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WOMEN EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES IN INDIA – AN OVERVIEW



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Abstract: *This paper attempts to analyze the need for Women's Empowerment in India and highlights the methods and schemes of Women Empowerment. Empowerment is the main process of social development that can enable women to participate, in the economic, political and socially sustainable development of rural communities. Today the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of the 21st century but practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of the economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones in the society. We observe in our day-to-day life how women become victimized by various social evils. Women Empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. The study is based on purely secondary sources. Women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy a somewhat lower status than that of men despite many efforts undertaken by Government. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in society. The study concludes by an observation that providing basic facilities and implementing various schemes are enabling factors to Women's Empowerment.*

Keywords: *Women Empowerment, Basic rights, Education, Health, Socio-Economic Status, strategies*

Introduction

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Women are an integral part of every economy. All-round development and harmonious growth of a nation would be possible only when women are considered as equal partners in progress with men. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent

on many different variables that include geographical location (urban/rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, and gender-based violence and political participation. Women's empowerment enables autonomy and control over their lives. The empowered women become agents of their development, able to exercise choices to set their agenda and be strong enough to challenge their subordinate position in society. Women particularly in rural areas have proportionately the least possessions, skills, education, social status, leadership qualities and capabilities for mobilization, which determines the degree of decision making and power, and as a result, their dependence on men increases. They have been confined to the four walls of the household, overburdened with domestic works and controlled of their mobility and personal freedoms by the men of the household since time immemorial. So they have lagged in the fields of education, skill development, and employment and as a result, their work is greatly undervalued in economic terms. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of the economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. The empowerment of women include creating awareness and consciousness about situations of women, discrimination of women, rights of women, opportunities to the women and importance of gender equality, organizing a group collectively, group identity and group pressure; capacity building and skill development, ability to plan, to decide, to organize, ability to manage, ability to carry out activities, ability to deal with people and institutions in the world around them; participation in decision making at home, in the community and the society, and access and control over resources, over means of production and distribution. Empowerment is the process of changing power relations in favor of those at the lower levels of a hierarchy. Empowerment of women implies a process by which women's power of self-realization is promoted and reinforced. They develop the capacity for self-reliance out crossing the relationship subordination on account of gender, social and economic status and the role in the family and society. It encompasses the ability to make choices, control resources and enjoy participatory relationships within family and community. To achieve these objectives, empowerment of women also implies their ability to participate in it and also lead social movements to remove obstacles in their progress towards their goal. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution that goes with being a woman in a traditionally male-dominated structure. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown a disproportionate sex ratio whereby the female population has been comparatively lower than males. Women should be put in the country's development agenda to achieve its desired goal. They should also be made partners in development and development ultimately

becomes a process of empowerment. This ensures their full participation in every aspect of social and national development. This participation is necessary to increase the productivity level of women. Thus, women's empowerment would enlarge the choices and productivity levels of individual women and the collective contribution of women groups. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all places. In Western societies, women have got equal rights and status with men in all walks of life. But gender disabilities and discrimination are found in India even today. The paradoxical situation has such that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as a slave.

Objectives of the Study

1. To know the need for Women's Empowerment.
2. To study the Government Schemes For Women Empowerment.
3. To assess the Awareness of Women's Empowerment in India.
4. To identify the misconceptions coming in the way of Women Empowerment
5. To utilize the Govt. schemes properly for the benefit of Women's Empowerment.
6. To analyze the Factors influencing the Economic Empowerment of Women.
7. To understand gender discrimination in society.
8. To provide useful suggestions for the development of social balance

Research Methodology

This paper is descriptive and analytical. In this paper, an attempt has been taken to analyze the empowerment of women in India. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the need of this study. Present Situation of Women in India, being equal to their male counterparts is still a far cry for Indian women. Not only are they marginal as public figures average Indian women can hardly take decisions at home or outside. In the last census of 2011 sex ratio of India is 940 and the literacy rate among women is 65.46% as compared to the men 80%. The literacy rate and sex ratio in India have always been a matter of concern because in both cases our women population is behind the race concerning male population.

The Essence of Women Empowerment

The status of women in India particularly in rural areas needs to address the issue of empowering women. About 66% of the female population in a rural area is unutilized. This is mainly due to existing social customs. In agriculture and Animal care, women contribute 90% of the total workforce. Women constitute almost half of the population, perform nearly 2/3 of its work hours, receive 1/10th of the world's income and own less than 1/100th of the world property. In the past "Vedas Purana" of Indian culture, women were being worshipped such as Laxmi Devi, goddess of wealth;

Sarswati Devi, for wisdom; Durga Devi for power. Among the world's 900 million illiterate people, 70% of people living in poverty are women. Lower sex ratio i.e. 933, only 10% seats in World Parliament and 6% in National Cabinet are held by women. The existing studies show that women are relatively less healthy than men though belong to the same class. They constitute less than 1/7th of the administrators and managers in developing countries. Young girls are considered a big burden in the family. Rape cases are increasing in modern times which forces us to take an initiative about the security of the female population.

Approaches to Empower Women

1. Providing education in every field
2. Change in women's control over Decision making
3. Providing women police stations for their complaints
4. Changes in women's mobility and social interaction
5. Providing separate hospitals for their checkup
6. Changes in women's labor patterns
7. Providing separate schools/colleges for their safety
8. Providing equal rights
9. Providing separate transport system
10. Changes in women's access to and control over resources
11. Self-employment and self-help group
12. Providing equal property rights
13. Providing minimum needs like Nutrition, Health, Sanitation and Housing
14. Providing equal opportunity in sports and other activities
15. Other than this society should change the mentality towards the word women
16. Encouraging women to develop in their fields they are good at and make a career

Recent Major Government Schemes for Women Empowerment

The Indian government has also recognized women's issues and their contribution to the country's economy. Here are some of the women empowerment initiatives available to women in India:

1. Mahila E-haat: It is a direct online marketing platform launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to support women entrepreneurs, Self Help Groups (SHGs) and Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to showcase products made and services rendered by them. This is a part of the

'Digital India' initiative. Women can register themselves at www.mahilaehaat-rmk.gov.in and leverage technology for showcasing their work to a broader market.

2. **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao:** This is a social campaign aimed at eradication of female foeticide and raising awareness on welfare services intended for young Indian girls. The "Save the Girl Child" movement was launched on 22nd January 2015, it is a joint initiative run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao - The scheme was launched with initial funding of Rs 100 crores. It mainly targets the clusters in Uttarakhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Delhi and Haryana. In India, the child gender ratio in the age group of 0 - 6 years stood at 931 girls for 1000 boys and it dropped to 918 girls for every 1000 boys in 2011. Sex-selective abortion or female foeticide in India has led to a sharp decline in the ratio of girls born in contrast to the boys in some states in the country. The wide gap in child gender ratio was first noted in 1991 when the national census data was released and it turned out to be a worsening problem after the release of 2001 national census data. To bridge the growing gap between the birth of girl and boy infants, the government of India has taken up an initiative to promote Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and many programs have been organized to promote 'Save Girl Child' and to 'Educate Girl Child', since January 2015. The campaign has also received support from the Indian Medical Association.
3. **One-Stop Centre Scheme:** This scheme is popularly known as 'Sakhi,' was implemented on 1st April 2015 with the 'Nirbhaya' fund. The One Stop Centres are established at various locations in India for providing shelter, police desk, legal, medical and counseling services to victims of violence under one roof integrated with a 24-hour Helpline. The toll-free helpline number is 181. Here is a list of Sakhi centres across the country. These centres can be contacted for Emergency Response and Rescue Services Medical assistance in lodging FIR / NCR/DIR Psychosocial support/ counselling Legal aid and counselling Shelter Video Conferencing Facility to record statement for police/ courts Duroflex Pillows - Duropedic & Energize range. Code PILLOW. 15% off. Duroflex Only You Can Help My Child Battle His Deadly Cancer.
4. **Working Women Hostels:** The objective of the scheme is to promote the availability of safe and conveniently located accommodation for working women, with daycare facility for their children, wherever possible, in urban, semi-urban, or even rural areas where employment opportunity for women exist. Further details of the Working Women Hostel Scheme can be accessed on the Department of Women and Child Development's official website.

5. Swadhar Greh: The Swadhar scheme was launched by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2002 for the rehabilitation of women in difficult circumstances. The scheme provides shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalized women/girls who are in need. The beneficiaries include widows deserted by their families and relatives, women prisoners released from jail and without family support, women survivors of natural disasters, women victims of terrorist/extremist violence etc.
6. The Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP): This Scheme aims to provide skills that give employability to women and to provide competencies and skills that enable women to become self-employed/entrepreneurs. A particular project will be for a duration of up to 5 years depending upon nature, kind of activities and the number of beneficiaries to be undertaken. Sectors include Agriculture, Horticulture, Food Processing, Handlooms, Tailoring, Stitching, Embroidery, Zari etc, Handicrafts, Computer & IT enable services along with soft skills and skills for the workplace such as spoken English, Gems & Jewellery, Travel & Tourism, Hospitality, etc.
7. Nari Shakti Puruskars: The Nari Shakti Puruskars are national-level awards recognizing the efforts made by women and institutions in rendering distinguished services for the cause of women, especially vulnerable and marginalized women. The awards are presented by the President of India every year on 8 March, International Women's Day at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi.

Need for the Empowerment of Women

The government of India took so many initiatives to empower the women in India. But women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over India. A few women are engaged in services and other activities. So, they need an equal economic power to stand side by side to the men. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girls, dowry harassment and so on. For these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. Another hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. Thus, increasing education among women is very important in empowering them. A big proportion of women in rural India are physically so weak who work more than the food they consume. This discrimination needs to address the empowerment of weaker sections of the society to make them powerful and respectful. Another problem is that workplace harassment of women. To sum up, women's empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, prevention, and elimination of violence against women and creating the basic assets to empower the women population of the nation.

Conclusion

From the study, we concluded that in the present scenario the condition of Indian women is not as good as it should be and there is a need to accomplish such steps which will help to accommodate the rights and the basic needs of the women population. Thus, the attainment in the field of income, employment and on the educational front, the scenario of women empowerment seems to be comparatively poor and needs to be checked. Because with the empowerment of women, the elimination of gender discrimination and the creation of a balance of power between men and women will not only be beneficial to women, but society as a whole shall benefit politically, economically and culturally. The greatest need of an hour is a change of social attitude to women. It is essential as their thought and their value systems lead the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation. The Empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concerns of the 21st century not only at the national level but also at the international level. Society must provide equal opportunity to both of the sexes for the upliftment of society and the well-being of society as a whole. Women represent half the world's population and gender inequality exists in every nation on the planet. Until women are given the same opportunities that men are, entire societies will be destined to perform below their true potentials. The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women into the mainstream of development. Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal because empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed with income and property so that they may stand on their feet and build up their identity in society. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which they can get the proper benefit from the schemes made by Government for the women's development. There should be no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities for self-decision making and participating in the social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

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