

**A STUDY ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA : ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

**Mr. Sandip Bhimrao Sable** Ph.D Research Scholar, Dept. of Economics & Research Centre, PDEA's, Prof. Ramkrishana More College, Pradhikaran, Akurdi, Pune - 411044 Maharashtra, India  
**Dr. Meghana M. Bhosale** Professor and Head, PDEA's, Mamasahab Mohol college, 48/1A, Erandwane, Paud Road, Pune - 411038 Maharashtra, India

**Abstract:**

The glorious Indian history, on one hand, venerates women in many societal dimensions but on the other hand, it echoes added challenges faced by women in education, business and politics compared to their male equal. Without the participation of women in national activities, the social, economic or political progress of a country will be stagnated. Women constitute almost 50% of the world's population, but they accomplish it resting on an unstable ground. Global canvas illustrates that nearly 70% women are under the poverty line, around 80% of the world's refugees are women and world's two third women are illiterate. Domestic violence, female feticide, rape, molestation & eve teasing, unequal wages and gender inequality are the global reality, which hinders women empowerment. Women's empowerment and economic development are closely related: in one direction, development alone can play a major role in driving down inequality between men and women; in the other direction, empowering women may benefit development. The present paper seeks to broaden existing understandings of women's empowerment and is an attempt to analyze the status of women empowerment in India using various indicators based on data from secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Women, Empowerment, Issues, Problems, Challenges, Education, Health, Socio-Economic Status.

**Introduction:** In the ancient Indian society women were adored and worshiped as goddesses. However in the middle age, the status of women got down to a great extent. In the modern world, where women status has been improved a little while, still they are facing problems. As far as their social status is concerned, they are not treated as equal to men in all the places. Women are called fair sex but always get unfair treatment. A woman's life lies between pleasure at one end and threat of violence at the other. Empowerment is a multi-dimensional and dynamic social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It means emancipation of women from the vicious grips of social, economical, political, caste and gender-based discrimination. Empowering girls and women is the key to economic growth, political stability, and social transformation.

Kofi Annan, 7th UN Secretary-General pointed out that there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women. The UNDP (1995) Report noted that without empowering women overall development of human beings is not possible. Empowerment in the social, political, economic and spiritual domain of women lead to the confidence in developing her capabilities and the realization that power can change. (Dr. Manju Tembhre-2018)

In the Western societies, the women have got equal right and status with men in all walks of life. But gender inequalities and discriminations are found in India even today.

**Review of Literature:**

**H. Subrahmanyam (2011)** compares women education in India at present and Past. Author highlighted that there has a good progress in overall enrolment of girl students in schools. The term empower means to give lawful power or authority to act.

**M. Bhavani Sankara Rao (2011)** has highlighted that health of women members of SHG have certainly taken a turn to better. It clearly 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.

**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.

**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.

**Sethuraman K. (2008)** The Role of Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence in child Growth and Under nutrition in a Tribal and Rural Community in South India. This research paper explores the relationship between Women's Empowerment and Domestic Violence, maternal nutritional status and the nutritional status and growth over six months in children aged 6 to 24 months in a rural and tribal community. This longitudinal observational study undertaken in rural Karnataka.

**Venkata Ravi and Venkatraman (2005)** focused on the effects of SHG on women participation and exercising control over decision making both in family matters and in group activities.

**Shariff (2009)** suggested a specific measure for gender empowerment for India keeping in view culture specific conditions prevalent in the country. He identified six dimensions for which dependable data are available from sample surveys and government records.

**Desai and Thakkar (2007)** in their work discussed women's political participation, legal rights and education as tools for their empowerment.

**Karat (2005)** in her works discussed the issues of violence against women, their survival, political participation and emancipation.

**Purusottam Nayak and Bidisha Mahanta(2017)** Women Empowerment in India. This research paper explores the relationship between Women's Empowerment and Gender related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure and compared it with HDI Human Development Index.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

1. To know the need of Women Empowerment.
2. To analyze the Factors influencing the Economic Empowerment of Women.
3. To assess the Awareness of Women Empowerment in India.
4. To identify the Hindrances in the Path of Women Empowerment.
5. To offer useful Suggestions in the light of Findings.

**Research Methodology:** This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. In this paper an attempt has been taken to analyze the empowerment of women in India. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources according to the need of this study.

**Concept of Women Empowerment:** The World Bank says, 'Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.' Generally "Women's empowerment" is used pervasively which mainly include economic participation and opportunities, educational attainment through improved literacy rate and enrolment ratio, political participation, health and survival, measured with life expectancy and sex ratio. In Indian context, there are three basic indicators for women's empowerment, women's security, decision-making power, and mobility.

### **Current Status of Women in India:**

**Educational Status:** According to 2011 census, female literacy rate in India is still much lower (64.7%) than male literacy rate (80.9%). However, the gender gap in literacy rate is slowly declining over years. It has come down from 21.6% in 2001 to 16.3% in 2011.

**Economic Status:** According to a November 2015 report by McKinsey Global Institute, women contribute just 17 percent of India's GDP compared to the global average of 37 percent. According to International Labor Organization (ILO, 2017), estimates in that only 23.7 percent of eligible Indian women are part of the workforce as compared that to 75 percent of men. ( Datta PB, Gailey R.)

**Political Status:** Political participation is also hindered at the Panchayat level and at the state and national levels, despite existing reservations for women (108th Constitutional Amendment Bill). Even though the 2019 Lok Sabha elections saw the highest ever presence of women in parliament, it still stands at 78 (14.36%). And 2014 - 61 (11.23%), 2009 – 59(10.86).

**Sex Ratio:** the sex ratio has improved up to 943 in 2011. However, the World Bank projections for India suggest a decrease of sex ratio to 931 by 2021.

**Gender inequality:** According to a report, India shows "extremely high" levels of gender inequality, with a Gender Parity Score of 0.48, compared to an ideal score of 1.

### **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, this paper tries to give a basic idea about the condition and status of women in terms of employment, education, health and social status. Before going to elaborate separately let us have a quick view of the overall status of women in terms of gender gap index prepared by World Economic Forum in 2012, 2020 and 2021.

<b>Gender Gap sub-Indices</b>	2012 (135)		2020 (153)		2021 (156)	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
Economic Participation and Opportunity	123	0.4588	149	0.354	151	0.326
Educational Attainment	121	0.8525	112	0.962	114	0.962
Health and Survival	134	0.9612	150	0.944	155	0.937
Political Empowerment	17	0.3343	18	0.411	51	0.276
<b>Overall Index</b>	105	0.6442	112	0.668s	140	0.625

**Source:** World Economic Forum (2012), Global Gender Gap Index – 2012, 2020, 2021.

The above table clearly connotes 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. India gained eight places (from 113 ranks in 2011 to 105 rank in 2012) as a result of improvement in the educational attainments and political empowerment. But in 2020 and 2021 it is 112 and 140. Keeping aside the Political Empowerment, the other three indices is all above the rank of 100. Economic Participation and Opportunity – (2012-123), (2020-149), (2021-151). Educational Attainment- (2012-121), (2020-112), (2021-114). Health and Survival- (2012-134), (2020-150), (2021-155). The Political Empowerment ranks quite high up to 2020. It may be due to the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution amendments of India providing greater opportunity to women to take part in active politics.

**Challenges:** There are several constraints that check the process of women empowerment in India. Social norms and family structure in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. The society is more biased in favor of male child in respect of education, nutrition and other opportunities. Women often internalize the traditional concept of their role as natural thus inflicting an injustice upon them. Targeting these issues will directly benefit the empowerment of women in India.

**Education:** 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.

**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:** This inequality is practiced in employment and promotions in Government Offices and Private enterprises.

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

**Household Inequality:** Social norms and family structures in developing countries like India, manifests and perpetuate the subordinate status of women. e.g. sharing burden of housework, childcare and menial works by so called division of work.

**Lack of awareness** about legal and constitutional provisions and failure in realizing it, is another factor that hinders the process of empowerment.

**Gender discrimination,** Lack of Education, Female Infanticide, Financial Constraints, Family Responsibility, Low Mobility, Low ability to bear Risk, Low need for achievement, Absence of ambition for the achievement.

**Findings of the Study:**

1. Globalization, Liberalization and other Socio - Economic forces have given some respite to a large proportion of the population. However, there are still quite a few areas where women empowerment in India is largely lacking.
2. There needs to be a sea – change in the mind set of the people in the country. Not just the women themselves, but the men have to wake up to a world that is moving towards equality and equity.
3. There are several Government programmes and NGOs in the Country, there is still a wide gap that exists between those under protection and those not.
4. Poverty and illiteracy add to these complications. The Empowerment of Women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety.
5. Empowerment of Women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved. And to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings.
6. In order to create a sustainable world, we must begin to Empower Women.

**Suggestions:**

1. Awareness programmes need to be organized for creating awareness among women especially belonging to weaker sections about their rights.
2. The first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women, which is the grassroots problem.
3. Women should be allowed to work and should be provided enough safety and support to work. 4. They should be provided with proper wages and work at par with men so that their status can be elevated in the society.
5. Strict implementation of Programmes and Acts should be there to curb the mal-practices prevalent in the society.

**Conclusion:**

Thus, the attainment in the field of income / employment and in educational front, the scenario of women empowerment seems to be comparatively poor. Let us take the oath that we want an egalitarian society where everybody whether men or women get the equal opportunity to express and uplift one's well being and well being of the society as whole. "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. Women empowerment will be real and effective only when they are endowed income and property.(Nagaraja, B. 2013).

The Empowerment of Women has become one of the most important concerns of 21<sup>st</sup> 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 deal with the issue of women empowerment, women have to unite in order to be heard in the creation and strict enforcement of laws and public policies with the purpose to assure their economic empowerment and gender parity.

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