

Women Empowerment Fact, Stories and Programmes

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Abstract

Women empowerment in India is a multifaceted issue that encompasses social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions. This review paper aims to explore the various aspects of women empowerment in India, examining the progress made, the challenges faced, and the strategies employed to promote gender equality. By reviewing existing literature, government policies, and non-governmental initiatives, this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of the state of women empowerment in India. The findings highlight significant strides in areas such as education and employment while also addressing persistent issues like gender-based violence and socio-cultural barriers.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Government, Women, Education, Program.

Introduction

Women empowerment refers to the process of enhancing women's abilities to make choices and transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. In the context of India, a country with deep-rooted patriarchal norms, women empowerment is crucial for achieving overall social and economic development. This paper reviews the current status of women empowerment in India, considering historical context, policy interventions, and ongoing challenges.

The status of women in India has undergone significant transformations from ancient times to the present day. Historically, women enjoyed a high status during the Vedic period but faced increasing restrictions and marginalization in later periods, especially during the medieval era. The colonial period saw the beginning of social reform movements that aimed to improve women's status, leading to gradual progress in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Study

Education and Women Empowerment

Education is a critical component of women empowerment. Numerous studies have shown that educating girls leads to improved health outcomes, economic opportunities, and social status. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), female literacy rates have significantly improved, reaching 70.3% in 2021. However, gender disparities in education persist, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized communities (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008).

Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment involves increasing women's access to economic resources and opportunities, including jobs, financial services, and property rights. Initiatives like the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement and microfinance schemes have played a significant role in enhancing women's economic status. Reports indicate that women's participation in the workforce has

improved, but challenges such as wage gaps, occupational segregation, and limited access to credit remain (Chaudhary & Verick, 2014).

Political Empowerment

Political empowerment refers to women's participation in political processes and decision-making. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in India mandated the reservation of one-third of seats for women in local governance bodies, significantly boosting their political participation. However, representation at higher levels of government remains low, with women constituting only about 14% of the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) members (Bhavnani, 2009).

Social and Cultural Empowerment

Social and cultural empowerment involves challenging and changing societal norms and practices that discriminate against women. Despite legal frameworks and social campaigns, practices such as dowry, child marriage, and gender-based violence continue to impede progress. Efforts like the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) campaign aim to address these issues, yet deeply entrenched cultural attitudes are slow to change (Srinivasan & Bedi, 2007).

Government Policies and Initiatives

The Indian government has implemented various policies and programs to promote women empowerment. Key initiatives include:

National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001): A comprehensive policy aimed at advancing women's social, economic, and political status.

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (2015): A campaign focused on preventing female infanticide and promoting education for girls.

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (2016): A scheme providing free LPG connections to women from below poverty line (BPL) households, promoting clean cooking fuel and women's health.

Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act (2017): Extending maternity leave from 12 to 26 weeks for working women in the organized sector.

Non-Governmental Efforts

NGOs and civil society organizations play a crucial role in women empowerment in India. Organizations such as SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association), CARE India, and Breakthrough India work at the grassroots level to address issues ranging from economic independence and health to education and gender-based violence. These organizations often fill gaps left by government initiatives and provide innovative solutions tailored to local contexts.

Challenges and Barriers

Despite significant progress, numerous challenges impede the full empowerment of women in India:

Gender-based Violence: High prevalence of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence against women.

Economic Disparities: Persistent wage gaps and limited access to formal employment and financial services.

Educational Barriers: Gender disparities in education, particularly in higher education and rural areas.

Political Underrepresentation: Low representation of women in higher political offices.

Cultural Norms: Deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes and practices that restrict women's autonomy and opportunities.

Recommendations

To further advance women empowerment in India, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1. Enhance Educational Opportunities:** Focus on reducing gender disparities in education, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, through scholarships, incentives, and infrastructure development.
- 2. Promote Economic Independence:** Strengthen initiatives that support women's entrepreneurship, access to credit, and participation in formal employment.
- 3. Increase Political Representation:** Implement measures to ensure greater representation of women in higher political offices.
- 4. Combat Gender-based Violence:** Enforce stricter laws and provide support services for victims of violence, along with awareness campaigns to change societal attitudes.
- 5. Address Cultural Barriers:** Engage community leaders and influencers to challenge and change patriarchal norms and practices.

Conclusion

Women empowerment in India has seen substantial progress in recent decades, yet significant challenges remain. By addressing these challenges through concerted efforts from government, civil society, and communities, India can move closer to achieving true gender equality. Empowering women is not only a moral imperative but also essential for the nation's overall development and prosperity.

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