



Women Empowerment for Nation Building

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Abstract

Women Empowerment has evolved from a social reform movement to a fundamental economic and strategic necessity for national development. True empowerment goes beyond mere equality. It is the process of equipping women with the knowledge, resources, and authority to make informed decisions, challenge inequalities, and actively participate in all facts of life. In the 21st century, with India aiming for a "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India) by 2047, empowering the female population which roughly half of the nation that is the surest way to foster a stronger, more prosperous, and equitable society. Mahatma Gandhi rightly said, "To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves.". Women empowerment is a stage of acquiring power for women in order to understand her rights and to perform her responsibilities towards oneself and others in a most effective way. Thus, the framework of empowerment encompasses the welfare of women, satisfaction of basic needs, access to resources, conscientisation to attain gender equity.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Society, Development, Equality

Introduction

The strength of the chain is the strength of its weakest link. In a society, women are the weakest links, so that they may be strengthened for strengthening the society as a whole and that is possible only by empowering them. Nehru said, "Women should be uplifted for the upliftment of the nation, for if a woman is uplifted, society and nation is uplifted" (Leela Menon, 2004). Women empowerment is critical to the process of the development of the community. Empowerment of women is essential to harness the women labour in the mainstream of economic development. According to Swami Vivekananda, "... there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of the women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing" (Yojana, August 2001). Women have to play an



important role in the building up of every economy. Women who form almost one half of the world's population constitute the visible majority of the poor. Women either solely or largely support an increasing number of families. Women experience poverty more than men. When money is given to men it may not benefit the family but when women manage money, it is found to be better utilised. "Increasing women's capabilities and empowering them is the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development" (Human Development Report, UNDP, 1996). The dignity and culture of a society can be detected from the status of women in that society.

Jawaharlal Nehru also aptly commended "In order to awaken the people, it is the women who has to be awakened first. Once she is on the move, the household moves, the village moves, the country moves and thus we build the India tomorrow" (Kochurani Joseph, 2005). Women empowerment is a global issue, which has gained momentum in recent decades. In India, apart from the provisions in the constitution and the ratification of different international conventions, several legislative acts have also been passed to ensure women empowerment. Moreover, women empowerment has received attention of the government right from the beginning of Indian planning. Bringing women into the mainstream of development has thus been a major concern of the government since independence. In order to empower women and bring them into the mainstream, an enabling environment with requisite policies and programmes, institutional mechanisms at various levels and adequate financial resources has all along been tried to be created. The Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment has special components for women in all its programmes and a certain amount of funds is earmarked as women's component to ensure a flow of adequate resources for women.

The Concept of Women Empowerment

The term 'empowerment' has been widely used in relation to women and has been given currency by United Nations in recent years. It is being increasingly felt that empowerment of women will enable a greater degree of self-confidence, a sense of independence and capability to resist discrimination imposed by the male dominated society. Many well-known writers and researchers have provided wide ranging definitions of empowerment. Their definitions of empowerment in a broad sense cover aspects such as women's control over material and intellectual resources. Empowerment is a process, which



challenges traditional power equations and relations. Abolition of gender-based discrimination in all institutions and structures of society, and participation of women in policy and decision-making process at domestic and public levels are but a few dimensions of women empowerment. In the context of women, empowerment is referred as a process whereby women become able to organise themselves to increase self-reliance, to assert their independent right, to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination (Meenakshi, 2004). According to K. Sayulu, G. Sardar & B. Sridevi, (2005) “Women empowerment is any process that provides greater autonomy to women through the sharing of relevant information and provision of control over factors affecting their performance”. The editor of the book, ‘Capacity Building for Effective Empowerment of Women’, Ranjani K. Murthy refers empowerment as a process of ‘exposing the oppressive power of the existing gender (and social) relations, critically challenging them and creatively trying to shape different social relations. Empowerment as the word suggests, is to empower or enable women to do certain things. The very concept of empowerment of women which is based on equality between genders, is a long drawn, conscious and continuous process comprising enhancement of skills, capacity building, gaining self-confidence and meaningful participation in decision-making. As the foremost precursor to development, empowerment of women comprehensively seeks to ensure an equitable division of resources and carve a clear role for them in decision-making. It helps them articulate theirs as well as others’ rights and participate actively in the democratic processes. Empowerment of women is a new ideology for carrying democratic values into the family and society (Ambarao Uplaonkar, 2005). Empowerment is an active process of enabling women to realize their identity, potentiality and power in all spheres of their lives (Syed Afzal Peerzade and Prema Parande, 2005). Empowerment of women also means equal status to women. Here the balance of power between men and women is equal and neither party has dominance over the other. Empowering women socio-economically through increased awareness of their rights and duties as well as access to resources is a decisive step towards greater security for them. Empowerment includes higher literacy level and education for women, better healthcare for women and children, equal ownership of productive resources, increased participation in economic and commercial



sectors, awareness of their rights and responsibilities, improved standards of living and acquiring self-reliance, self-esteem and self-confidence.

Characteristics of Women Empowerment

Women empowerment possesses certain characteristics. They are the following:

1. Women empowerment is giving power to women; it is making women better off.
2. Women empowerment is a process of acquiring power for women in order to understand her rights and to perform her responsibilities towards oneself and others in a most effective way.
3. Women empowerment gives the capacity or power to resist discrimination imposed by the male dominated society.
4. Women empowerment enables women to organise themselves to increase their self-reliance.
5. Women empowerment provides greater autonomy to women.
6. Women empowerment means women's control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology.
7. Women empowerment challenges traditional power equations and relations.
8. Women empowerment abolishes all gender-based discriminations in all institutions and structures of society.
9. Women empowerment means participation of women in policy and decision-making process at domestic and public levels.
10. Women empowerment means exposing the oppressive power of existing gender and social relations.
11. Empowerment of women enables women to realise their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.
12. Empowerment also means equal status to women.
13. Empowerment of women is an ongoing dynamic process which enhances women's abilities to change the structures and ideologies that keep them subordinate.

Empowerment of Women Leads to a Stronger Nation

Empowering women is not just a moral obligation; it is a smart economic and social strategy.

A. Economic Growth and National Prosperity

When women are empowered, they enter the workforce, engage in entrepreneurship, and contribute to economic growth. Studies by the McKinsey Global Institute show that advancing



women's equality in India could add \$770 billion to the country's GDP by 2025. Women-led Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have doubled in the last decade, promoting job creation and economic diversification. Furthermore, when women earn money, they tend to reinvest a higher percentage of their income into their families' education and health than men, leading to better human resource development.

B. Social Stability and Better Health Outcomes

Empowered women make informed decisions about their own health and reproductive rights, leading to lower maternal and child mortality rates. A society with empowered women is also a more peaceful and safer society. When women are educated and financially independent, they are better equipped to resist abuse and domestic violence, reducing the societal cost of crime and instability.

C. Enhanced Political Decision-Making

Political empowerment ensures that women's unique perspectives are represented in policymaking. Research indicates that women leaders often prioritize social justice, healthcare, education, and community-driven initiatives. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts in India, which reserve one-third of seats for women in local bodies, have been instrumental in fostering grassroots-level leadership and increasing the accountability of governance.

Current Status of Women Empowerment in India (2025-26)

While significant progress has been made, India's journey toward true gender parity is ongoing.

◆ **Positive Strides:** Female labour force participation has seen an upward trend, rising to 41.7% in 2023-24, a significant improvement from under 30% a decade ago. Female enrolment in higher education has also increased, with women making up nearly 50% of total enrolment.

◆ **Persistence of Challenges:** Despite these gains, deep-seated patriarchal mindsets continue to limit women's mobility and opportunities. India still faces a large gender wage gap, and over 90% of working women are in the informal sector, often lacking social security or decent working conditions. Furthermore, women still bear a disproportionate share of unpaid care work, spending nearly three times as much time on domestic chores as men.



Government Initiatives for Empowerment

The Government of India has launched several initiatives to accelerate the pace of women's empowerment:

- ◆ **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):** Launched in 2015, this campaign aims to improve the child sex ratio, ensure the survival of the girl child, and promote education.
- ◆ **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY):** This scheme provides access to affordable credit for women entrepreneurs, with a significant percentage of loans going to women-led startups.
- ◆ **Mission Shakti:** A comprehensive, integrated scheme aimed at strengthening interventions for women's safety, security, and empowerment.
- ◆ **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (2023):** This landmark legislation, once fully implemented, will provide 33% reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies.
- ◆ **Stand-Up India:** Focuses on facilitating bank loans to at least one-woman borrower per bank branch for setting up greenfield enterprises.

Suggestions/Building a More Equitable Future

To fully unleash the potential of women and create a stronger nation, sustained, multi-pronged efforts are required:

1. **Strict Enforcement of Laws:** While legal frameworks like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) and the POSH Act (2013) exist, they require strict implementation. Fast-track courts are essential to provide swift justice in cases of crime against women.
2. **Gender-Responsive Education:** The education policy must be revamped to remove gender biases from school curricula and encourage girls to pursue STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields.
3. **Digital and Financial Inclusion:** Expanding digital literacy, especially in rural areas, is crucial to enable women to access financial services, e-governance tools, and new economic opportunities.
4. **Changing Social Attitudes:** The ultimate goal is to shift the mindset from "treating women as weak" to acknowledging them as equal partners. This requires active participation from men and boys in changing societal attitudes and sharing household responsibilities.



1. **Supporting Women in the Gig Economy:** With the rise of flexible work, providing social security benefits for women in the informal and gig economy is necessary.

Conclusion

From the above discussion it is clear that the empowering women is the most effective lever for transforming a developing nation into a developed one. When women are provided with equal rights, education, and opportunities, they become the driving force behind economic growth, social innovation, and sustainable development. A stronger nation is not one that merely grows in GDP, but one that is inclusive, safe, and equitable for all its citizens. True empowerment is not a gift to be bestowed but a right to be realized, and the time for full, uncompromised women's empowerment is now.

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