

Women in Empowered India; Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

The expanding economy greatly benefits from the contributions of women in India. Women make up about half of our population. Over the past ten years, women's literacy has increased at a rate that is 3% higher than that of men. Consequently, the number of illiterate women has decreased from 200.7 million in 1991 to 190 million in 2001. Nonetheless, the gender gap in schooling remains significant at 21.7%. There are several reasons for this, including restricted access to schools and inadequate restroom and drinking water facilities. In addition, as agriculture becomes more and more feminized, girls are burdened with caring for younger siblings, gathering water and fuel for cooking, and maintaining the home, all of which impede their ability to learn and grow. Women's economic independence or self-reliance encourages women's empowerment; nevertheless, chances for women are restricted by factors such as poverty, ill health, and discrimination, gender inequity and other issues, which eventually cause obstacles to women's empowerment. Given that women are still discriminated against on many fronts, women's empowerment is crucial. Several ministries and departments have created and implemented a variety of programs and initiatives to empower women. Attempts have been also made to go beyond empowerment and acknowledge women as agents of sustainable socio-economic growth and transformation. This paper aims to examine contemporary concerns and challenges facing women, as well as strategies and tactics for achieving women's empowerment.

Keywords

Future Directions, Issues, Challenges, and Women Empowerment.

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Introduction

During the Vedic era, women were considered to be on par with men in all aspects of life. Once she reached adulthood and gained awareness of her hobbies, she made her husband's choice. Remarrying as a widow was not restricted. Scholars like Sir Herbert Risley concur with this. The Indian lady of the Vedic era had experienced greater independence than the European woman of today in several ways. The historical Hindu lady in India held a higher social status than her sister in Europe at any given period. Islam improved the position of Muslim women by providing them the right to own property and a share of their husbands' or relatives' estates. It is important to remember that the Prophet of Islam advised women to "observe privacy," and not to be isolated or confined. However women were the first casualties of fanaticism in the Islamic world. Islamist radicals started claiming that a woman belonged at home. Allah made women to bear and raise children, as well as to take care of their spouses' comforts when they got home each day. Similar to this, radical Hindus likewise wish to deny women's equality and restrict their rights. They actively promote Sati practice and justify it both in theory and in practice. Even Shankaracharyas stood up to support the Sati event that happened in Deorala, Rajasthan. Any society's status and place for women are indicators of its level of civilization. Women should be viewed as equal collaborators in the development process. However, due to centuries of oppression and exploitation, Indian women have continued to be victims. They have a sizable labor force, but they have not actively participated in the mainstream of development. They are pushed to the bottom of the heap because they are unappreciated and undervalued. The majority of women in developing nations bear the twin burdens of prejudice and poverty. The paradigm has shifted with globalization and liberalization, favoring technology-dominated industries and leaving traditional sectors like agriculture unviable and unprotected. Regretfully, a significant number of women in India work in this industry. Another thing that keeps women in poverty is the absence of financial facilities, skill training opportunities, or alternative work. Our economy benefits greatly from the contributions of women. Women make up about half of our population, and 42% of them are under the age of 18. We must provide for their safety, well-being, development, empowerment, and involvement if we are to achieve truly inclusive progress.

Women Empowerment in India

The Indian Constitution's Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties, and Directive Principles all contain references to the idea of gender equality.

In addition to guaranteeing women's equality, the Constitution gives the State the authority to enact laws that promote discrimination against men and women.

Our laws, development strategies, plans, and programs have all targeted women's advancement in various fields within the framework of a democratic society. The emphasis on women's issues was clearly moved from welfare to development starting with the Fifth Five Year Plan, and then from development to empowerment starting with the Eighth Five Year Plan. The recognition of women's empowerment as the primary factor in establishing their position has grown in recent years. In addition, India has ratified a number of international agreements and human rights instruments that guarantee women's equality. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified in 1993, is a crucial one. In 1990, a parliamentary act established the National Commission for Women with the aim of defending the legal rights and privileges of women. The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which focuses on the three variables that reflect women's participation in society—political power or decision-making, education, and health—was developed by UNDP in response to calls for women's empowerment at the UN Population and Development Conference in Cairo in 1994. A 1995 UNDP report on women's empowerment stated that human development is in jeopardy if it is not fostered. 2001 was proclaimed the Year of Women's Empowerment (Swashakti) by the Indian government. In 2001, the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women came into effect.

The Current State of Women's Empowerment in India: Challenges and Barriers

The Indian Constitution has a number of social, economic, and political measures that were based on the principles of women's empowerment advocated by our founding fathers. Indian women are active in a variety of fields, including science and technology, education, athletics, politics, journalism, art and culture, and the service industry. However, women are still mistreated, humiliated, abused, and exploited in Indian society as a result of the deeply ingrained patriarchal mindset. After nearly seven decades of independence, prejudice against women persists in the social, economic, and educational spheres. Many of the obstacles to women's equity and empowerment are deeply rooted in cultural traditions. While some women have become accustomed to being viewed less favorably than men, many women still experience similar pressures. The most pervasive and degrading prejudices against women stem from this skewed viewpoint. Discrimination against female children starts as soon as they are born. In India, it is common practice to kill female infants because boys are preferred over girls. An Indian girl's battle to be seen and heard begins at birth and continues throughout her life. The patriarchal rules of self-

styled caste lords, who stand in for outdated and unfair customs, dominate traditional Indian society. They stunt women's development by placing the weight of customs, culture, and honor on their shoulders. The occurrences of "honor killing" expose the twisted social fabric of a society ruled by men. Numerous obstacles stand in the way of women's empowerment. Below is a quick discussion of them:

1. **Literacy:** Women's employment in business and commerce is hampered by their lack of literacy. Agriculture as well as conventional and contemporary industries. After independence, the percentage of female students rose gradually, with the last ten years seeing the largest growth. Women's literacy rates increased from 8.86 percent in 1951 to 29.75 percent in 2001, when they were at 54.16 percent. The 2011 Census report shows that just 65.46 percent of women are literate. The fact that women's literacy rates in India are substantially lower than the 74.04 national average is almost depressing. Since 1995, the number of women enrolled in higher education has increased. However, these numbers pale in comparison to the enrolment levels for boys. The primary obstacles to women's education in India are living in rural areas, belonging to lower castes, having low economic status, and the traditional view of women's education in general. In rural places, women's education is growing very slowly. Additionally, not everyone has access to education equitably. Education reinforces gender inequality, as evidenced by the 2011 Census's finding that women's literacy rates are just 65.46% compared to men's 82.14%. Women are also shown to have a relatively greater percentage of school dropouts. Undoubtedly, women's greater percentage of illiteracy contributes to their dependence on men and their role as subordinates. The main factor contributing to the exploitation and neglect of women is a lack of knowledge.
2. **Economic problems:** Despite making up just 29% of the labor force, women account for the bulk of the nation's impoverished. The attempt to turn the pool of available women into human resources has failed. This has therefore impeded the nation's overall economic growth as well as the economic advancement of women. The first step in achieving equal participation for women in local communities and ending socially oppressive customs through working women's organizations is economic empowerment. In contrast to the global average of 37%, women in India contribute just 17% of the country's GDP, according to a November 2015 analysis by the McKinsey Global Institute. As to the figures provided by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2017), a mere 23.7% of Indian women who meet the

eligibility requirements are employed, while 75% of men do the same. This percentage falls even lower, to just 16 percent in metropolitan regions. The similar figure for males is 69%. Even among working-age women, there is a significant unemployment rate. Compared to 4% for males, the percentage is 8.7%. India's progress is belied by the decreasing participation of women in the labor force and, consequently, in the economy. It is necessary to investigate the reasons why women's participation is declining.

3. **Unaware of their legal status:** In general, women are unaware of the provisions pertaining to the advancement of their own status. They don't want to use the clauses pertaining to their rights of succession, marriage, or family, even though they are aware of them. Women's ability to exercise their legal rights is frequently hampered by the traditional dominance of male parents, husbands, and other family elders. The way these issues manifest still primarily depends on societal shifts in attitudes.
4. **Gender inequality:** Despite having equal rights with males legally, there is not enough employment for women, and those who do have jobs are not sufficiently safeguarded from exploitation. This is mostly the cause of it. Gender inequality in India is the root cause of the issue.
5. **Lacking Political Ambitions:** Even though there are reservations for women, political involvement is still restricted at the state, national, and panchayat (local governing body) levels. To encourage women to participate fully in all aspects of society, the 108th Constitutional Amendment Bill, often known as the Women's Reservation Bill, was passed. It reserves one-third of these for women. This is undoubtedly a sign of hope for a bill that might contribute to changing the female makeup of state assemblies and the parliament. Though the number of women serving in parliament reached a record high in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, it remains at 61 (11.23%) out of 543 seats. There were just 59 women members of the Lok Sabha following the 2009 elections. 181 of the 543 seats in Parliament and 1,370 of the 4,109 seats in the State Assembly will be guaranteed under the reserve measure. This is a significant development for Indian politics, since women currently hold fewer than 15% of the seats in the national legislature.
6. **Poverty:** Owing to the extreme poverty experienced by the vast majority of Indians, women from the top and middle classes are the only ones who can afford an education and can participate in social and civic life. Women are exploited as domestic helpers and wives whose salaries are seized by the man of the house because of extreme poverty. The girl child would be free

to pursue her ambitions without fear of domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, lack of education, or unemployment if poverty were not an issue.

7. **Health and safety:** Concerns about women's health and safety are crucial for a nation's welfare and play a significant role in determining how empowered women are in that nation. On the other hand, there are concerning issues with maternal healthcare. Even with the numerous initiatives that the nation's government and NGOs have launched, there is still a significant divide between those who are protected and those who are not. Poverty and illiteracy exacerbate these issues, since local quacks treat women's illnesses with inadequate and even dangerous medicines. Ensuring the health and safety of women is the first step towards their empowerment.
8. **Crime against Women:** In India, more than 24,000 dowry fatalities have been reported in the last three years. In India, between the ages of 15 and 49, 70% of married women report having been raped or beaten. 2014 data from the National Crime Record Bureau states that females under the age of eighteen make up 39.8% of India's rape victims. According to a 2011 Thomson Reuters Foundation survey, India is the fourth most dangerous country in the world for women to live in because women from all social classes, castes, and religions can experience violent acid attacks. In India, women who ask for a divorce or dare to reject a man's marriage proposal are targeted with acid attacks as a sort of retaliation.
9. **Sex ratio:** UNICEF reports that the identification of a fetus's gender by unethical medical experts has developed into a 1,000-crore industry in India. Concerns were voiced by many activists that as many as 8 million female fetuses' had been terminated in the ten years before the 2011 census. Furthermore, India's ranking on the United Nations Gender Inequality Index remains appalling, at 127th out of 146, even with an improving child sex ratio. In India, the sex ratio (females per 1000 males) dropped from 946 in 1951 to a significantly unfavorable 927 in 1991. The sex ratio thereafter improved, reaching 943 in 2011. On the other hand, India's sex ratio is predicted by the World Bank to drop to 931 by 2021.
10. **Child marriage:** Nearly half of all women in India between the ages of 20 and 24 were married off before the legal age of 18, despite the fact that this is against the law.

The Empowerment of Women through Policy Approaches

The evolution of policy approaches to women's empowerment has gone through several stages. Five macroeconomic development strategies based on

modernization, fundamental necessities, and structural adjustment have been outlined by the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development.

Welfare approach: According to this strategy, women are the primary focus for development since they are viewed as the workforce. Women benefit from growth, but they do not actively participate in it.

Efficiency approach: This method fundamentally views women as important resources in development rather than as intervention beneficiaries. Women must participate in development if it is to become more efficient. It places women at the center of development and makes the supposition that they will always gain from participation.

Equity approach: The goal of this strategy is to advance women's status, authority, and control to make them essentially more equal to men. According to the perspective that women have a right to equal involvement, this appears.

Empowerment approach: It originates from organizations for women who want to become more independent to empower themselves. Women fight for the freedom to change and the ability to make their own decisions in life. From this perspective, it appears that women require the right resources to become self-sufficient.

Approach to Gender and Development: By making the best use of women's abilities, it acknowledges the active participation of women in development. This is accomplished by giving the programs' planning and execution the appropriate inputs.

Conclusion

It will take a herculean effort to empower women legally, politically, economically, and educationally. Changing the deeply ingrained culture of disdain for women in Indian society would not be a simple task. It does not, however, imply that it is impossible. Changes happen quickly only during revolutions; reforms take time. This one, in particular, will also require some attention. Although the concept of women's empowerment may seem difficult at first, it is actually rather simple. All that's required is a determined effort directed in the proper direction, ending only when women are freed from all wickedness. The goal of the government's 2001 announcement designating the year as the year of women's empowerment is to give women equal partnership with men and the freedom to fully govern their own actions. The government's efforts remain insufficient, and India's journey toward women's empowerment is a lengthy one. Remember that the entire sky won't reveal its "glitter" until the gloom and darkness of "half of the sky" is released. Social

customs, including child marriage, sati, lifelong widowhood, dowry, and female infanticide, must all be completely abolished. The government is among several individuals and groups striving to improve the social and economic standing of women.

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