

Patriarchy to Parity: Various Facets of Women Empowerment

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Introduction

Gender equality is, first and foremost, a human right. A woman is entitled to live in dignity and in freedom from want and from fear. Empowering women is also an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty.

Empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families and communities and to improved prospects for the next generation. The importance of gender equality is underscored by its inclusion as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals.

Yet discrimination against women and girls - including gender-based violence, economic discrimination, reproductive health inequities, and harmful traditional practices - remains the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality. Women and girls bear enormous hardship during and after humanitarian emergencies, especially armed conflicts. There have been several organizations and institutions advocating for women, promoting legal and policy reforms and gender-sensitive data collection, and supporting projects that improve women's health and expand their choices in life.

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 are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence.

Need of Women Empowerment

Reflecting into the '*Veda and Puran*' of Indian culture, women is being worshiped such as *Laxmi maa*, goddess of wealth; *Sarswati maa*, for wisdom; *Durga maa* for power. 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 rural area is unutilized. This is mainly due to existing social customs. In agriculture and animal care the 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 the world property. 70% of people living in poverty are women. Lower sex ratio i.e. in the Population Census of 2011 it was revealed that the population ratio in India (2011) is 940 females per 1000 of males. The existing studies show that the women are relatively less healthy than men though belong to same class. They constitute less than 1/7th of the administrators and managers in developing countries. Only 10% seats in World Parliament and 6% in National Cabinet are held by women.

We need women empowerment because:

1. Women are deprived of decision making power
2. Freedom of Movement
3. Access to Education
4. Access to Employment
5. Exposure to Media

6. Domestic violence

Fig 1

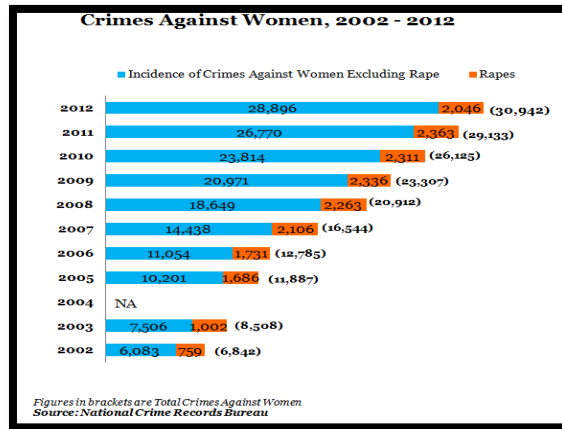
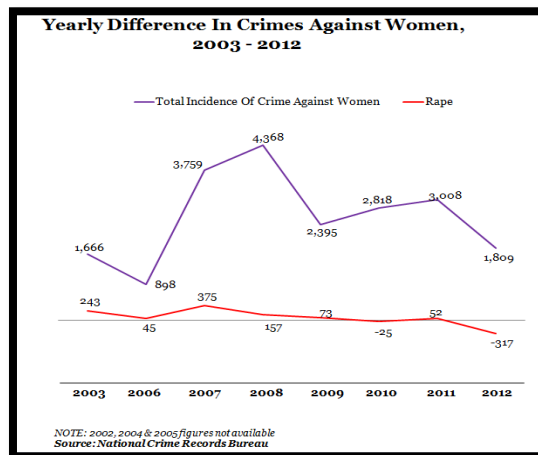


Fig 2



Key issues and linkages

There are several constraints that check the process of women empowerment in India. Social norms and family structure in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. One of the norms is the continuing preference for a son over the birth of a girl child which is present in almost all societies and communities. The society is more biased in favor of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities. The root cause of this type of attitude lies in the belief that male child inherits the clan in India with an exception of Meghalaya. Women often internalize the traditional concept of their role as natural thus inflicting an injustice upon them. Poverty is the reality of life for the vast majority women in India. It is the factor that poses challenge in realizing women's empowerment. There are several challenges that are plaguing the issues of women's right in India. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India

Reproductive Health

Women, for both physiological and social reasons, are more vulnerable than men to reproductive health problems. Reproductive health problems, including maternal mortality and morbidity, represent a major – but preventable cause of death and disability for women in developing countries.

Stewardship of Natural Resources

Women in developing nations are usually in charge of securing water, food and fuel and of overseeing family health and diet. Therefore, they tend to put into immediate practice whatever they learn about nutrition and preserving the environment and natural resources.

Economic Empowerment

More women than men live in poverty. Economic disparities persist partly because much of the unpaid work within families and communities falls on the shoulders of women and because they face discrimination in the economic sphere. In nearly every country, women work longer hours than men, but are usually paid less and are more likely to live in poverty. In subsistence economies, women spend much of the day performing tasks to maintain the household, such as carrying water and collecting fuel wood. In many countries women are also responsible for agricultural production and selling. Often they take on paid work or entrepreneurial enterprises as well. Unpaid domestic work – from food preparation to care giving – directly affects the health and overall well being and quality of life of children and other household members. The need for women's unpaid labour often increases with economic shocks, such as those associated with the AIDS pandemic or economic restructuring. Yet women's voices and lived experiences – whether as workers (paid and unpaid), citizens, or consumers – are still largely missing from debates on finance and development. Poor women do more unpaid work, work longer hours and may accept degrading working conditions during times of crisis, just to ensure that their families survive.

Educational Empowerment

About two thirds of the illiterate adults in the world are female. Higher levels of women's education are strongly associated with both lower infant mortality and lower fertility, as well as with higher levels of education and economic opportunity for their children.

Political Empowerment

Social and legal institutions still do not guarantee women equality in basic legal and human rights, in access to or control of land or other resources, in employment and earning, and social and political participation. Laws against domestic violence are often not enforced on behalf of women. Experience has shown that addressing gender equality and women's empowerment requires strategic interventions at all levels of programming and policy-making.

Empowering Women through Education at the Grass Root Level

"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."

—ICPD Programme of Action, paragraph 4.2

Mahatma Gandhi had a deep appreciation of the value of educating women: 'When a man is educated, an individual is educated; when a woman is educated, a family and a country are educated.' Such imparting of critical skills—in a word, empowerment—has three essential elements: a teaching method that fits the needs and circumstances of the audience; a teacher well versed in the required knowledge, who is able to engage the target audience; and the incorporation of the traditional knowledge and expertise of the students into the capacity-building effort.

Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Investments in secondary school education for girls yield especially high dividends.

Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families. Educated women can recognize the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. However, women's literacy rates are significantly lower than men's in most developing countries.

Education has Far-Reaching Effects

Role of Science and Technology in Women Empowerment

The National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001 adopted in the Ninth Five-Year Plan stated that the 'Application of science and technology is vital for the advancement of women'. Technology will reduce household drudgery and provide better working conditions for women, particularly in rural areas, with emphasis on the improvement of the environment and quality of women's lives at affordable cost

Many governments in the developing world are taking such actions by adopting a two-tiered strategy: formation of a cadre of experts in specialized research institutes, and technology transfer dispersed among local 'knowledge centers.' These networks of relatively large regional research institutes and small and dispersed knowledge centers represent, in effect, wholesale and retail levels of S&T training. While the research institutes concentrate on the production of knowledge, the knowledge centers focus on its distribution and practical application. Thus knowledge centers typically embrace animal science, agriculture, the health sciences, water technology, alternative energy sources, post-harvest operations, and sustainability of the environment. Information technology, an attractive career option in itself, is also an important subject for knowledge centres because it greatly enhances the community's access to relevant information. In India's Pondicherry territory, the **M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation** has established a pilot knowledge centre that is undertaking largescale field demonstrations and training programmes for resource-poor farmers, principally women.



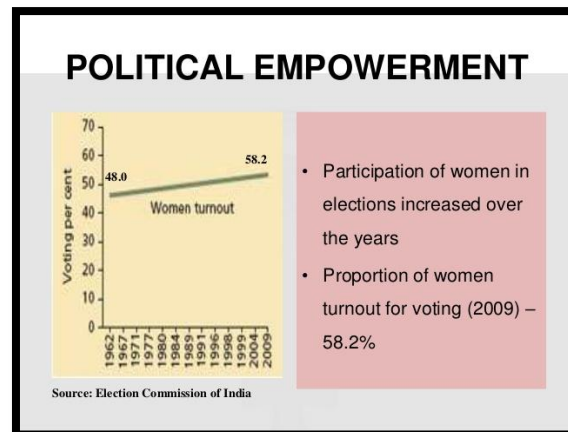
Fig-3

Political Empowerment

Throughout much of the world, women's equality is undermined by historical imbalances in decision-making power and access to resources, rights, and entitlements for women. Either by law or by custom, women in many countries still lack rights to: Own land and to inherit property, obtain access to credit, attend and stay in school.

Earn income and move up in their work, free from job discrimination. Moreover, women are still widely under-represented in decision-making at all levels, in the household and in the public sphere. Addressing these inequities through laws and public policy is a way of formalizing the goal of gender equality. Legal changes, which most countries have now implemented, are often a necessary step to institute gender equality, but not necessarily sufficient to create lasting changes. Addressing the gaps between what the law proscribes and what actually occurs often requires broad, integrated campaigns.

Fig-4



Government Efforts

DST has been making pioneering efforts in initiating and implementing programmes based on appropriate S&T inputs for the welfare for women. This endeavour was aimed to support these women through reduction in drudgery involved in their daily chores, improvement in their quality of life and empowering them with the opening of new avenues of income generation. The scheme 'S&T for Women' in 1981 was a pioneering gender initiative of DST being implemented since the Sixth Five- Year Plan to promote research, development and adaptation of technologies to enhance the overall social status of the women and augment their incomes through S&T, especially in rural areas.

They have also focused on women through All-India Coordinated Programmes (AICP), women technology parks, scholarship schemes and by the constitution of national awards for women development through application of S&T. The focus of these interventions has largely been to demonstrate the application of S&T to women. These initiatives enabled women to get newer opportunities for income generation, reduce drudgery and improve health and environment.

Constitutional Provisions for Empowering Women in India

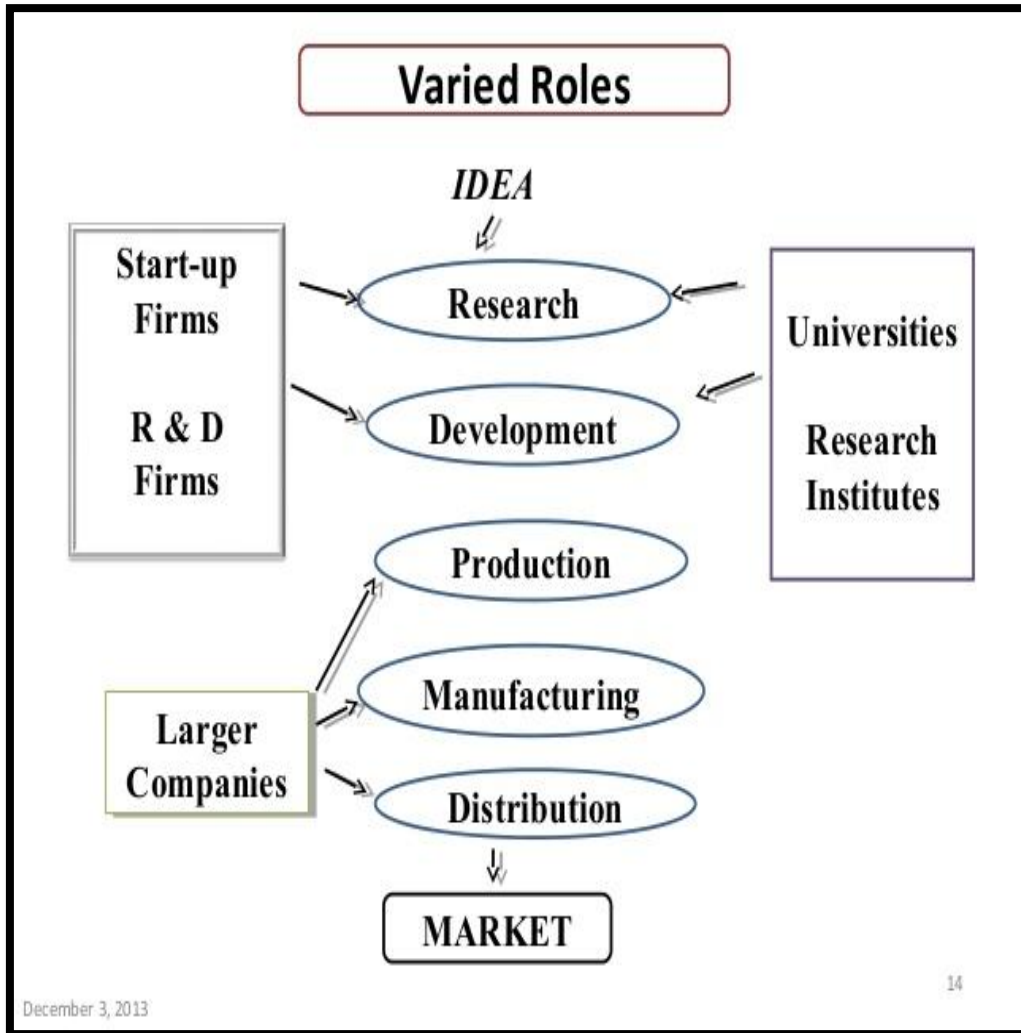
1. Equality before law for all persons (Article-14).
2. Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 15(I)).
3. However, special provisions may be made by the state in favours of women and children Article 15(3).
4. Equality of opportunity for all citizens relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state (Article 16).
5. State policy to be directed to securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a); (v) equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)).
6. Provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42).
7. Promotion of harmony by every citizen of India and renouncement of such practices which are derogatory to the dignity of women Article 51A(e).
8. Reservation of not less than one-third of total seats for women in direct election to local bodies, viz; Panchayats and Municipalities (Articles 343(d) and 343 (T)).

Suggestions

1. The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grassroots problem. Hence, education for women has to be paid special attention.
2. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights.
3. Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in the society.
4. Strict implementation of Programmes and Acts should be there to curb the mal-practices prevalent in the society.

5. Technological empowerment for drudgery reduction
6. Promoting rural enterprises for women
7. Skill development and capacity building
8. Research and development for the relevance of rural women

Fig-5



Conclusion

Gender equality and women's empowerment are human rights that lie at the heart of development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Despite the progress that has been made, six out of ten of world's poorest people are still women and girls, less than 16 percent of the world's parliamentarians are women, two thirds of all children shut outside the school gates are girls and, both in times of armed conflict and behind closed doors at home, women are still systematically subjected to violence. Women empowerment connotes "Economic Empowerment" which implies a better quality of material life through sustainable livelihoods owned and managed by women, "social empowerment" which means a more equitable social status for women in society, "Legal Empowerment" that suggests the provision of an effective legal structure which is supportive of women's empowerment and "Political Empowerment" means a political system favoring the participation in, and control by women of the political decision making process and in governance. It is needless to say that effort will go in vain if the need for empowerment does not come from within a individual. We have to carve out from within our personality the equal status. The right way of thinking can only ensure the efforts of organization to endeavor a Change in family, society and in Nation. It is apt to say:

"You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink."

Table 1
Chronology of Key Events Relevant to Science and Technology and the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, 1995

1946	UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) established
1975	First UN World Conference on Women, Mexico City, Mexico
1976 1985	UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development, and Peace
1979	UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development adopts Vienna Programme of Action including Resolution on Science and Technology for Women, Vienna, Austria
1979	The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the UN General Assembly
1980	Second UN World Conference on Women, Copenhagen, Denmark
1983	UN Advisory Committee on Science and Technology for Development Ad Hoc Panel on Science, Technology, and Women issues recommendations
1985	Third UN World Conference on Women, Nairobi, Kenya publishes Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women
1993-1995	UN Gender Working Group completes study and report; Science and Technology for Sustainable Human Development: The Gender Dimension and Missing Links, publication based on study report
1994	Once and Future Action Network (OFAN) established
1995	Fourth UN World Conference on Women (FWCW), Beijing, China, issues Platform for Action (PFA)
1995	UN Gender Advisory Board established
1999	UNIFEM study in preparation for the World Conference on Science: Women Making a Difference in Science and Technology
1999	UNESCO World Conference on Science, Budapest, Hungary
1999	WomenWatch Online Working Groups and UN Commission on the Status of Women prepare for UN Special Session to appraise progress on implementing the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies and Beijing Platform for Action
2000	Beijing +5: Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century

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