



A STUDY ON THE CONSTRAINTS MILITATING AGAINST THE ATTAINMENT OF EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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Abstract

The present study has been examined to know the status of Women's empowerment and the constraints of women empowerment in India. This paper is an explanatory one. The examination involves the desk review of literature, reports and books. The reviews and the findings of different articles have been brought together in this paper for effective and collaborated conclusion. World Economic Forum's Gender Calculate has also been used to have a broader and realistic demarcation of gender and to overview the present status of women in India among other countries of the world. Broadly, the constraints have been divided into economic, social and political constraints which block fullest attainment of women empowerment in the country. Immediate and effective measures should be taken to substitute all weakness and wipe out constraints, and support women for attainment of fullest empowerment in the country.

Keywords: Women empowerment, World Economic Forum, Gender, Constraints

Introduction and Background

Women empowerment can be described as the provision of adequate opportunities to women to develop their potentials and contribute to the development of the nation in particular and to the World in general (Yahaya, 1999). Adewole (1997) described women empowerment as the provision of conducive environment or opportunities to women to contribute their quota to the social, political and economic development of a nation.

The issue of gender inequality is an important social cum economic problem to the India today. The term was coined by Amartya Sen in a now classic article in the *New York Review of Books* (Sen 1990) to capture the fact that the proportion of women is lower than what would be

expected if girls and women throughout the developing world were born and died at the same rate, relative to boys and men, as they do in sub-Saharan Africa (Esther Duflo, 2012).

According to census 2011, women constitute 48.56% of the total population in India and 25.67% of female population is designated as workers. Almost 400 million people, more than 85% of the working population in India works in unorganized sector and out of these at least 120 million are women (*Vaidya et al 2015*). There is a bidirectional relationship between economic development and women's empowerment defined as improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development-in particular health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation. As Sen Said Empowerment can, in other words, accelerate development (Esther Duflo, 2012).

In India, since it is one of the biggest populated states in the world, the empowerment of women is a major issue. Though the government and NGO's have been engaged in the fullest utilization and upliftment of women section, there seems innumerable constrains in its way of women's empowerment. In this context, this paper reviews the evidence of women empowerment within state and brought together all the constraints of it.

Objectives

- To examine the status and the constraints of empowerment of women in India.

Methodology

The present study is about knowing the actual present status of Women and their empowerment and to review the constraints of women empowerment in Indian economy. For this objective analysis, the examination has been done which involves the desk review of literature, reports and books on women empowerment in India. The reviews and the findings of different articles have been brought together in this paper for effective and collaborated conclusion. World Economic Forum's Gender report-2014 has been used in the study to overview the women of India and India's ranking in terms of gender. Further, Online Gender Calculate by World Economic Forum has been used in this regard to have a broader and realistic demarcation of gender and to overview the present status of women in India among other countries of the world.

Further, for easy understand and effective study, this study has broadly divided the constraints into three major constraints, viz., economic, social and political constraints of women empowerment.

Results and Discussion

Empowerment is an active process, which enables women to realize their identity and power in all aspects of life. It enables women to have more access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their times, free them from the clutches of irrelevant customs built and practices (Manmeet Kaur *et al* 2007).

Women in India: An overview

1. **Right to Vote:** Women gained the right to vote in India in 1950 right 65 years ago.
2. **Gender Gap:** According to World Economic forum, Gender Gap Global Ranking India ranks 114th in the 2014 Global Gender Gap report, with a score of 0.646, where 0.00 denotes inequality and 1.00 denotes equality (0.00 = inequality, 1.00 = equality).
3. **Income:** While talking about Income, on an average, in India, for every \$1 you earn, a man earns \$4.17. In India, the average annual salary for a woman is \$1,980 and average annual salary for a man is \$8,087.
4. **Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave on Work:** Women receive 84 days maternity leave in India.
5. **Labor Force Participation:** In India, 30.3% of women are part of the labour force, compared to 83.5% of men.
6. **Literacy among women:** In India, the literacy rate for women is 50.8%, compared to 75.2% for a man.
7. **Health and life expectancy:** On healthy life expectancy, In India, a woman can expect to live 58 years in good health as compared to 56 years for a man.

India, as ranked 114th by World Economic Forum 2014, has experienced a steady improvement of its overall score since 2010, with a slight decrease in 2014 due to a drop in scores on the Economic Participation and Opportunity and Educational Attainment sub-indexes. Since 2006, India has experienced the largest decrease (in absolute and relative value) on its Health and Survival sub-index score because of an important drop in its Sex ratio at birth score. In 2014, India is below average on three sub-indexes: Economic Participation and Opportunity,

Educational Attainment and Health and Survival. In fact, it is the second-lowest performing country on Health and Survival, just ahead of Armenia. On the other hand, India is among the top twenty best-performing countries on the Political Empowerment sub-index.

India is part of the twenty worst-performing countries on the Labour force participation, Estimated earned income, Literacy rate and Sex ratio at birth indicators. India is the highest-ranked country on the Years with female head of state (over the past 50 years) indicator. India has the highest difference between women and men on the average minutes spent per day on unpaid work-a difference of 300 minutes. It is also among the countries with the highest difference in the female and male percentage of total R&D personnel (FTE). India has one of the lowest percentages of firms with female participation in ownership (World Economic Forum, 2014).

A case study by Maria Costanza Torri, 2014 states that the socio-cultural constraint prevents an increase in the participation of the women in and limits their empowerment. In this context it is important to underline all the complexity of intersectionality of gender oppression, in order to better understand the multiple ways in which various socially and culturally constructed categories interact on multiple levels to manifest themselves as inequality in women's condition (Maria Costanza Torri, 2014).

Constraints of Women Empowerment

Illiteracy: Illiteracy has been found as major constraints for the attainment of women empowerment in the nation. It is the rate of literacy which governs the reservation, takeover and competition among women for their right in country. Female child are less privileged for attaining schools. Umar (1996) noted that the girl-child is valued not for who she is, her potentials or achievements but for her services, submissiveness and at best good looks. Still India is fighting for the girl child education and their right.

Discriminatory nature of male towards female: In India, since the olden days, the men have been in control of politics, social, economical as well as cultural and traditional spheres of life. Olawoye (1985) observed that many provisions on inheritance and domestic violence have been described as more favorable to the male gender than the female. This results in less opportunities and dominating character towards female. Some of which are manifested in the form of wife

battering, assaults, acid attack, sexual harassment like rape, genital mutilation, girl-child abuse. Ritual murder and unfavorable widowhood practices (Yahaya, 1999).

Religious and cultural beliefs: This is another important constraint of women's empowerment in India which tightens up the female population. It is because of unknowing beliefs and following superstitions.

Insufficient power: Insufficient power and insignificant distribution of power among men and women in India is an additional constraint in attainment of women empowerment in the country.

Less participation of women in political field: In particular, women themselves involve less in the political field. Their participation is very insignificant in political issues and rights as compared to male population. It is again because of various socio-economic and cultural aspects of the country.

Health Issues: Studies from developing countries like India, show that they suffer from assorted health problems due to handling of heavy loads without taking adequate rest breaks (Mukhopadhyay, 2008; Sett & Sahu, 2008). Various risk factors are involved including biomechanical and environmental conditions such as physical work load, unfavorable body posture, vibration, psychosocial factors such as time, pressure and repetitive or monotonous tasks (Ariens *et al* 2000; Bongers *et al* 2002; Salerno *et al* 2002).

Role of Communities: There is also some evidence from India to suggest that women in local government roles make decisions with better outcomes for communities than men do when charged with budget decisions.²⁵ They also appear to be more competent representatives than men, obtaining more resources for their constituencies despite having significantly lower education and relevant labor market experience (World Economic Forum, 2014).

Other: Women and their children are bonded due to the fact that the male of the household is a bonded laborer. Women carry out domestic services in the landlord's house and besides being exposed to long working hours, they may fall victim to physical and sexual abuse from the landlord (Vikas Dhawan, *et al* 2014).

Major Constraints

Broadly, one can divide the problems of women empowerment into social, political and economic constraints.

Social Constraints

1. Lack of gender based academic institutions causes' women illiteracy
2. Dependable natures of women suppress them in their empowerment.
3. The right of free avenues of expression women lacks
4. Social taboos, superstitions, unhealthy tradition and customs hinder in women empowerment.
5. The family members unanimously oppose the gender to participate in social activities

Economic Constraints

Women's economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to strengthening women's rights and enabling women to have control over their lives and exert influence in society (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2010). It is about creating just and equitable societies. Women often face discrimination and persistent gender inequalities, with some women experiencing multiple discrimination and exclusion because of factors such as ethnicity or caste. Economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways which recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth (Eyben *et al* 2008). Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information (OECD, 2012).

According to OECD 2012 report, the challenge is to reach poor women who are landless labourers, smallholder agricultural producers, cross-border traders and factory and domestic workers and ensure that these women have access to the opportunities and benefits of economic growth and trade. There are specific challenges when working with the poorest women such as:

- Lower levels of literacy.
- Lower levels of access to and control over resources.
- Lower levels of access to networks and people who can assist and support, and
- Greater vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abuse at the community level, if not the household level (Mayoux, 2009).

Basic economic constraints which have been found with the women are;

1. Lack of Agro-based and rural industries for the income generation and employment to rural women.
2. Hindrances in implementation of women rights for sharing in family property.
3. Ownership of family income and finance are generally in male hands.
4. Males often operate the bank accounts of the family only.
5. The women of the family in service are not free to spend their income independently.

Political Constraints

1. Harassment and exploitation of women leaders by officials, leaders, social workers and others.
2. Women generally by nature avoid to lead the group organization and the society.
3. The political provisions for gender leadership are either not implemented or encroached by men, if implement.
4. The ill motive people misguide the women leaders in their vested interest and thus weaken them.

Further, if one see the constraints of women in particular to agricultural sector, the major constraints for participation of women in agriculture are (i) Discrimination in wages, low wages for women, (ii) Gender based technology, training and extension services, (iii) women have limited access to modern technical viz., credit, training and to other facilities, (iv) Due to women illiteracy, their exposure to outside world is less and productivity is less (v) Due to migration of men, women have to bear the entire family responsibility and hence they prefer to work at their house, (vi) Job security and availability is less due to seasonal nature of agricultural production (Rath, 2007).

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the study that most of the women are deprived from the benefit they have been provided for the upliftment of their status and decision making power in the nation. It is because of presence of various constraints militating towards the fullest attainment women empowerment in the country. There is an important and urgent need to designing and development of plans and programmes like workshops, prevention programme and training at

the very specific level which can lessen the gender discrepancy and can be benefited for the women section, in particular and nation as a whole, in general.

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