



## A STUDY ON ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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### Abstract

Unlike in the earlier days, women were maltreated even as slaves in the post-Vedic and epic ages after Indian Independence. India has so far passed or amended several women specific legislations and implemented a plethora of programs for women's advancement and economic emancipation in different spheres.

Today the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. But practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. In our day to day life, how women become victimized by various social evils. Women Empowerment is the vital instrument to expand women's ability to have resources and to make strategic life choices. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. The study reveals that women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by Government. The access to Education, Employment and Change in Social Structure are only the enabling factors to Women Empowerment. However, it has been observed that most of the policies and programs view empowerment in the economic sense only working in the belief that economic selfreliance empowers, women ignoring other variables like health, education, literacy etc.

**Key Words:** Women Empowerment, Education, Health, Socio-Economic Status Crimes against women, Policy implications, economic self-reliance.

### 1.0 Introduction

Women Empowerment is a global issue and discussion on women political right are at the fore front of many formal and informal campaigns worldwide. The concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women conference at NAROIBI in 1985.

Women empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender or economic strength of individuals and communities of women. Women's empowerment in India is heavily dependent on many different variables that include geographical location (urban / rural) educational status social status (caste and class) and age. Policies on Women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local (Panchayat) levels in many sectors, including health, education, economic opportunities, gender based violence and political participation. However, there are significant gap between policy advancements and actual practice at the community level. Empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society. It is the process of guarding them against all forms of violence. Women empowerment involves the building up of a society, a political environment, wherein women can breathe without the fear of oppression, exploitation, apprehension, discrimination and the general feeling of persecution which goes with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population but India has shown disproportionate sex ratio whereby female's population has been comparatively lower than males. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. Even today gender disabilities and discriminations are found in India and paradoxical situation shows that she was sometimes concerned as Goddess and at other times merely as slave.

### 2.0 Review of Literature

S.n	Name of Author	Year	Study highlight
1.	H. Subrahmanyam	2011	compares women education in India at present and Past, and highlighted that there has a good progress in overall enrolment of girl students in schools. The term empowers means to give lawful power or authority to act. It is the process of acquiring some activities of women.

2.	M. Bhavani Sankara Rao	2011	highlighted that health of women members of SHG have certainly taken a turn to better and shows that health of women members discuss among themselves about health related problems of other members and their children and make them aware of various Government provisions specially meant for them.
3.	Doepke M. Tertilt M.	2011	Does Female Empowerment Promote Economic Development? This study is an empirical analysis suggesting that money in the hands of mothers benefits children. This study developed a series of non cooperative family bargaining models to understand what kind of frictions can give rise to the observed empirical relationship.
4.	Duflo E.	2011	Women's Empowerment and Economic Development, National Bureau of Economic Research Cambridge The study argues that the inter relationships of the Empowerment and Development are probably too weak to be self sustaining and that continuous policy commitment to equality for its own sake may be needed to bring about equality between men and women.
5.	Saradha	2001	reported that the product empowerment of women in self-help groups was found to range from high and low with 35.80 and 35.00 per cent, respectively. It indicated that even though the women are psychologically empowered but their real empowerment level was low. The possible reasons for this may be the patriarchal society where the women are regarded as weaker section and the managerial competencies, decisionmaking power, reduction in drudgery, assessing information and resources and critical awareness of rural women were found to be low because of the lack of general media exposure, low level of education and lack of recognition.
6.	Giriyyappa	1997	analysed the women empowerment with the corresponding levels of discrimination and effectiveness of decision-making by women in different rural enterprises and concluded that the female headed households were effective in taking decision in respect of work mobility, schooling, health care, asset creation, employment generation and social participation in low social status households.

### 3.0 Significance of the Study

Educated urban women are presumed to be more aware of the opportunities and challenges of the workplace or educated urban women can better understand their roles and limitations in the workplaces and are perceived to be bold enough to develop their own personalities, with or without encouragement from their families. An assessment of the problems and issues plaguing urban working women is therefore a necessity for better understanding of workplace dynamics related to women.

### 4.0 Objectives of the Study

- To Study The Government Schemes For Women Empowerment
- To Analyze The Factors Influencing The Economic Empowerment Of Women
- To Suggest The Useful Ideas In The Light Of Findings.

### 5.0 Research Methodology

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature. For the purpose an attempt has been taken to analyze the empowerment of women in India, for which data used in the study is purely from secondary sources covering all the requirement of the study.

### 6.0 National Perspective Plan for Women 1988 – 2000 A.D.

To boost up the programmes for women's development, a National Perspective Plan for Women (1988–2000 A.D.) was brought out by the Department of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Human Resource Development.

The main aim of National Perspective Plan is to promote holistic perspective to the development of women. Main recommendations of the National Perspective Plan :-

- Need for a strong inter ministerial co-ordination and monitoring body in the Department of Women and Child Development.
- Education to girls should be given priority and awareness needs to be generated to contribute effectively to the socio-economic development of the country.
- Strong need to eliminate all forms of discrimination in employment especially to eliminate wage differentials between men and women.
- Planning Commission and all ministries and government departments must have a women's cell.
- A conscious strategic change is required in national media and communication effort. In order to change the attitudes towards women and girls
- Law drafting technologies and enforcement mechanism including police, judiciary and other components need to be reviewed, to provide equality and justice.
- Government should effectively secure participation of women in decision making process at National, State and Local levels.
- 30% reservation should be provided at Panchayat and at district level for women.
- Urgent need to improve the effectiveness of voluntary action.

### 7.0 The National Policy for Empowerment of Women

The Government of India has declared 2001 as Women's Empowerment year. The policy aims at upliftment, development and empowerment in socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects, by creating in them awareness on various issues in relation to their empowerment.

**Table: 1,Cognizable Crimes registered during 2010-2014**

Year	Number of cases			Ratio (IPC : SLL)	Rate per (1,00,000 Population)
	IPC	SLL	Total		
2010	22,24,831	45,25,917	67,50,748	1: 2.03	569.3
2011	23,25,575	39,27,154	62,52,729	1: 1.69	516.7
2012	23,87,188	36,54,371	60,41,559	1: 1.53	497.9
2013	26,47,722	39,92,656	66,40,378	1: 1.51	540.4
2014	28,51,563	43,77,630	72,29,193	1: 1.54	581.1

Source: Crime in India 2014 Compendium.

The rate of total cognizable crimes (IPC + SLL) was reported as 581.1 in the year 2014 showing an increase of 2.1% over the year 2010 and an increase of 7.5% over 2013.

### 8.0 Crime against Women

The crimes against women fly directly against orchestrating Women Empowerment in India. Data on the crimes against Women by the National Crime Records Bureau comes up with alarming statistics and the Crime Head Wise details of reported crimes during the year 2009 to 2015 along with percentage variation are shown in Table : 2

**Table : 2 ,Crime head-wise incidents of crime against women during 2010-2014 and percentage variation in 2014 over 2013**

Sl. No.	Crime head	Year					Percentage variation in 2014 over 2013
		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
1	Rape	22,172	24,206	24,923	33,707	36,735	9.0
2	Attempt to commit rape*	--	--	--	--	4,234	--
3	Kidnapping & abduction of women	29,795	35,565	38,262	51,881	57,311	10.5

4	Dowry Deaths	8,391	8,618	8,233	8,083	8,455	4.6
5	Assault on women with intent to outrage her/their modesty	40,613	42,968	45,351	70,739	82,235	16.3
6	Insult to the modesty of women	9,961	8,570	9,173	12,589	9,735	-22.7
7	Cruelty by husband or his relatives	94,041	99,135	1,06,527	1,18,866	1,22,877	3.4
8	Importation of girls from foreign country	36	80	59	31	13	-58.1
9	Abetment of suicide of women	--	--	--	--	3,734	--
A.	Total IPC crime against women	2,05,009	2,19,142	2,32,528	2,95,896	3,25,329	9.9
10	Commission of Sati Prevention Act	0	0	0	0	0	
11	Indecent Representation of Women (P) Act	895	453	141	362	47	-87.0
12	The Dowry Prohibition Act	5,182	6,619	9,038	10,709	10,050	-6.2
13	Protection of women from Domestic Violence Act	--	--	--	--	426	--
14	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act	2,499	2,436	2,563	2,579	2,070#	--
B.	Total SLL Crime against women	8,576	9,508	11,742	13,650	12,593	-7.7
	Total (A+B)	2,13,585	2,28,650	2,44,270	3,09,546	3,37,922	9.2

Source : Crime in India 2014 Compendium.

\*newly included crime head; # Modification in data in 2014, as figures refer to women related crimes only.

A total of 3,37,922 Incidents of Crime against Women (both under IPC and SLL) were reported in the country during the year 2014 as compared to 3,09,546 in the year 2013 recording an increase of 109% during the year 2014. These crimes have continuously increased during 2010-2014 with 2, 13,585 cases in the year 2010.

2, 28,650 cases in 2011 and 2,44,270 cases in 2012 and 3,09,546 cases in 2013 and 3,37,922 cases in the year 2014. The proportion of IPC crimes committed against women towards total IPC crimes has increased during the last 5 years from 16.04% in the year 2010 to 25.45% during the year 2014.

**Table: 3 ,Proportion of crime against women (IPC) towards total IPC crimes**

S.no.	Year	Total IPC Crimes	Crime Against women (IPC cases)	Percentage to total IPC crimes
1	2010	22,24,831	2,13,585	9.6%
2	2011	23,25,575	2,19,142	9.4%
3	2012	23,87,188	2,44,270	10.2%
4	2013	26,47,722	2,95,896	11.2%
5	2014	28,51,563	3,25,327	11.4%

Source: Crime in India 2014

The proportion of IPC crimes committed against women towards total IPC crimes has increased during last 5 years from 9.6% in the year 2010 to 11.4% during the year 2014

### 8.1 Why Need of Women Empowerment?

Reflecting into the “Vedas Purana” of Indian culture, women are 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. Among the world’s 900 million illiterate people, women outnumber men two to one. 70% of people living in poverty are women. Lower sex ratio i.e. 933, 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.

### 8.2 Ways to Empower Women

- Changes in women’s mobility and social interaction
- Changes in women’s labor patterns
- Changes in women’s access to and control over resources
- Changes in women’s control over Decision making
- Providing education
- Self employment and Self help group
- Providing minimum needs like Nutrition, Health, Sanitation, Housing
- change the mentality towards the word women\
- Encouraging women to develop in their fields

### 8.3 Status of Women Empowerment

The status of Women Empowerment cannot be visualized with single dimension rather multidimensional assessment in terms of various components of women’s life and their status would bring a clear conception. So, the basic idea of the paper is about the condition and status of women in terms of employment, education, health and social status of women in terms of gender gap index produced by World Economic Forum in 2012.

**Table 4,Details of Gender Gap Index – 2012 (out of 135 countries)**

Gender Gap sub-Indices	India		Srilanka	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
Economic Participation & Opportunity	123	0.4588	105	0.5596
Educational Attainment	121	0.825	108	0.9946
Health and Survival	134	0.9612	1	0.9796
Political Empowerment	17	0.3343	22	0.3151
Overall Index	105	0.6442	39	0.7122

Source: World Economic Forum (2012) Global Gender Gap Index- 2012

The above table clearly depicts the status of low level of attainment of women in the varied field of their attainment. The ranking and scores for India amply proves that it is found in the lower rank even compared to Sri Lanka in all sub-indexes of gender equality. India gained eight places (from 123 ranks in 2011 to 105 rank in 2012) as a result of improvement in the educational attainments and political empowerment. Keeping aside the Political Empowerment, the other three indices is all above the rank of 100. The Political Empowerment ranks quite high may be due to the 73rd and 74th Constitution amendments of India providing greater opportunity to women to take part in active politics.

### 8.4 Reasons for the Empowerment of Women

Today, in India women are discriminated and marginalized at every level of the society whether it is social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education, and also reproductive healthcare. Women are found to be economically very poor all over the India. Only few women are engaged in services and other activities. So, they need economic power to stand on their own legs on par with men. Other hand, it has been observed that women are found to be less literate than men. According to 2001 census, rate of literacy among men in India is found to be 76% whereas it is only 54% among women. Thus, increasing education among women is of very important in empowering them. It has also noticed that some of women are too weak to work. They consume less food but work more. Therefore, from the health point of view,

women folk who are to be weaker are to be made stronger. Another problem is that workplace harassment of women. For these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. Women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

## 9.0 Challenges

Social norms and family structure in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. 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

**Education:** While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since independence where education is concerned. The gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India. The gender bias is in higher education, specialized professional trainings which hit women very hard in employment and attaining top leadership in any field.

**Poverty:** Poverty is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradication of poverty should be a national goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy. Due to this, women are exploited as domestic helps.

**Health and Safety:** The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country and are an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country.

**Professional Inequality:** Women face countless handicaps in male customized and dominated environs in Government Offices and Private enterprises.

**Morality and Inequality:** Due to gender bias in health and nutrition there is unusually high mortality rate in women reducing their population further especially in Asia, Africa and china.

## 9.1 Suggestions

Empowerment of women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved by adopting definite social and economic policies with a view for bringing phenomenal change in the plight women's education and empowerment in India -

- Steps should be taken to improve the health status of women, reduce maternal mortality especially in the areas which do not have good medical facilities.
- Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights.
- Strict implementation of programs and acts should be there to curb the malpractices prevalent in the society.
- The Ministry of Education both at Centre and State level should work out strategic steps to stop firmly the ongoing high drop outs among girls especially in rural areas to realize zero drop-out among girls.
- Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work.

## Conclusion

The attainment in the field of income / employment and in educational front, the scenario of women empowerment seems to be comparatively poor. The need of the hour is to identify those loopholes or limitations which are observing the realization of empowerment of women and this initiative must be started from the women folk itself as well as more importantly policy initiative taken by the state and society.

**“When women move forward the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves”.** The best way of empowerment is perhaps through inducting women in the mainstream of development. The Empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.



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