

The Empowerment of Rural Women in India

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Some people say that women are poor and illiterate. The girl children are most susceptible to social evils and crimes than the boys particularly in the lower income brackets. The various social exploitations and humiliations on women and girl over several hundreds of years have devastated the women race with powerlessness, voicelessness and ill treatments. The only remedy to overcome this horrible malpractice is to make them literate by providing them education at any cost through both formal and informal systems so as to achieve a balanced socio-economic development because any attempt to develop a society will be a futile effort unless and until the women are brought to the forefront of the society. I wonder how effective it will really be in protecting women's rights given in our slow legal system.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Literacy, South Asia, Freedom, Discrimination, Society, Programmes.

Introduction

All Men are equal in the eyes of God. So where does that leave women? Poor economic conditions and illiteracy have ensured that a majority of women continue to remain fettered to the cleric words. However, some people say attitudes are slowly changing. Women constitute 48 per cent of the Indian but when we offer sermonize Lumen right, we often forget that women as a human being are also entitle to fundamental human rights. We Have denied and continue to deny them basic human rights. Even after 75 years of independence these women continue to live in a state of neglect and exploitation. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women's Conference at Nairobi in 1985. The term empowerment was defined as a distribution of social power and control of resources" in favour of women.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this research paper to analyses the process of women empowerment through various initiatives and scheme of the government in India. Education and training also play an important role in the path of empowerment, so It also focuses on the empowerment through education, training and by legal approach.

Hypotheses

1. Inclusion of reservation provisions empowers the women.
2. In spite of its limitations, Indian system is more inclusive and effective than her neighbours.
3. Less bureaucratic intervention and more financial resources strengthen the government institutions.

Methodology

This research paper is mainly based on secondary sources. The secondary data were collected from various secondary sources available on the proposed theme. Major sources of this type comprises of: books of eminent authors, published articles in journals of repute; well researched dissertations on the subject concerned; editorials in magazines; and relevant columns in newspapers. To trace governmental as well as non-governmental organisations' websites for data assistance, the help of internet was also taken.

Review of Literature

Empowerment has brought women to the mainstream in order to develop and able themselves to take part in decision making process within the society. Various scholars and agencies define the term 'Empowerment' and doing their research work.

Annual Report (2020-21), Ministry of women and child, Government of India opined that Women and child together constitute about 67.7% of the country's population, as per 2011 Census. Empowerment and protection of women and children, and ensuring their wholesome development is crucial for sustainable and equitable development of the country.

Manoj Kumar Srivastava & Dr. Shipra Mishra (2020), in their book

“Women Empowerment” concludes that, decision making power is very important for women empowerment. By developing decision-making power, a person's fear is eliminated and the person's fearlessness develops the power to make decisions. It is said that as long as you are afraid, other people will take decisions related to your life.

Jyotsna Jha et al (2020), “Women’s Education and Empowerment in Rural India” This is a book about understanding women’s empowerment and pathways as well as roadblocks to women’s economic empowerment in rural India

Khobragade, Grishma (2019), Women Empowerment: Challenges and Strategies deals with the problems associated with the women community suffering from marginalization and the ways to address their identity and human rights concerns. The status of women in every nation was deprived and never considered.

All these works are very useful to understand the theme of empowerment and doing research work in this regard.

Empowerment of Rural Women

Empowerment is not something which could be made available in the form of a capsule to those women we think are in need of it is not just a concept that could be defined with the help of a some universally accepted parameters. Empowerment is a process and in includes the following components.

1. Equal access to opportunities for using societies resources,
2. Prohibition of gender discrimination in thought and practice,
3. Freedom from violence,
4. Economic independence,
5. Participation in all decision-making bodies, and
6. Freedom of choice in matters relating to one's life.

Empowerment actually is a process that addresses all sources and structure of power. It is not enough to provide only education to women but they require access to the labour market and employment also. It will however not transform any gender and caste relations. The process has to work on individual as on a collective level. Women have to be organize and acknowledged as a political force also. The process has to challenge both gender and social power relations. It is a process that is much about education, but it does not come out of school books. It is a knowledge which has to be expended most importantly people should start thinking critically and questioning it. It generates new notions about power itself. Otherwise when women enter the public structures, given the existing ideology, they operate with the so-called male notions of power which is presented as domination, patronage etc.

Education is a mile stone for women Empowerment because it enables them to respond to opportunities, to challenge then-traditional roles and to change their live. Similar Ideas were supported in International Conference, 1994. It was said that education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Educationing women benefit the whole society. It has a more significant impact on, poverty and development than men’s education. It is also one of the most influential factors in improving child health and reducing infant mortality, in India, women literacy rate is 64.63 percent and vary enormously across India between social groups/ethnic groups and urban/rural populations The Global Gender Gap Report, 2016, a survey of 115 world economies ranks India 98 in empowering women politically, with 8 per cent women in parliament and 3 per cent in legislators & senior officials posts. Though the US has 15 percent women in parliament and 14percent in ministerial positions, it has pushed to the 66 spots,as unlike India; the country never had any female leadership in the executive office. Results of the study, an initiative of World Economic Forum, Harvard University and London Business School were published last month. The highlight of the report is a Global Gender Gap Index, which measures the difference between the sexes in matters of eco nomic participation and opportunity, educational attainment health & survival and political empowerment. India according to the report also fares poorly on the question of economic empowerment of women. It takes the 110 spots. The U.S. has 60per cent participation of women in labour force and 55 percent in professional & technical work force. India has this at 34 percent and 2 percent respectively.

The statistics show that Norway and Sweden provide the best deal for

pregnant women. Norway provides 42 to 52 week's parental leave, all paid. Sweden provides 14weeks paid maternal leave and maternity benefit of 480 days paid parental leave. Croatia too takes good care of its expectant mothers with maternity leave of 45 days before delivery and one year thereafter. According to the report, 58 percent childbirths in India happen without any "skill" health staff to attend to. This is far greater than some of the worst performing nations on the index like Saudi Arabia (9%), UAE (1%) and Iran (10%)

And as a society, we must analyse whether our awareness campaigns and education measures are actually reaching remote areas. The ignorance is so widespread; we need to take this up on a war footing.

Moral Approach

Certain steps are essential in Universities & Colleges for introducing the contents of women's studies for greater involvement of the women/girls in related areas and subject disciplines (All the Universities in India now have centres for women studies and colleges also have Professor in charges for women studies). It can be done by involving teachers from various colleges & University departments within the ambit of the state within the area of common concern, new centres for women should be established in the need-based areas having predominance of the women in the category of economically or other backward/minority/disabled etc. It should be based on evidence with the help of a proper survey and on merit. At University level, major roles may take place, which are highlighted below.

1. Interaction of Universities with girl's school.
2. Start short-term course for women.
3. Up to date courses in agriculture for women.
4. Relationship of University with industries.
5. Scholarship for girls.
6. Reservation of seats for girls in different disciplines,
7. Motivation for industrial research and,
8. Introduction new professional courses for women.

Even in the developed world, fewer women than men attend Universities. At least 60 million girls lack access to primary education and the gender gap in literacy persist till date. Although literacy and school enrolment among both girls and boys has increased dramatically, yet much remains to be done. More and more girls should be enrolled in schools and should complete their schooling. This will become true as the level of education increases. There are signs of progress, as enrolment of boys and girls in primary school edges closer to parity.

Along with Gandhi, Bernard Shaw and Vivekananda and so many great thinkers, Tamil poet Bharathiar also emphasized the importance of women's education. He puts a very relevant question. That is by denying education to half of the world population, women are pushing the world into darkness. Gandhi said, educate one woman and you are educating the whole world. Bharathiar, as we know, is the one who could dream about and prophecy the emancipation of women, in this poem, Bharathiar explodes the myth that women are inferior to men in intellectual calibre.

India recognizes the empowerment of women as the most critical precondition for participation of girls and women. Central and State Government have to implement policies on empowerment of women to effectively address gender disparities. Here is a summary of steps taken by Department of Women & Child Development Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

1. Year 2001 declared as Women's Empowerment Year and various activities & programmes launched nation-wide.
2. A national policy for empowerment of women with the objective of bringing about advancement, development and empowerment of women in all walks of life has been formulated.
3. Guidelines for operationalisation of District level committees on violence against women and help lines for women in distress have been issued. A national level committee to monitor Supreme Court's guidelines on prevention of sexual harassment of Women at work place has been set up. & A tele-conference between parliamentarians and women at the grass root to establish a dialogue between policy makers and grass root level functionaries has been organised.

Some of the Ongoing Programmes for betterment of Women's Status

1. Training cum Employment Programme for women received a significant boost during this year,
2. A record number of new projects under Women's Economic Programme were sanctioned and 25,650 women were trained in different traditional and non-traditional traders.
3. Initiative measured for preparing Gender Development Index for the states and districts.
4. Swayamsidha, an integrated scheme for Women's empowerment based on the formation of women into Self-help Groups (SHGS) aims at holistic empowerment of women through awareness generation, economic empowerment and convergence of various schemes. It is to be implemented in 650 blocks benefiting 9.30 lakh women.
5. Swa-Shakti project, a World Bank and International Fund for Agriculture Development supported project is being implemented in 35 districts of seven states, 91 NGOs have already formed 9,000 women self-help groups.
6. Working women's hostels have been sanctioned with Day Care facilities benefiting 61,564 women.
7. Comprehensive review of legislation affecting women undertaken by sub-groups formed under the Task Force on Women & Children.

Programmes to be launched

1. A National Commission for Children was set up. This Commission will take a holistic overview of all child related issue and will monitor & evaluate the status of safeguards provided to children constitutionally and legally or otherwise.
2. The proposed National Policy and Charter for Children provide the guideline for government and non-government actions on child welfare and development
3. A National Nutrition Mission will be launched shortly to break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition that affects women and children.

Some Glimpses

1. National Commission for Women (NCW) building consensus against female feticide and declining sex ratio by organizing a meeting of religious and community leaders. NCW has launched an ambitious programme to include gender values amongst college students. Laws relating to women are being reviewed.
2. Rashtriya Mahila Kosh facilities provision of micro-credit to poor women for income generating activities through a network of social organizations. More than Rs. 104 crore has been sanctioned since independence, out of which Rs. 77.8 crore has been distributed benefiting about 4 lakh women.
3. National Institute of Public Cooperation & Child Development (NIPCCD) is a premier organization devoted to the promotion of voluntary action and research, training and documentation in the overall domain of women and children development and will be developed as a centre of excellence.
4. Central Social Welfare Board: The Year 2000 was observed as "Vikas Party" to identify and develop voluntary organizations in the uncovered and remote areas. Vocational training programmes were organized for widows of victims of communal riots and terrorism. Counselling centres on pre-marital issues in colleges & universities have been organized.

In the agricultural field, women participate to a greater extent but they remain as invisible contributors. An educated woman who has specialized in this area can render a great service. There are several things to be done by women in the health and hygiene. By nature, women have the ability to care and to soothe the suffering. With a professional knowledge of hygiene and contagious diseases, they can certainly go a long way in building up a healthy community. Women can easily save the younger generation from the deadly practices of smoking, drinking and drug abuse. All these activities are now taken by women staying behind the curtain as a silent catalyst, this is not enough. More pro-active steps from individuals and institutions are necessary.

Conclusion

Men constitute the most elegant resource of a society and are the dynamic source of power. They comprise the very backbone of a family with multiple role players of a mother, wife a pretty sister and a host of the others. The status of nation, its overall socio-economic condition can very well be assessed by judging and appraising the status of its women.

Women empowerment has become a prime concern all over the world because of the growing tendencies of victimizing women and committing social

crimes on them making them weak, destitute and risk-prone. The situation is grave and formidable where the women are poor and illiterate. The girl children are most susceptible to social evils and crimes than the boys particularly in the lower income brackets. The various social exploitations and humiliations on women and girl over several hundreds of years have devastated the women race with powerlessness, voicelessness and ill treatments. The only remedy to overcome this horrible malpractice is to make them literate by providing them education at any cost through both formal and informal systems so as to achieve a balanced socio-economic development because any attempt to develop a society will be a futile effort unless and until the women are brought to the forefront of the society. I wonder how effective it will really be in protecting women's rights given in our slow legal system.

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