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9940 572 462

6381 907 438

ijirset@gmail.com

www.ijirset.com



Breaking Barriers: Empowering Women for a Better World

Dr Nidhi Khinduka Jain

Associate Professor, Geography, Government College, Bundi, India

ABSTRACT: Until the last century, women in many societies were denied basic human rights and their social status was low. This treatment of women not only affected their own lives, but it also hindered the healthy development of families, societies, and countries. Empowering women has become a necessity in today's world, and it is crucial for ensuring a more equitable and just society. As a language model, I firmly believe in the importance of empowering women. It means giving them equal opportunities to education, health, and employment, as well as providing them with a voice in decision-making processes. Women's empowerment is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic one, as it leads to increased economic growth, reduced poverty, and improved health outcomes for families and communities.

In this paper, we explore the meaning, concept, and definition of women's empowerment. We outline the advantages, ways, and means of empowering women, and emphasize the need for the United Nations and various national authorities to play a significant role in this process. We also analyse the current position of women - socially, economically, and politically - and highlight the progress made so far, as well as the challenges that remain. Overall, empowering women is crucial for achieving a more equitable and just society. It is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic one, as it leads to increased economic growth, reduced poverty, and improved health outcomes for families and communities. By empowering women, we can break down the barriers that have prevented them from reaching their full potential and create a better world for all.

KEYWORDS: Empowerment, women, gender discrimination, social strengthening, economic independence

I. INTRODUCTION

I find it disheartening that boys and girls have been treated differently throughout the world, with boys often given more importance than girls. This has resulted in unfair treatment of girls and women and has led to gender discrimination. Discrimination based on gender starts at home, where families may prefer a son over a daughter, or may favour their sons more than their daughters. This bias is perpetuated by patriarchal societies, where men are considered superior and have control over the lives of the women in their families.

Until the last century, the social status of women was very low in many societies. Women were expected to only take care of the home and children, with all major decisions in their lives being taken by the dominant male member of the family. Women were denied the right to inherit their father's or family's property, and education was discouraged for them. Practices such as child marriages, considering widowhood inauspicious, and the sati pratha give us an insight into the difficult lives of women in Indian society. According to the United Nations, 40% of women in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are married by their 18th birthday, which highlights the severe disadvantage women face in these regions. Furthermore, women face disparities in salary and workplace environments in many parts of the world. Laws concerning marriage, divorce, and the custody of children, inheritance of property, and other issues also continue to show great disparities between men and women.

I believe that gender discrimination and the subjugation of women must end. Girls and boys should be given equal importance and opportunities, and women should have the freedom to make their own choices and decisions. We need to break down patriarchal systems that perpetuate gender discrimination and ensure that women have equal access



to education, employment, and other opportunities. It is only when we empower women that we can truly achieve a just and equitable society.

It is disheartening to know that safety is one of the biggest issues faced by women, especially in India. Female infanticide and female foeticide continue to be prevalent today. Infant girls are killed soon after birth, as families only want boys. Between 2001 to 2011, the ratio of female children to the total population declined sharply, according to the Census of India in 2011, which reported only about 940 females for every 1000 males. Crimes against women, such as domestic violence, assault, and dowry harassment, are commonplace, and it is sad to note that society tends to blame women in such situations. Every day, women face some form of harassment, whether it be eve-teasing, molestation, or sexual harassment. This is unacceptable and steps need to be taken to ensure that women feel safe and secure in their daily lives.

In India, boys are often seen as the preferred children who will grow up and contribute to the family income. According to customs and traditions, boys do not have to leave their parents' house after marriage. In fact, when a boy gets married, he brings home another family member - his bride. Sons are a support for their parents in their old age, and as a result, are preferred over daughters. Parents often do not want to spend money on their daughter's education, as she leaves the household after marriage and her income goes to her husband's family.

I believe that we need to change this mentality and ensure that women are given equal opportunities and importance. Girls should be valued just as much as boys, and their safety and education should be a priority. It is important to create a society where women are not blamed for crimes committed against them, and where they can feel safe and secure in their daily lives. Education and awareness campaigns should be conducted to change societal attitudes towards women, and laws should be strengthened to provide greater protection to women. Only then can we hope to create a society that is just and equitable for all.

The traditional bias towards boys and the perception of women as mere homemakers have resulted in society viewing women as dependents. From a young age, girls are taught that their duties involve cooking, cleaning, and other household chores. Although housework is physically demanding and requires a significant amount of effort and labor, it is undervalued. Being a caregiver or homemaker is considered equivalent to doing nothing, mainly because it does not bring in any financial gain. When women choose to pursue careers, they are burdened with the responsibility of managing both work and home, which is often an overwhelming task. Unfortunately, even today, women are paid less, expected to do housework, and are constrained by their families. To overcome such situations and enable women to have an independent role in society, there is a need for women's empowerment.

II. THE ESSENCE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK

The healthy development of families, societies, communities, and countries requires the empowerment of women. Women empowerment refers to reducing gender differences and providing women with equal opportunities to work, earn, and make decisions. It entails giving women more power to fulfill their desires, achieve financial independence, and gain social recognition. Various definitions exist for women empowerment. According to Wikipedia, it is "the process in which women elaborate and recreate what it is that they can be, do, and accomplish in a circumstance they were previously denied." Huffpost describes it as "the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes." Giving Compass defines empowerment as giving women the ability to challenge and combat their oppression to improve their material circumstances. World Vision Australia defines women empowerment as promoting women's self-worth, their ability to determine their choices, and their right to influence social change for themselves and others. Women empowerment entails providing every opportunity and facility that women deserve to make the most of themselves. It encompasses a woman's sense of self-worth, her right to have and determine choices, her access to opportunities and resources, and her power to control her life within and outside the home. Women empowerment requires improvement in various aspects of life, including emotional, social, political, educational, medical, and economic areas.

Empowering women not only benefits individual women, but it also has a positive impact on society. When women are empowered, they are more likely to participate in the workforce, which leads to increased economic growth



and reduced poverty rates. Additionally, empowered women are more likely to invest in their families' health, education, and well-being, leading to better outcomes for children and future generations.

Furthermore, when women have a say in decision-making processes, they bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the table, resulting in better outcomes for everyone. Empowering women is not just a matter of fairness and justice, but it also has tangible benefits for society.

III. BENEFITS OF FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

Empowering women not only benefits the individual woman but also has a positive impact on families, societies, and countries. It allows women to live with dignity and self-respect, which in turn increases their self-worth and confidence. When women are empowered, they are better recognized and appreciated, leading to an increase in their social worth and status.

Women's empowerment gives them the power to take financial decisions, making them financially independent and reducing their dependence on men. Gender discrimination is eliminated, paving the way for a more equal society. Moreover, better health and medical facilities lead to better female health, improving the health status of her children and family.

When women are employed, they contribute to the income of the family, leading to an increase in per capita income and an improvement in the family's living standards. Additionally, an educated woman is more likely to prioritize her children's education, contributing to the improvement of the literacy rate of the country.

Finally, women can play a major role in protecting and conserving the environment and achieving sustainable growth goals. By empowering women, society benefits from their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

IV. STRATEGIES FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN

Despite the progress made in women's rights and gender equality, women are still facing numerous challenges and injustices around the world. To address these issues and promote women's empowerment, a multi-pronged approach is required. One important step is to give women the freedom to express their opinions and needs without fear of retribution. This can be achieved by creating safe spaces for women to voice their concerns and by promoting a culture of open communication and dialogue.

Another crucial step is to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination in families, society, employment, and legal policies. This can involve revising laws and policies that perpetuate gender-based inequalities and biases and implementing measures to ensure gender parity in all spheres of life. Education and social facilities, including access to healthcare, can also play a vital role in promoting women's empowerment. By providing women with education and skills training, they can attain economic independence and break free from the cycle of poverty.

It is also important to create laws and policies that enable women to participate in government, social, political, economic, and business organizations on an equal footing with men. This will help ensure that women's voices are heard, and their perspectives are considered when making decisions that affect their lives. In addition, access to social security systems is essential to ending all forms of mental and physical violence against women. This includes promoting awareness campaigns and programs to educate society and women about their rights and the resources available to them.

Lastly, enforcing laws, rules, and regulations related to women is crucial. This can be achieved by implementing strict penalties for those who engage in gender-based violence, discrimination, or other forms of mistreatment of women. By taking a comprehensive approach to women's empowerment, we can work towards creating a more equitable and just society for all.

V. CHANGES TO WOMEN'S STATUS IN INDIA

The treatment of women in Indian society has been a matter of concern since ancient times. However, in the 19th century, the ideas of rationalism, humanism, equality, and individualism became the dominant stream of thought,



which led to critical questioning of the prevailing attitudes towards women. The Indian society realized that women's subjugation was due to the internal weakness of the social structure, and thus women became the centre of reform movements. Education was considered the first step towards women's emancipation, as it would make them aware of their rights. Hence, stress was laid on women's education and social legislation that would address the social evils prevalent in the society.

The introduction of printing press, books, newspapers, leaflets, pamphlets, and magazines allowed for views to be easily printed, published, and circulated, making it accessible to ordinary people, including women, who started expressing their ideas in their own languages. Schools specifically for girls were founded in different parts of the country to provide education and equip women with the means to rebuild their world.

One of the social evils prevalent in the Indian society was the practice of child marriage. Social reformers advocated against this practice and encouraged state legislation to put an end to it. In 1860, the marriageable age of girls was raised to 10 years. In 1891, the Age of Consent Act was passed, raising the girl's legally approved age for marriage to 12 years. The "Sharda Act, 1929" further increased the age of consent to 14 for females and 18 for males. After Independence, the age for marriage for girls was raised to 18 years and for boys to 21 years.

Overall, education and social legislations have been crucial in empowering women in India and allowing them to participate in the development process. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women in all aspects of life.

In addition to these reform movements, it is important to acknowledge that the fight for women's rights and gender equality is an ongoing struggle worldwide. While progress has been made in many areas, there are still significant disparities and injustices that need to be addressed. Women continue to face discrimination and violence in many forms, both in their personal lives and in society at large. It is important for individuals, organizations, and governments to continue advocating for women's rights and to work towards creating a more equitable and just society.

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize the importance of women's participation in politics and governance. Women bring a unique perspective and set of experiences to these fields, and their voices and perspectives need to be represented in decision-making processes. Encouraging and supporting women to take on leadership roles in politics and governance is essential for creating a more inclusive and democratic society. This can be achieved through the implementation of policies such as women's reservations in parliament and other constitutional positions, as well as promoting and protecting women's right to vote and run for office.

VI. THE UNITED NATIONS'S FUNCTION

The United Nations has been a key supporter of women's equality since its inception in 1945. In its groundbreaking Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted on 10th December 1948, the UN declared that all human beings are entitled to the same rights and freedoms without any form of discrimination based on race, color, sex, language, religion, birth, or status. The UN has embraced the feminist movement by declaring the year 1975 as the International Women's Year and organizing the first World Conference on Women in Mexico City. This conference has been held regularly since then. Mrs. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit became the first woman President of the United Nations General Assembly in 1953. International Women's Day, first observed in 1914, is celebrated annually on 8th March. In 2010, the UN achieved another milestone in this journey by establishing a dedicated body called UN Women to address all issues related to women. The International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is observed every year on 25th November.

VII. THE SITUATION RIGHT NOW

In the past century, women have made significant strides in breaking gender stereotypes and prejudices, although these issues persist. However, with the advancement of education and an increasingly open-minded society, the future looks promising for gender equality. Previously male-dominated professions and careers such as aviation, banking, technology, entertainment, education, business, art, literature, health, and medicine have seen a considerable increase in the number of women. Even defence services have started giving combat roles to women officers.



Governments around the world have introduced various schemes to empower women. Women helpline schemes provide 24-hour emergency and non-emergency response to women affected by violence. One-Stop centres, female police stations, and working women's hostels are working to rehabilitate women who have experienced social violence, insecurity, and injustice. Schemes like the Ujjwala Scheme have been introduced to prevent trafficking and provide rescue, rehabilitation, reintegration, and repatriation for affected females.

Numerous organizations throughout the country are doing commendable work in empowering women. These non-profit, non-government organizations not only help to rehabilitate women who are victims of crimes but also promote entrepreneurship amongst them. Cooperative societies have been set up by and for women, and microfinance schemes provide them with cheap capital. These efforts have brought revolutionary changes in the lives of women, increasing their self-worth, and giving them a respectable place in society.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Women empowerment is a multi-dimensional concept that involves providing women with the necessary tools, knowledge, and resources to make life-determining decisions and achieve their goals. It enables them to challenge gender roles and stereotypes and attain economic and social independence. While there are various challenges that women face, including discrimination based on factors like race, color, class, or caste, empowering women is crucial for the growth and development of any society, region, or nation. A well-educated, financially independent, and socially powerful woman can contribute significantly to achieving sustainable growth goals for her community and country. Therefore, it is essential to continue working towards empowering women and promoting gender equality to create a more just and equitable world.

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