

Woman's Empowerment; An Analytical Study

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<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2013.2.1.4>

Abstract

Empowering women is the key to building a future of the nation. The main theme of the study is to highlight the importance of women empowerment in the society. It is actually a comparative and analytical study regarding the general status of women in different countries like Pakistan and India, etc. The study also focuses on the hurdles and pitfalls faced by the women to prove themselves in different sectors. Women bears all responsibility for meeting basic needs of the society yet are systematically denied the resources, information and freedom of action they need to fulfill this responsibility. The approach of the research is analytical and descriptive. The researcher follows the original and secondary links to find out the truth. In the end findings and references are given.

Keywords: Women status, Women's rights, Violation, Women empowerment

Introduction

Today's women are a smart lot and when they are empowered, it only gives them an extra edge. The statement made by Mumta Sharma, head of the National Commission of Women at a seminar in Jaipur recently only goes on to show how far women have come. "Don't be offended if someone says 'sexy', rather take it positively," (Mumta Sharma).

While we are still at empowering women with more rights, some of us feel that being women themselves has worked out a boon for them. Being women, city-based interior designer and entrepreneur, Vinita Chaitanya, has never faced any setbacks. In fact, she says, "It has always worked towards my advantage", It all depends on how you portray yourself. The only way one can treat you inferior is when they have better knowledge as its powerful here. I never felt that I belong to the weaker sex so to speak because I know my subject well." (Vinita Chitaniya).

Empowerment of women is the pride and courage to fight social injustice. For centuries, women were not treated equal to men in many ways. They were not allowed to own property, they did not have a Share in the property of their parents, they had no voting rights, and they had no freedom to choose their work or job and so on. Now that we have come out of those dark days of oppression of women, there is a need for strong movement to fight for the rights of women and to ensure that get all the rights, which men have, or in other words a movement for the Empowerment of Women. The ability of women to control their own fertility is fundamental to women's empowerment and equality. When a woman can plan her family. She can plan the rest of her life. When she is healthy, she can be more productive. And when her reproductive rights -including the right to decide the number, timing and spacing of her children, and to make decisions regarding reproduction free of discrimination,

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coercion and violence-are promoted and protected, she has freedom to participate more fully and equally in society.³(Research Publication: UNDP)

Empowerment

The origins of the concept of empowerment go back to the civil rights movement in the USA in the 1960. It has since then been interpreted differently and filled with new meanings and is today used in such different sectors as business, social work, development discourse and by advocates of very different political agendas. The different definitions of empowerment range between defining it as a largely individual process of taking control of and responsibility for one's life and situation. In addition, defining it as a political process of granting human rights and social justice to disadvantaged groups of people. The empowerment of women is located within the discourse and agenda of gender equality and is increasingly being taken in the agendas of international development organizations, perhaps more as a means to achieve gender equality than as an end in itself.

At the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1993 and the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994, Governments committed themselves to the empowerment of women. This commitment was operationalised and formulated into a clear action plan at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995 where Governments committed themselves to the "empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual, and intellectual needs of women and men, individually or in the community with others and thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations.³

Women empowerment relates to three levels: empowerment on the individual, group, and societal/community-level and the interaction between these:

- a. The individual level deals with individual women's abilities to take control over their lives, their perceptions about their own value and abilities to identify a goal and work towards this goal,
- b. The group level deals with the collective action and sense of agency that woman experience together, in a group,
- c, The societal level deals with the permissiveness of the political and social climate, the societal norms and the public discourse on what is possible and impossible for women to do so, how women should behave

The different levels are seen as interconnected and mutually reinforcing, e.g. when empowerment on individual level occurs, this will have effect on the group and societal level. Women who are empowered on an individual level will most likely go on and affect the other levels, Empowerment on a group level e.g. women organizing around a particular need is likely to have effect on the individual empowerment of the women in the form of increased self esteem and sense of agency. Women's empowerment is a commonly cited objective of developing projects. There is a growing literature on what women's empowerment means, and how it can be facilitated.

General Situation of Women in Different Countries

In Pakistan, the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan gives equal rights to both women and men. According to the Human Development Report 2007/2008, the Gender

Empowerment Measure (GEM) rank of Pakistan among 93 countries registered with UN is 82. The Gem quantitatively measures the empowerment of women on a country basis. This indicator includes the measures of inequality in control over earned economic resources, participation in political decision-making and economic decision-making. As per the latest Human Development rankings, 2007-2008, Pakistan with the HDI ranking of 136 out of 177 countries comes under the band of Medium Human Development countries.⁵(Ruth, Paterson)

Premier institution of the Government of Pakistan under Ministry of Industries. SMEDA was established in October 1998 to take on the challenge of developing Small and Medium Enterprises in Pakistan. With a futuristic approach and professional management structure, it has focus on providing an enabling environment and business development services to small and medium enterprises. SMEDA is not only an SME policy-avisory body for the government of Pakistan but also facilitates other stakeholders in addressing their SME development agendas (SMEDA).

Considering the plight of women, the government of Pakistan has introduced a special hardcore poverty alleviation programme focusing on the very poor families through the women of the family. Farzana Raja says, “Our commitment is reflected in the newly created “Benazir Income Support Programme” through which cash assistance of Rs.1000/per month is provided to poor households with an allocation of 34 billion for 2008-09. The Primary objective of BISP is social protection to the poor while secondary objectives are :

- To register the women with NADRA.
- Empowerment of Women.
- To bring the women in mainstream.

In Pakistan, we have taken deliberate and conscious steps for the promotion and protection of women’s rights and their advancement.

On the political front, we have thirty-three percent reserved seats for women in all local bodies (more than 36000 women councilors). At the national level seventeen percent reserved seats have been reserved for women in the constituent assembly. The Khushhali Bank and women Bank is providing micro-credit to the poor, particularly to the women. Micro-credit, as experienced by us, can be instrumental in empowering women.

We are working on four strategic methods to bring the women in the main stream and address the cultural barriers in the full exercise of women’s citizenship:

- Awareness –Rising among the citizens.
- Capacity building of women.
- Research and documentation on the achievements of women.

According to the Global Gender Gap (GGG) report, the planet’s ten- worst offenders are Yemen, Chad, Pakistan, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Turkey, Egypt and Oman. At the other end of the spectrum, the planet’s best countries for women to live in are Sweden, Norway, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, Philippines, Germany, Denmark, Ireland and Spain.

GGG collected data from 128 countries to develop a comprehensive, scientific index. The GGG Index is based on four different sub- indices—namely, economic participation, educational attainment, political empowerment and health –while each of the indices has half a dozen components.

Under economic participation, five of the worst- offenders are; Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Oman, and Bahrain. Under educational attainment, the worst-offenders are Chad, Yemen, Benin and Pakistan. The Best: Denmark, United Kingdom. Australia, France, and Belgium. Under political empowerment, during later 1970's. (GGG Report)

In India Women got voting right much before USA and some other European countries. The real impetus for this movement was gained when under the Primministership of Mrs. Indra Gandhi. A scheme known as Indira Mahila Yojana was launched; UNDP also incorporated issues of women uplift as Primary objectives. Various schemes were later on launched for the empowerment of women such as Rashtiya Mahila Kosh, Mahila Samrighi Yojana, Self-help groups of at panchayat level and many more. The establishment of National Women Commission and State Women's Commissions were important milestones in the directions of Women Empowerment in India.

Some reformatory movements by Gru Nanak, Jainism, RajaRam Mohan Rahi, Ishwar Chandra Vidia Sagar, Pandita Rama Bhai and others did give some relief. It is not that Britishers did not do any thing for improving the condition of women of Sati" Widow Remarriage Act 1856.

The real change came after independence, Constitution of India guarantees equality to women (Article 14). There are other articles too which ensures rights of women e.g. no discrimination by the state {Article 15(!) equality of opportunity (Article 16) etc, Feminist activism picked up momentum in India (The Constitution of India).

The Role of Different Agencies for Women Empowerment

Different projects are initiating in different countries form the platform of United Nation Development Program. In addition, from different other agencies. UNDP coordinates global and national efforts to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment into poverty reduction and recovery, and environment and sustainable development. Through its global network, it works to ensure that women in all institutions, from the judiciary to the civil services, as well as in the private sector and civil society, so they can participate in decision-making and influence the decisions that will determine the future of their families and countries.

In this regard, The UNDP/Japan Women in Development Fund (JWIDF) was established in 1995 as a join project of Japan and UNDP. It supports national capacities in promoting gender equality and the empowerment. that broadens and sustains women's opportunities. UNDP has also established Gender Thematic Trust Fund. The Fund has received nearly US\$10 million and has funded projects in more than 65 countries.

The UN Development Program has released a publication, titled "Powerful Synergies, Equality, Economic Development and Environmental Sustainability." which provides evidence from scholars and practitioners on how gender equality in access and how resources ensures enviroental sustainability. Included papers consider gender equality across development as climate change, consumption and production patterns, energy, food security, health, human rights, and urbanization. Publication includes nine broad recommendations for policy practitioners, aimed at ensuring the integration of gender equality and sustainable development policies and Programmes. Specific recommendations are also included in

individual chapters. Noting women's role in empowerment, the report recommends fostering women's access to the efficient sources and technologies (UNDP Report).

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Globalization has presented new challenges, the realization of the goal of women's equality, the gender impact of which has not been systematically evaluated fully. However, from the micro-level studies that were commissioned by the Department of Women and Child Development, it is evident that there is a need for re-framing policies for access to employment and quality of employment. Benefits of the growing global economy have been unevenly distributed leading to wider economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, increased gender inequality through often deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in the informal economy and rural areas.

Strategies will be designed to enhance the capacity of women and empower them to meet the negative social and economic influences which may flow from the globalization process. Under the social empowerment of women steps, needs to be taken to improve the health status of women, reduce maternal mortality especially in the areas, which do not have good medical facilities.

Awareness Programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights, Government has to be vigilant for ensuring that there is no discrimination against the girl child and her rights are protected. The social stigma like child marriage, child abuse and child prostitution must be eradicated immediately.

Education is a powerful tool of social transformation. Hence, education for women has to be paid special attention. Greater access for women to education must be ensured in the educational system. Gender sensitivity must be developed. Watch has to be kept on drop out rate of girls and corrective measures should be taken to check the drop out rates.

The Role of NGOs

Governmental Organizations are formal agencies working for the empowerment of women. However, this work requires multidimensional approach and hence a large number of voluntary organizations/ NGOs have gained increased attention in the field from grass-root level to national & international level. Their role is so impressive because they work with missionary zeal and commitment. The working style of NGOs is nontransparent and

personal. So, they are more effective in this direction. They organize seminars, conferences and workshops for the awakening of the masses. Their mass appeal-style contributes to a better understanding of women's rights and of the means to ensure the enjoyment of those rights. They prepare urban and rural uneducated women for self-employment, which is vital for the economic empowerment of the women. In short, all these programs and functions of NGO's contribute towards the realization of sustainable community development and hence women empowerment.

Conclusion

Despite many international agreements affirming their human rights, women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. They usually have less access than men to medical care, property ownership, credit, training and employment. They usually have less than men to medical care, property ownership, credit, training and employment, they are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence (UNFPA).

The Empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. The government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and Women have full opportunities of Self-decision making and participating in the Socio-political and Economic life of the Country with a sense of equality. Empowering women is not enough; they should assert themselves and take place as leaders at home, the panchayat, workplace, community. The time is right to take on leadership roles wherever they are. For a woman, empowerment is not just the balance and not escapes from domestic drudgery. It is a pride and courage. It is concluded that Wherever, Women is respected, God resides there.

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