inequality and violence to a much greater extent, and in all domains of life. Urban women and, in particular, the well educated women

residing in urban areas, make use of greater availability of the employment opportunities, economic opportunities, health and education, and experience less gender inequality and domestic violence. Women in well educated, wealthy and high status families are empowered in themselves. Women in urban and rural areas who have acquired some literacy skills have a greater decision making power in the household as well as in the society. Besides, the level of education also has a direct impact on maternal mortality rates, and nourishment and well-being concerns amongst the children (Upadhyay, n.d.). One of the main aspect for the difference in the implementation of laws and policies in order to report discriminatory treatment, economic disadvantages, and violence against women at the community level is the essentially patriarchal structure that administers the society and households in most of the country. As such, women and girls have constrained movement, access to education, employment opportunities, health facilities, lower or no authority in decision making, and experience higher rates of violence. Political involvement is also obstructed at the Panchayat or the level of the local governing bodies and at the state and national levels, despite the present reservations for women (Upadhyay, n.d.).

Need and Significance for Women Empowerment

The empowerment of women refers to an increasing spiritual, political, economic, educational, social and gender strength of an individual within the society. There are many factors on the basis of which the empowerment of women takes place, such as their area of existence, rural or urban, their age, educational level, the kind of work that they do, i.e. homemakers, or they work in organized or unorganized, informal sectors and their socio-economic status. The meaning of the term 'empowerment' means the upliftment of the socio-economic status of women, recognizing their significance, making provision of all the opportunities to them as compared to the men and treating them with respect and courtesy. It has been observed that women are subjected to violence and criminal acts, therefore, in order to bring about women empowerment, it is important to guide them against all the forms of violence and criminal acts. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population, but in India, the female population has been comparatively lower as compared to the males. As far as the realization of women's empowerment and their social status is concerned, they are not treated equally with the men. In western societies, they have been treated equally but in India, gender inequalities and discriminations do take place even in the present existence (Shetter, 2015).

Within the society, women empowerment is considered to be an important concept. There is a need to bring the empowerment of women because they are vital within a social setting and render an important contribution in the bringing up of the family. The need for empowerment of women is vital for the implementation of various functions, such as they should also have a say in the decision making matters, freedom of movement from one place to another, because if they remain restricted and will not be able to move outside, then their status will not be improved. Access to education and employment is important for women, there are some jobs within the society which only women can perform, such as teaching nursery school students, hence, it is essential to make provision of education and employment opportunities for women so that they are able to render an effective contribution towards the well-being of the society. If the women are not provided with opportunities that would lead to their empowerment, then the improvement within the society, advancements, innovative techniques and methods will encounter impediments and the country as a whole will experience hindrances within the course of its development (Shetter, 2015).

Women Empowerment leading to Solutions to Five Challenges

There have been existence of five main areas within the society, and if women are provided with empowerment opportunities, then they will be able to render an effective contribution towards making provision of solutions to these five challenges (Five Challenges, One Solution, 2013).

1. Leadership

2. Food Security and Agriculture

3. Sustainability and Resource Scarcity

4. Demography

5. Conflict

Leadership – In various functions, jobs, organizations and areas, leadership is stated to be an important aspect; leaders are expected to guide and direct the individuals in an appropriate manner.

The individual, who is assuming the responsibilities of the leader are required to possess vital leadership skills. Women can serve as effective leaders in various kinds of businesses and organizations, if they are provided with opportunities and prospects. It is believed that women are meant to add value, because they bring various kinds of perspectives, information, ideas and skills in the implementation of various tasks and functions.

Food Security and Agriculture – Women are stated to assume the major responsibility regarding the security of food requirements and agriculture. Women normally perform functions such as preparation of meals, operate smaller farms, have fewer livestock, have less access to innovation and productive assets, are much less capable of obtaining equipment, machines and technology, and materials such as seeds, pesticides, fertilizers and so forth. Women receive lower wages for the work as compared to men, even when they have the similar experience and qualifications.

Sustainability and Resource Scarcity – Women do possess the knowledge and the information that is required for providing solutions for sustainability and resource scarcity. In most cases, the women do obtain the main positions across the society that is required for their empowerment. The activities of production, consumption and resource utilization are been carried out by women in an effective manner, if they are provided with the opportunities.

Demography - Women regulate the population trends by determining the number of children within the family. In the present existence, a majority of married women of reproductive age (55%) have the capacity to plan their families by utilizing modern contraception. Yet there are 210 million women who would like to postpone their next pregnancy or discontinue child-bearing altogether but are not utilizing modern contraception. Most of these women either reside in low income countries or belong to the minor segments of middle income or high-income countries, and often reside in rural areas where the access to services is not of good quality. Providing family planning is a cost-effective means of improving the lives of women and children, especially in developing countries. Use of contraception to lengthen the interval between births is an effective approach to reduce maternal mortality and increase child survival.

Conflict – The existence of conflict is considered to be common in all households, whether they are urban or rural. In spite of households, in organizations, businesses as well as educational institutions there is sometimes occurrence of conflicts. Women are stated to be the individuals who can provide conflict resolution procedures. Educating a woman not only empowers them but also contributes to the global competitiveness of the country. The future economic competitiveness of the country depends upon how well the women of the country are educated and empowered.

Barriers during the course of Women Empowerment

There have been existence of barriers during the course of women empowerment and these have been stated as follows:

1. **Restraints on Education**
2. **Child Marriage**
3. **Restraints on Employment**
4. **Female Feticide and Infanticide**
5. **Crime and Violence**
6. **Work Participation**

Restraints on Education – In rural areas, in most cases as compared to the urban, women are restrained from going to school and even developing their basic literacy skills. The poverty stricken people and the individuals belonging to deprived, marginalized communities possess this viewpoint that women are not meant to study and they can only perform the household chores, prepare meals and bring up the children, hence, restrictions on education is a barrier within the course of women empowerment.

Child Marriage – In rural communities, there has been a system of child marriage. People long for a male child and believe that males can bring wealth and prestige to the family, whereas, females are only considered to be a burden. They believe in early marriage of their girls. When a girl is married off early, she is not permitted to attend educational institutions, she is not mobile and remains confined within the house, performs the household chores, then all these factors prove to be hindrances within the course of women empowerment.

Restraints on Employment – Employment is regarded to be a crucial aspect which all individuals desire, men as well as women. In rural areas, too women feel that they should get engaged in agricultural activities or other minority jobs and earn some money and not remain dependent upon the male members of the household. On the other hand, in urban areas, if the women are well educated and do not work they are married off and are meant to perform only the household chores, then that proves to be a hindrance within the course of women empowerment. Therefore, employment and work opportunities should be opened up for women.

Female Feticide and Infanticide – The prevalence of the practices of female feticide and infanticide are considered to be major impediments to the empowerment of women. Female feticide is killing of the female unborn child and infanticide is killing the female new born child. These are the practices, when the women are deprived of their basic right that is the right to live. There has been formulation of policies and programs that girls should be allowed to live and they should be provided with all kinds of opportunities that would lead to their empowerment.

Crime and Violence – In rural as well as in urban areas, women have been subjected to different kinds of criminal and violent acts such as rape, sexual harassment, exploitation, intimidation, murder, beating, physical abuse and verbal abuse. The violent and criminal acts have been imposed upon women of all age groups, even girls who are below ten years of age are subjected to these kinds of acts. When women from disadvantaged and under-privileged groups come to urban areas in search for employment opportunities, then normally they obtain jobs of domestic helpers and they are in some cases mistreated and get subjected to violent acts.

Work Participation – Women are normally at the lower position within the labour market as far as participation in work activities and pay is concerned. They basically occupy low status and low paying jobs, even if they have the similar skills and work ethics as men. The unemployment rate amongst the women is higher as compared to men even in the informal sector. In the organized sector, the number of women is significantly less, even if they possess the skills and the qualifications. Therefore, when the women are not considered at par with men, when they are looked down upon, then they will certainly encounter barriers within the course of empowerment (Chakravarty, Kumar, & Jha, 2013).

Measures that would contribute in Women Empowerment

In order to promote women empowerment within the society or the nation, it is vital to take into consideration various measures and these have been stated as follows: (Kabeer, 2009).

1. **Skills education:** Promotion of education, skills, knowledge and capabilities is an important area that is required to be taken under consideration. Since, their childhood stage, girls should be permitted to attend educational institutions and training centres to develop their knowledge and skills, so that they have the right to say in important matters.
2. **Moral Responsibilities:** It is vital to redistribute the reproductive responsibilities. Women play an important part, but they are not the sole members within the family who are meant to raise their children. Fathers also have an imperative role to play in the bringing up of the children. Labour saving technologies, and affordable and reliable care facilities are required in the case of family planning.
3. **Decision Maker:** Women are deprived of various concerns in the family matters, such as having no say in household activities, they are not allowed to speak in the case of important decision making matters, they are not given any rights in the wealth and property. Therefore, an important measure is equalising property rights among men and women, which includes land, housing and the associated resources.
4. **Good Functioning:** The women of all households should be permitted to be mobile, they should carry out all the important functions such as purchasing of groceries, carrying out banking transactions, maintaining finances and all kinds of financial dealings. Therefore, it is necessary to mainstream the women into finances in order to lead to their empowerment.
5. **Proper Protection:** There should be a restraint in the crime and violence against women, if women are experiencing crime and violent acts, then they should definitely raise their voice and call for their protection, even if they are not educated and belong to under-privileged, marginalized communities. There have been women who have experienced heinous crimes, but when they have raised their voice against them, then they secured protection and improved their living conditions.
6. **Acquire Empowerment:** Women, whether they are well educated or not educated, should be allowed to work and search for employment opportunities for themselves. Any kinds of work and employment opportunities in various fields,

whether organized or unorganized sectors, enables women to acquire self-sufficiency, they are able to effectively sustain their livelihoods and acquire empowerment.

Strategies to Overcome the Barriers to Women Empowerment

The various kinds of strategies that are vital in order to overcome the barriers within the course of women empowerment have been stated as follows: (Gangadharrao, 2012).

1. Increase the Literacy Levels:

2. Mass Awareness Programs

3. Acquire Higher Education

4. Strategies

5. Living self-sufficient

6. Employment Opportunities

7. Women's role in Society

1. **Increase the Literacy Levels:** Mid-day meal schemes, free text-books, notebooks, uniforms, bicycles, bus services, scholarships and so forth are the various measures to enable the girls to attend schools. The main purpose of these services is to increase the literacy levels amongst the girls.

2. **Mass Awareness Programs:** The social problems such as dowry, child marriage, caste system and other practices deprive the girls from acquiring education. This is mainly amongst the children belonging to poverty stricken and underprivileged families. These problems should be eliminated through the well-designed packages of mass awareness programs and social welfare measures with complete support from the public, political parties, non-government organizations and government agencies.

3. **Acquire Higher Education:** Women should be given the opportunity, even to enrol at the college and university level and acquire higher education. Education is considered to be the most crucial area that would lead to their empowerment and overcome all the barriers.

4. **Strategies:** The Ministry of Education, both at the Centre and State levels should formulate strategic procedures to put a constraint on the drop-out of girls from the educational institutions; this occurs mainly in the rural, tribal and the slum areas.

5. **Living self-sufficient:** It is vital to implement poverty alleviation strategies. The poverty stricken families are the ones who experience barriers within the course of acquisition of education, employment and empowerment, therefore, poverty alleviation services are provided to strengthen the income of these people so that they are able to make their living self-sufficient.

6. **Employment Opportunities:** Measures should be implemented by the educational institutions to enable the girls and women develop their skills, knowledge and aptitude in such a manner that they will be able to obtain employment opportunities.

7. **Women's role in Society:** The modern women has started caring for health ,figure, cultural , needs and interest, academic pursuits, social intercourse, religious activities, recreational needs etc. women are known to be the symbol of spirituality, strength, love, sacrifice and courage. The role of women in today's world is changing significantly. The progress achieved in this direction so far is not that significant and sufficient. The mindset of men has to be changed, women are also has given priority in all aspects equal to the men at all levels of decision making.

Conclusion

The prevalence of these barriers do not enable women to speak out for themselves, work towards the fulfilment of their life and carrier goals or accomplish something for themselves and their families .Women empowerment is a crucial concept, it means when women are provided with opportunities to gain control over their own lives by increasing awareness, taking action and working to exercise greater control. In any organization, society or nation, there has been five main areas in which women can contribute in providing most of the solutions, if they are empowered, these are, demography, leadership, food security and agriculture, sustainability and resource scarcity and conflict. There have been existence of numerous kinds of barriers within the course of empowerment of women in urban as well as in rural societies, these are restraints on education, restraints on employment, female feticide and infanticide, crime and violence,

child marriage, and work participation.. There have been formulation of various kinds of strategies that are required to lead to women empowerment; these are enrolment of women in higher educational institutions such as colleges and universities. Procedures should be formulated to prevent the girls from dropping out of schools and colleges, it is vital to formulate strategies that would alleviate the conditions of poverty amongst the individuals. Measures that would render an effective contribution in the generation of women empowerment are, education, distribution of all the responsibilities within the household between men and women, equal rights to wealth and property, mobility of women, putting restraints on criminal and violent acts and generation of employment opportunities. Emphasis should be put upon the enhancement of skills, proficiency and expertise amongst them so that they are able to acquire employment opportunities. Provision of various materials and services for free would contribute in increasing the rate of enrolment of girls in schools and abolition of any kinds of social problems and practices that would prove to be hindrances in the path leading to improvement in the status of women.

. Finally, it can be stated that there should be implementation of appropriate measures and strategies that would lead to empowerment of women and all kinds of problems that would lead to hindrances should be eliminated and effective solutions should be provided for them.

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