

A Study on Women Economic Empowerment and the Inclusive Growth in context to India

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Article Info

Volume 83

Page Number: 4964 - 4968

Publication Issue:

July - August 2020

Abstract

We are living in a transitional age, the transition being from farming society to current industrial society. Females constitute nearly half of the population of male dominant society and the inequalities based on gender seem unfair in India. Women status is determined to a great extent in terms of socio-economic indicators such as income, property, education and skills that opens up opportunities of empowerment, better health. It is very fundamental to have participation by women in activities strengthening their position in society. At the same time, women must have a share in the decision-making process in the family and in the public sphere, and access the rights and opportunities provided by the state and society at large. They may get empowered by creating innovations and commercializing them. They can organize some sort of self-help group or working as entrepreneurs. The empowerment of women may help them to enjoy their social, economic, civil and political rights. For overall empowerment and the inclusive growth, it is needed participation of women into economic too. Women empowerment and the inclusive growth needed focus on increasing women's access to education, training, financing, technology, infrastructure etc. Further, the empowerment of women may be promoted by their leadership, adequate jobs, developing entrepreneurship, capacity building. All the development efforts would be only half done if there is no effective participation of females. This paper is trying to look into some important aspects of women empowerment and the inclusive growth.

Keywords: *Empowerment, Entrepreneur, Education, Panchayat, Socio-economic.*

Article History

Article Received: 25 April 2020

Revised: 29 May 2020

Accepted: 20 June 2020

Publication: 10 August 2020

1. Introduction:

Empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, or economic strength of individual and social communities. It is a multidimensional

process and refers to the expansion of freedom of choice and action in all spheres – social, political to shapes one's life. The concept of women empowerment has been becoming a buzz word in

social, political and economic spheres of life across the world. Women empowerment does not mean sharing for the right of the women. It means making them able to take the right place and at the right time. The term women empowerment refers to the process of strengthening the hands of women, who have been suffering from various disabilities, inequalities and gender discrimination. Empowerment emerged as an important theme in the women's movement from 1975 onwards. In fact, empowerment as a theme arose out of a failure of "Women in Development" (WID) programs, notably the equity approach all of which failed to question the interrelationship between power and development. Women empowerment is a process in which women challenge the existing norms and culture, to effectively promote their wellbeing. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women conference at Nairobi in 1999. It attempted to define the term as "redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women". According to Mahatma Gandhi – "women is companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man. She has the same right of freedom and liberty on he". Stormquist (1993) has identified four clear dimensions of empowerment, they are cognitive, psychological, economic and political.

Inclusive growth is a concept focusing equal opportunities to participants in socio-economic activities during the process of economic development with benefits incurred by every section of society. Inclusive growth is a necessary and crucial condition for poverty reduction. It adopts a long-term perspective and is concerned with sustainable economic development. It is a strategy which aims at achieving a particular type of growth process which meets the objectives of inclusiveness and sustainability.

Empowerment is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systemic forces, which marginalize women and other disadvantaged sections in a given context. It is necessary to mobilize the vast women power, if the country has to progress in all spheres of development.

2. Need of women empowerment:

Women need to be empowered with the fact that women play a very significant role in the developing

human resources and in shaping the character of the country's future generation. Women, who constitute half of the population, have been subjected to the tyranny and operation of a patriarchal order for centuries and in fact most of them are suffering from the same fate even today. It is an accepted fact that when women are in the main stream of progress only the economic and social development can be achieved.

3. Importance of women empowerment:

Women constitutes almost half of the total population of the world and out of which two third of the world's adult illiterates are women. According to FAO, the most disadvantaged section of society is the women; they are the 'silent majority' of the world's poor. Seventy percent world poor are women and they faced peculiar social, cultural, educational, political and allied problems (Sharma and Varma, 2008). Hence, empowerment of women of any flock is critical not only for their welfare but also for the development of the country. According to Agarwal (2001), "women need to be viewed not as beneficiaries but as active participants in the progress of development and change empowerment of women could be organized into groups for community participation as well as for assertion of their rights in various, services related to their economic and social wellbeing". But empowerment of women faces challenges boldly and overcome barriers in their lives and environment. There are many issues and challenges faced by women to live a life of dignity and self-respect. And some of them are – the unwanted female child, high rate of illiteracy among women, health abuse and malnutrition, dowry death, sexual harassment and atrocities in the work place, etc.

4. Women Empowerment and the Inclusive Growth in different dimensions:

4.1 Role of Women in Rural India:

Gender disparities have been an important characteristic of rural societies in India. During the last sixty-five years, the improvements in literacy and education levels of women, socio-economic mobilization through the organizations like SHGs have

been impacting on the gender equations in favour of women. The 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution has enlarged the space for women in the

local governance and is building capacities of women members in articulating their needs. All these factors cumulatively help in bring gender harmony in rural societies.

The enactment of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005 makes the government legally binding to provide 100 days of manual works to the individuals who wants to work under the scheme. At least one-third beneficiaries are women. Equal wages are provided to both men and women under the Minimum Wages Act 1948 for agricultural labourers which is not less than 60 rupees per day. Work is provided within 5 km radius of the village. In case work is provided beyond 5 km, extra wages of 10 percent are payable to meet additional transportation and living expenses. Work site facilities such as creche, drinking water, shade have to be provided. The Act is to ensure economic and democratic rights and entitlements of the common people in general and women in particular. The scheme is to ensure inclusive growth and empowering women in rural India. Though the wage employment has some shortcomings, it has many positive effects on the society in general and in alleviating rural poverty in particular. Income is an important variable which influence the socio-economic development of the society. And this program has positively changed the employment and income of the beneficiaries including women.

4.2 *Education and Women Empowerment:*

Education has been recognized as an essential agent of social change and development in any society of a country. Education is considered as a potent instrument through which processes modernization and social change come to existence. Hence to think harmonious development without educating women is impossibility. According to 2011 Census report the literacy rate of male is 81.14% while it is 56.46% in case of women. This gap between male and the female regarding the literacy, limits the women access to employment, health, facilities and exercise of legal and constitutional rights. The extent of the relationship between empowerment and education undoubtedly forces us to believe that it is education through one be in a position to distinguish between right and wrong, desirable and undesirable, good or bad make one self economically independent that welcome self confidence in every human being.

Education contributes towards creating better self-image which helps in liberating women from their psychological and sociological constraints. The policy of 1986 also emphasizes the removal of disparity between the sexes in the aspect of educational pursuit and attainment. It is not far from the truth that movement for the empowerment of women as a part of major civilization transformation should have been blessed with tremendous success with the involvement of all three factors time, money and effort. It seems as if the entire effort of elevating the status of women lacks in proper understanding of the true concept of empowerment. Empowerment of women is a process, a movement and collective action for elevating and enchanting the self-confidence, ability and willingness of women to challenge oppression. Empowerment lies not only in challenging but in eliminating all the obstacles that come in the way of progressive development of women folk. Some of the important attention for women empowerment can be –

1. Every girl should access for free and compulsory primary education.
2. Removal of illiteracy among women folk.
3. Encouraging girls for all kinds of vocational, technical and professional education.
4. A women friendly environment in work place.
5. Value based education should be emphasized among women.
6. Equal participation of women in various job sectors.
7. Role of media as an important agent in promoting women empowerment, etc.

4.3 *Empowering Women through Entrepreneurship:*

Entrepreneurship is one of the major contributing factors towards economic growth and social betterment of the society. There is a strong relationship between the level of entrepreneurial activities in a region for a country and its rate of economic growth (Carree and Thurik, 1988 and 2000). Women became more involved in the business world after it was a more acceptable idea to society. Women are generally perceived as home makers with little to do with economy or commerce. But the picture is changing. In modern India, many women are taking up entrepreneurial activity especially in medium and small-scale enterprises. Even as women are receiving education, they face the hope of unemployment. In this background, self-

employment is regarded as a cure to generate income. The Planning Commission as well as the Indian Government recognizes the need for women to be part of the mainstream of economic development. Women entrepreneurship is seen as an effective strategy to solve the problems of rural and urban poverty. Before the 20th century, women were operating businesses as a way of supplementing income or in many cases they simply trying to avoid poverty and making up for the loss of another half. The ventures that these women undertook were not known as entrepreneurial due to the time in history and usually had to yield to their domestic responsibilities. Women Entrepreneurship means not only an act of business ownership, it also boosts the economy for everyone, and the empowered women can smash scarcity – not only for themselves, but for their families, societies, and countries too. As per Government of India “An enterprise owned and controlled by a woman having a minimum financial interest of 51 percent of the capital and giving at least 51 percent of the employment generated by the enterprise to women”. The policy maker cannot neglect the truth that women are now a promising economic force. Now the modern world as well as the democratic economy is now balanced by the participation of both sexes. Women entrepreneurs have been making a significant blow in all segments of the economy which is more than 25 percent of all types of business. In India we have topmost women entrepreneurs in different zones. Some of the most influential women entrepreneurs of the country are – *Dr Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Indra Nooyi, Neelam Dhawan, Naina Lal Kidwai, Indu Jain, Simone Tata, Shahnaz Hussain, Mallika Srinivasan, Ekta Kapoor, Preetha Reddy*, and many more to name. Though women were empowering themselves through entrepreneurship and making themselves vibrant and strong, as well as boosting the country’s economy and influencing their similar folks towards empowerment, but still they were facing problems and challenges. Some of the problems faced by them at various stages are – *Patriarchal Society, Lack of Entrepreneurial Aptitude, Family Conflicts, Heavy struggle, Credit Facilities, Lack of proper support and back-up for women by their own family members and the external humanity, Lack of self-confidence and Optimistic Attitude amongst women, etc.* Right efforts from all areas are required in the development

of women entrepreneurs and their greater participation in the entrepreneurial activities.

5. Conclusion:

Even though after Independence, considerable developments have taken place in the lives of women, these remains a black picture. A majority of women are still underprivileged in a tradition bound society like ours, where there is a distinction between lawful legitimacy and general practice. In spite of women’s contribution towards family income, their position in the family hierarchy mostly remains subordinate. The societal attitude is still discriminatory against women. In India more than 6000 women are killed every year because their in-laws consider their dowries inadequate (UNESCO, 2000). Some problems to be given topmost priority are formal foeticide, female infanticide, malnutrition, illiteracy, child marriage, dowry harassments and dowry death, domestic violence, sexual harassment in society as well as in the work place, bounded labour, property and police neglect and harassment. The effective protection of women requires an increased focus on women’s empowerment through participating in various activities, like participation in political activities, avail job opportunities in governmental and non - governmental sector by acquiring adequate qualification, participation in sports as a huge potentiality has been inherent therein with the women communities which will give self-reliance to them in particular and increase the quality of participation of the country in this respect and in general. Empowering women as a process, demands a life cycle approach. It has different dimensions at different levels. It is a long drawn conscious and continuous process comprising enhancement of skill, capacity building, gaining self-confidence and meaningful participation in decision making. Hence empowerment is a psychological process of transformation to reverse the feeling of learned helplessness among women leading to an increase in knowledge, capacity, self-confidence, self-esteem and self-reliance. Such an internal transformation of one’s consciousness is inevitable in enabling one to overcome the traditional ideologies and break the external barriers to access to resources. Thus, empowerment of women demands emancipation in the psychological realm making it a psychological process. Proper empowerment of Indian women is

not possible due to social inequalities, gender bias, class and caste discrimination, religious fanaticism, high degree of illiteracy among women and economic dependence. In this context, education can be a potent weapon of women empowerment. Also, involvement of women in entrepreneurship is an important factor of inclusive growth and development of the country, as well as empowering women in every aspect. I want to conclude my paper with the famous words of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru “If you educate a man you educate an individual, however if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered”.

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