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The Unheard Voices- Empowerment of Women through Participation Socially, Economically, and Politically in India

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Abstract

The discrimination and exploitation of women is seen all over the world. Empowerment is an aid to help women to achieve equality with men or, at least, to reduce gender gap considerably. Women play a very strategic role in the development of society in particular and development of economy in general. Since empowerment is considered a multidimensional concept, it is determined by many socio-economic factors and cultural norms. In this paper, an attempt is made to explore the possible determinants of women empowerment using the data from secondary sources. Empowering women is the urgent need of the time. Her potential hidden power is to be utilized for which, her status in the society must be improved and economically she should be strengthened True empowerment of the women is only when all this three factors i.e. social, economic and political are simultaneously address and made compatible with each other therefore for holistic development of women to happen the impact of all this three factors should be covered effectively. Thus, the paper sheds lights on role of key indicators in the empowerment of women by participating socially, economically and politically. It also argues for programme that enhance autonomy of women.

Key words: empowerment, holistic development, compatible, potential presence

1. Introduction:

What is Empowerment?

The term 'women empowerment' has become popular in the development field since 1980s. It is vividly recognized that women empowerment is essential for sustainable economic growth and Reduction in poverty in developing countries. (Chaudhary, 2009) . 'Empowering' women

has become a frequently cited goal of development interventions. However, while there is now a significant body of literature discussing how women's empowerment has been or might be evaluated, there are still major difficulties in so doing. (Mosedale, 2005). Women empowerment is central to human development. Human development as a process of enlarging people's choices of

half of the humanity is restricted. Targeted actions aimed at empowering the women and righting the gender inequalities in the social and economic share, as well as in terms of social and political rights, must be taken alongside effort to en-gender the development process. The extent of women empowerment in the country is largely determined by three factors economic, social and political identity. (A.Sangamithra, 2008).

Women in India are divided in caste , class, rural , urban , educational , occupational, and linguistic groups ; but marginalization is the common thread of uniformity among them and it begins with the non-recognition of women's work (kumar, 2005). One has to recognize the fact that women works at two level , at the private one and the public level. She forms network with the family of her birth and the one she is married into. Women also had a focal importance in contributing the livelihood of the family. Proverbially as the weaker sex, women in reality has proved to be the weaker sex women In reality have proved to be tougher biologically and not inferior psychologically and culturally. Without the work done by the women everyday life could not be managed. (Chakrapani, 2005).

Empowering women is the only solution for all questions. Her potential hidden power is to be utilized for which, her status in the society must be improved and economically she should be strengthened. The poverty is the main cause for her low bargaining power hence poverty should be removed. Empowering women and removal of poverty go hand in hand. Woman if is educated and empowered, her potential power can be utilized for the economic development. Mahatma Gandhi says, "You educate a man, you educate an individual. You educate a woman, you educate an entire family". (Kadam, 2012)

Gender subordination is a strategy of a tradition-bound society , fact remains that majority of the women even today live in a mirage brainwashed by the custodians of the traditions , customs and patriarchs, sacrificing their owner , dignity and pride and even their identity with no reference in the human history whatsoever. Consequently women's multi-faced personality are little or seldom known, they still continue to live as an extensions of their male counterparts (Arunachalam, 2005)

2. Need and Importance of the Study:

Women play an important role in all the fields of development. Socially economically if she is strengthened then she will create wonders. Women contribute directly and indirectly for the economic development. Over the years women has been treated as the soul property of husband, father, brother not given any choice or freedom of her own. The present scenario were women are been subjected to violence, and it includes even the increasing number of rape cases in the country were the recent example is the Delhi gang rap case of 2012, this current situation raises the questions not only on the empowerment but also on the security of women , it seems that the dignity of women which was there in the ancient Indian society is lost in the fog of wild human urges , and our ultra-modern Indian society. Empowering women is the only solution for all questions. Hence it is essential to study the past and present position of women and suggest measures for their upliftment

3. Objective of the study:

- To study the current status of women empowerment and transformation - socially, politically and economically.
- To study the reasons for the increase insecurity of women in India.

- To study the necessity of empowerment of women.
- To access the basic problem for women empowerment.
- To suggest the better policy for women empowerment

4. Date and Methodology:

An adequate and reliable source of literature is very important for the theoretical analysis. In this study secondary data is used for the preparation of the paper.

5. Women in Ancient India:

The status of women is changing from time to time. The history of women in India has been exciting. Over the past few millennia, the status of women in India has been subject to many changes. Women enjoyed equal status with men in all fields of life in ancient days of India. Works by ancient Indian grammarians such as Patanjali and Katyayana point out that, women were educated in the early Vedic period.

The Rigvedic verses tell that, the women married at a mature age and were free to select their life partner. Rig Veda and Upanishads, the holy books mention that, There were many women sages and seers, like Gari and Maitreyi. Stri. Dharma Paddhati, the text of Tryambakayajvan reflects the role of women and tells that, „women were enjoined to be of service to their husbands“. In some kingdoms of ancient India, tradition like Nagar Vadhu i.e bride of the city was practiced. Amrapali was the famous Nagar Vadhu. Women were competing to win the popular title of the „Nagar Vadhu“. (Kadam, 2012)

During the early Vedic Period women enjoyed equal position and rights. Later around 500 B.C the position of women started to decline with the Manusmiti and with the Mughal invasion of Babur and the Mughal empire and later Christianity cut the

freedom and rights of women. Even though penitentiary movements like Jainism allowed women to be admitted to the religious order by and large, the women in India faced captivity and restrictions. Around sixth century, the practice of child marriages started. (Kadam, 2012)

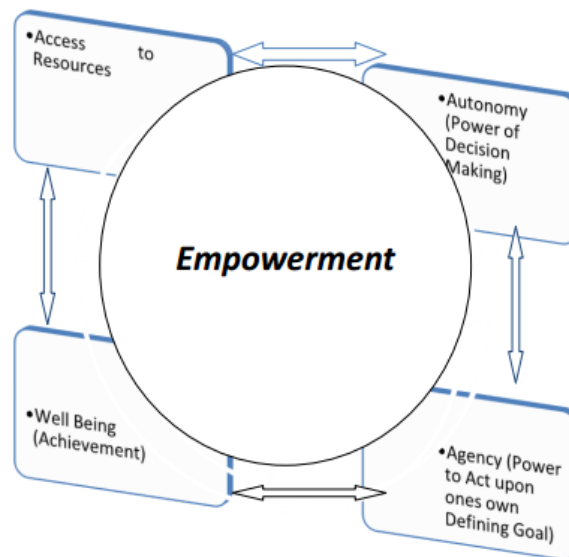
5.1. Medieval Period

During the medieval period, the position of Indian woman in the society further deteriorated. Among some communities in India, practice of Sati, Child Marriages and a ban on remarriages of widows became part of social life. The Muslim conquest brought the purdah practice in the Indian society. The Jauhar was practiced among the Rajputs of Rajasthan. The practices of temple women (Devadasi) was in practice and were sexually exploited in some parts of India. Among Hindu Kshatriya rulers polygamy was widely practiced. Women were restricted to Zenana areas in many Muslim families. During and after British rule the condition of women is not very good. The women are not viewed with equal status. In India, woman herself doesn't feel equal and many times she ill-treats herself. (Kadam, 2012)

6. Women empowerment in India:

Women constitute about 46 percent of total population of the country, As per the 2011 census; They suffer many disadvantages as compared to men in terms of literacy rates, labor participation rates and earnings. In order to address issues relating to social and economic advancement of women, the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) under the Ministry of Human Resource Development has been implementing various schemes. The national policy of employment of women was adopted in the country in 2001 with the ultimate objective of ensuring women of their rights. (Prof.M.D.Pujari, 2012)

Social empowerment of women is designed to create an enabling environment by adopting various affirmative policies and programs for development of women, besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services to enable them to realize their full potential. Educations, being an important tool for social empowerment of women, Specific schemes to provide incentive to promote education, especially amongst girl children and reduce the school dropout rates are being implemented. In addition, the Department Of Women and Child Development implements the schemes of „condensed courses for educated and vocational training and Distance Education Programme for Women“ supplementing the efforts of Department of Education (Prof.M.D.Pujari, 2012)



6.1 Importance of empowerment:

While empowerment literally means 'to invest with power', in the context of women's empowerment the term has come to denote women's increased control over their own lives, bodies, and environment. In discussions of women's empowerment, emphasis is often placed on women's decision-making roles, their economic self-reliance, and their legal rights to equal treatment, inheritance and protection against all forms of discrimination. (Sunita kishor, 2004). Women's empowerment is a flow rather than a stock variable manifesting into various outcomes and well being is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the former, i.e. well-being going through various pathways like gaining resources, autonomy and agency. These pathways denote expansion in capabilities in a way which brings changes in the lives of individuals; people who are previously denied power are now being empowered. (Tripathi, 2005)

6.2 Constitutional provisions:

As per Census 2011, the population of India is **1210.19** million comprising

586.47 million (**48.5%**) females and **623.72** million (**51.5%**) males. Females have a share of **48.1%** in the urban population and of **48.6%** in the rural population. (S. Jeyalakshmi, 2012) . The importance of women as an important human resource was recognized by the Constitution of India which not only accorded equality to women but also empowered the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in their favor. (India, 2006)

The Constitution of India guarantees:

- The right to equality (Article 14, 16)
- To secure all citizens men and women equally the right to means of livelihood [Article 39(a)]
- Right to life (Article 21)
- Right to equality and equal protection before the law (Article 15)
- Provides for discrimination in favor of women [Article 15 (3)]
- To make provision for ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief
- (Article 42)

- To renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women [Article 51(A) (e)]. (development, 2007)

6.3 Levels of women empowerment:

6.3.1. Social empowerment: There are different indicators of women empowerment like health, education, violence against women, Nutrition, drinking water, sanitation, housing, etc.

- **Education:** We need to accept the fact that gender inequality and discrimination has been the norm of the society and in this regard it touches all aspects of the life of women. Education and training for women is one of the major goals of social empowerment of women which need to be universally made applicable to all parts of the world. (kali, 2005). As per Census 2011, **74.0%** of the population is literate comprising **65.5%** females and **82.1%** males.

The incremental increase over Census 2001 of **11.8%** for females is higher than **6.8%** for males. The main reasons of females never attending school are 'expensive cost of education', 'not interested in studies', 'education is not considered necessary' and 'required for household work'. (S. Jeyalakshmi, 2012) The **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** for females at the primary level stood at **115.39** compared with **115.55** for males in 2009-10 indicating parity in GER. At the middle classes level, the GER for females was **78.30** while that for males was **84.53**. The **Drop-out Rates** were observed to be **27.25** and **30.25** for females and males respectively in the classes I-V in **2009-10**. These were **44.39** and **40.59** in classes I-VIII and **51.97** and **53.38** in classes I-X for females and

males respectively. (S. Jeyalakshmi, 2012).

Indian women are as capable as any women in any part of the world, but unlike women in any western countries Indian women are denied equal opportunities for working with men, in many spheres of life. Constitutionally Indian women have been granted equal rights with men but practically speaking they are kept much behind men in various activities of life. Co-education should be permitted but for the secondary education many separate schools should be opened as many parents does not like their girl child to be in co-education, so women should be trained in many professional courses because India requires a large number of professional teachers for working at secondary level (Sharma, 2004)

- **Health:** Women and girls in India face a crisis of growing, yet un-addressed, health needs. From the moment of conception to the end of life, the challenges to the female sex are enormous, especially poor women who have limited access to health care. Despite the alarming health crisis of women and girls, the national policy focus prioritizes family planning and reproductive health without addressing underlying issues such as women's low participation in decision-making, which adversely affects her health status. Another important point to note is that the leading killer of women in India is tuberculosis. Yet due to the focus on maternal and reproductive health this fact is not little known nor are there any gender specific policies or programs in place with regard to this disease. (India,

2006). The **female Infant Mortality Rate (IMR)** was **49** compared with the male IMR of **46** and the overall **IMR of 47** in 2010. Among the major States, the highest overall IMR of **62** was observed in Madhya Pradesh and the lowest of **13** in Kerala in 2010 (S. Jeyalakshmi, 2012)

- **Ill treatment:** In India violence against women is common evil. Not just in remote parts but in cities also women bear the brunt. They are subjected to physical and mental violence. They are the one who work most but are not given their due. The woman is not safe anywhere neither at home nor at workplace. (Prof.M.D.Pujari, 2012). It seems to be simply up to the men to perpetrate violence and for women to safeguard themselves as best as they can. These crimes against women are part of a wider change where reactionary forces are becoming dominant. (Krishnan, 2012). Cruelty by husband and relatives continues to occupy the highest share (**43.4%**) among the crimes committed against women in **2011** followed by molestation (**18.8%**). **15.6%** cases are that of kidnapping and abduction, **10.6%** of rape, **3.8%** of dowry deaths and **3.7%** of sexual harassment (S. Jeyalakshmi, 2012). In **2011**, of the total Juvenile Delinquency, **5.8%** were girls. Also, the rate of incidence of the crime per lakh population was **2.1**. India ranks **134** in **2011** among **187** countries in terms of the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Inequality Index (GII). (S. Jeyalakshmi, 2012)

Crimes against women have been increasing over the years. The reported crimes against women in

2008 were **195,856** (under IPC and SLL) compared to **185,312** during **2007**, recording a marginal increase of **5.7%** in **2008**. Andhra Pradesh accounted for **12.3%** of the total incidents of crime against women, and Uttar Pradesh accounted for **12.0%** of the total crimes against women. About **95.3%** of the crimes were IPC crimes and **4.7%** were crimes under special and local laws (SLL). Although women may be victims of many crimes but rape is one of the most heinous crimes. Rape is defined under **Section 375** of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) as the unlawful and carnal knowledge by a man of a woman (a) against her will, (b) without her consent, (c) consent obtained by putting her in fear of hurt, (d) obtaining her consent by making her believe that she is lawfully married wife, and (e) with or without her consent when she is under 16 years of age. (Vasudevan, 2010)

One of the positive consequences of the public protests in the aftermath of the 16 December 2012 gang-rape in Delhi has been the intense public focus on rape and sexual violence in India. For long buried by the patriarchal establishment and its state, this issue has now become impossible to ignore anymore and even the most reactionary parts of India's political establishment are forced to demonstrate that they are going to act on sexual violence. The report of the committee headed by the retired chief justice of India, J S Verma has been a major achievement in putting forth a framework for a progressive law on this issue, a structure that addresses the many different aspects

of sexual violence and provides sensible measures which will help plug loopholes and provide justice to victims of sexual violence. (Marriage and Rape, 2013)

6.3.2. Economic empowerment:

Women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development and pro-poor growth. Achieving women's economic empowerment requires sound public policies, a holistic approach and long-term commitment and gender-specific perspectives must be integrated at the design stage of policy and programming. Women must have more equitable access to assets and services; infrastructure programmes should be designed to benefit the poor, both men and women, and employment opportunities must be improved while increasing recognition of women's vast unpaid work. (Gendernet, 2012).

The workforce participation rate of females in rural sector was **26.1** in **2009-10 (NSS 64th Round)** while that for males was **54.7**. In Urban sector, it was **13.8** for females and **54.3** for males. Among the States/UTs, workforce participation rate of females in the rural sector was the highest in Himachal Pradesh at **46.8%** and in the urban sector it was the highest in Mizoram at **28.8%** (S. Jeyalakshmi, 2012) The unemployment rate for women of all ages was **2.4** compared with **2.0** for men in the rural areas in **2009-10**. It was **7.0** for women and **3.1** for men in urban areas during the same period. Among the States/UTs, the highest unemployment rate for women in rural sector was observed in Chandigarh (**51.1%**) and in the urban sector in Dadra and Nagar Haveli (**60.0%**) in **2009-10**.

In the rural sector, **55.7%** females were self-employed, **4.4%** females had regular wage/salaried employment and **39.9%** females were casual labours compared with **53.5%**, **8.5%** and **38.0%**

males in the same categories respectively. (S. Jeyalakshmi, 2012) In **2011-12**, the share of women swarojgaris in the total swarojgaris assisted under the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarojgaar Yojna (SGSY) stood at **69.4%**. (S. Jeyalakshmi, 2012)

6.3.3. Political empowerment:

Much of the country's governance has been left to the hands of elected representatives and the official machinery. Notable Constitutional, legislative and policy reforms within the last decade, including the 73rd. and 74th amendments and the continued administrative decentralization through programs like NRHM, have demonstrated the Government of India's commitment to increasing the political participation of marginalized groups, especially poor women. (India, 2006). In **2012**, women occupied only **8** out of **74** Ministerial positions in the Central Council of Ministers. There were **2** women judges out of **26** judges in the Supreme Court and there were only **54** women judges out of **634** judges in different High Courts. (S. Jeyalakshmi, 2012)

The present membership of the women in loksabha from **1991 to 2011** has increased comparatively from **7.17%** to **11.02%** respectively (see Table 1), but in as far as the membership of Rajyasabha is concerned the membership of the women has decreased considerably from **1991 to 2011** from **15.51 % to 10.78%** (see Table 2). From the given statistics we can say that as far as the political empowerment is concerned it is only up to the level of loksabha and we can't find such a satisfactory picture in the case of Rajyasabha because in loksabha the membership of women have been increased by **3.85%** from **1991 to 2011**, while in the case of Rajyasabha the membership of women have considerably decreased by **4.73%** from **1991 to 2011**. The bureaucratic structure of India is very complex and messy

and because of that we find lot of departmentalization in ministries and various administrative posts.

Women here can play an very effective role and in fact the women have been doing so but the level of participation has decreased . From the statistics (see Table

3) ,we find that since **2002 to 2007** the participation of women have been considerably decreased in the ministries and at the higher administrative level from **2002 to 2007** the level of participation was from **10.95% to 10.52%** so there is an decreased of **0.43%** .

Position of women in Loksabha

Year	Total seats	Seats held by women	% of female members in total
1991	544	39	7.17
1996	543	39	7.18
1999	543	49	9.02
2004	544	45	9
2007	544	47	8.63
2009	545	49	8.99
2011	544	60	11.02

Source: Loksabha secretariat

Position of women in Rajyasabha

Year	Total seats	Seats held by women	% of female members in total
1991	245	38	15.51
1996	233	19	8.52
1999	245	19	7.75
2004	250	28	11.2
2007	250	25	10
2009	234	21	8.97
2011	241	26	10.78

Source: Rajyasabha secretariat

Position of Women in National Council of Ministers

Year	Total number of ministers	Number of women ministers	% of female minister in total
2002	73	8	10.95
1996	68	7	10.29
1999	87	6	6.89
2004	78	7	8.87
2007	76	8	10.52

Source: Parliament of India.

7. Conclusion:

Women empowerment is one of the momentous issues of contemporary development policies in developing countries. A woman is different by nature yet this difference does not mean inferiority. The empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns in the 21st century not only at the national level but also at an international level. 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 the sense of equality.

The status of women in India is not even in all the times. In ancient period they enjoyed equal status with men, in the medieval period, the position of Indian women deteriorated. During British rule and after independence many efforts are being made for improving the status of women in India. The government of India, by passing timely and essential Acts and implementing rules and regulations trying to empower and strengthen the women. As society maintains double standards in the case of education, marriage, spousal relationships, domestic violence, laws of patriarchal society,

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property laws, dowry system, sexual harassment as well as discriminatory social stigma and because of this double standards of the society only there is less recognition and respect for women's work.

Education can play a vital role in bringing about the desirable behavioral changes among the women and make them well equipped. In terms of knowledge, competence and capacity to deal with different socio-economic problems. The popular UNESCO slogan should be considered as an ideal for not only empowerment but also development of women:

“Educate a man and you educate an individual; educate a Woman and you educate a family.”

At the end, it is concluded that women empowerment which is declared as Millennium Development Goal by UNDP, could be achieved only when all concerned bodies will work in cooperation and understanding the factors analyzed in this paper. Empowering Women is an important end in itself not only as human right issue but also as having the potential to enhance Human wellbeing.

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