

ROLE OF THE STATE IN THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Women constitute half of the human resources and if about half of a nation's human resources are neglected, the overall progress of the country would obviously be hampered. Recognizing the need for involving women in various development activities, the state/government in India and other parts of the world has initiated several affirmative measures by way of programs and schemes to bring them into the mainstream of development. These affirmative actions have brought some changes in the socio- economic conditions of women. Despite this, women in our country have been lacking behind in every sector. It is therefore vital to study the role of the state in the empowerment of one of the most vulnerable sections of our society, that is women. In this background the present study is an attempt to understand the meaning and significance of women empowerment in India. The study also wants to examine the role of the state in women empowerment particularly in India.

Keywords: Role of state, Women empowerment, Acts, India, Government

Introduction

In today's world women empowerment is an important issue of discussion because in every sector we find women which constitute half of the total population in the world are lacking behind. If about half of the nation's human resources are neglected, the overall progress of the country would obviously be hampered. Realizing the importance of involving women in various development activities, the state/government in India and other parts of the world has initiated several affirmative measures to bring them into the mainstream of development. These affirmative measures have brought about some changes in the socio- economic conditions of women. The literacy rate of females, which was 8.86% in 1951 rose to 54.16% in 2001. Women's work participation rate, which was 19.7% in 1981 rose to 25.7% in 2001 (Statistics on Women in India 2010, 2022). The data also brings out the areas where the progress has been slow. The sex ratio in the 0-6 year's age group dropped from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001, which indicates that society still does not welcome a girl child and the preference rests with sons. Nearly 50% women get married before they attain 18 years of age, and 57.9% pregnant women and 56.2% married women suffer from anemia (Ahamad, Tiwari, & Bano, 2014). All these problems have compelled the state/government to recognize the issue and introduce different schemes and acts to fight the atrocities against the women, for the country's overall development.

Objectives of the study

The study is based on the following two objectives;

- 1 To understand the meaning and significance of women empowerment in India.
2. To examine the role of the state for women empowerment in India.

Methodology

The study is completely based on secondary sources. Data used in this study have been collected from various books, journals, government websites, internet sources and so on. The study is based on quantitative data analysis and a descriptive method of analysis.

Meaning of Women Empowerment

The concept of empowerment comes from the concept of 'power'. Empowerment of women therefore means making women economically independent, self-reliant, to enable them to face any difficult situation and to create an environment for increasing women's participation in the decision making process. Thus, Women's empowerment simply is the process of empowering women (Tandon, 2016). People are empowered when they can access the opportunities available to them without any restrictions in education, profession and lifestyle (Singh, 2019). Therefore women's empowerment is all about equipping and allowing women to make life-determining decisions independently (Dandekar, 1986).

Need for Women Empowerment

The concept of women empowerment wants to help women to achieve equality with men by reducing gender based gaps in society. Empowering women in every society is very much needed due to the following;

Women are the chief architect of the family, the first teacher, supplier of labor power and play an important role in the creation of a civilized society. Nature has given the biological power of reproduction especially to the women (Singh A. P., 2017). Women constitute half of the total population of the earth. Even then the socio-economic status of women is so poor. In India women are discriminated against and marginalized at every level of the society such as social participation, political participation, economic participation, access to education and also reproductive health care. In terms of literacy rate also women are lacking behind than men. Along with this women in India are victimized in the cases like rape, dowry harassments, sexual harassment, kidnapping, female infanticides, sex selective abortions, domestic violence and trafficking etc. Many court verdicts go against women because of the non-availability of witnesses and difficulty of proving the incidents etc (Arya, 2019). Hence she should be strengthened and her status should be improved, she should be physically, mentally, economically, socially, politically and culturally strengthened so that the country can make use of the hidden potential of women in the country's overall development and progress.

Role of the state in the empowerment of women

Since women are one of the most vulnerable groups in every society, the role of state or

government becomes very much significant in the upliftment of women in society. Governments through various mass campaigns, schemes, policies and programs try to address the issues related to women and to empower them so that they could realize their actual potential in the development and progress of any society. The Indian government has been also taking various such measures for advancement and empowerment of Indian women. Such important policies and programs are discussed below;

a) Swa-Shakti

The project was jointly founded by IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development), World Bank and the government of India. It was launched in October, 1999. The objective of the program was to bring out socio-economic development and empowerment of women through promotion of women SHGs (Self Help Groups), micro credit and income generating activities. This was a centrally sponsored project (PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN, 2022).

b) Swayamsiddha

This was also a scheme for women empowerment through formation of SHGs launched in February, 2001. The aim of the program was empowerment of women through improving access of women to micro credit, economic resources etc. This is a centrally sponsored scheme. The program was implemented in 650 blocks of the country and 67971 women SHGs have been formed benefiting 9, 89,485 beneficiaries (PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN, 2022).

c) Swavalamban program

This program was launched in 1982-83 with assistance from the Norwegian Agency for Development Corporation (NORAD). Since 1998 the program has been run with Government of India funds. The objective of the program is to provide training and skill to women to facilitate them to obtain employment or self employment on a sustained basis. The target groups under the scheme are women from weaker sections of the society such as SCs and STs (PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN, 2022).

d) Swadhar

This scheme was launched in 2001-2002 for providing relief and rehabilitation to women in difficult circumstances. The main objectives of the scheme are as follows;

- a) To provide primary need of shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalized women living in difficult circumstances.
- b) To rehabilitate poor women through education, awareness, skill up gradation and personality development.

Beneficiaries covered under the schemes are windows deserted by their families, women prisoners released from jail, trafficked women, women victims of terrorist, mentally challenged and women with HIV/AIDS etc (PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN, 2022).

e) Compensation to Rape Victims

The honorable Supreme Court in Delhi Domestic Working Women's Forum vs Union of India and other writ petition (CRL) No. 362/93 had directed the National Commission for women to evolve a scheme to wipe out the tears of victims of rape. Accordingly the NCW has drafted a scheme titled "Relief to and Rehabilitation of Rape Victims" (PLANS, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN, 2022).

f) Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme

Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (save girl child, educate girl child) is a Central Government sponsored scheme by the Government of India. The prime goal of this scheme is to generate awareness and improve the efficiency of welfare services meant for women. Also, it aims to celebrate the girl child and enable her education. Indian PM Narendra Modi launched the program on 22 January 2015 from Panipat, Haryana on the occasion of International Day of the Girl Child (Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, 2022).

g) Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY)

The Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY) is a maternity benefit scheme introduced in 2010 by the Government of India. This scheme is for the pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for the first two live births to contribute to a better enabling environment by providing conditional cash transfer for improved health and nutrition. The pregnant women of 19 years of age and above are entitled to a cash incentive of Rs 4000 in three installments for the first time two live births (Indira Gandhi Maternity Support Scheme (I.G.M.S.Y), 2022).

h) Women Helpline Scheme (WHL)

This scheme has been implemented since 01-04-2015 by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development. Universalization of Women Helpline is meant to provide 24 hours immediate and emergency response to women affected by violence through referral (linking with appropriate authority such as police, One Stop Centre, hospital) and information about women related government schemes/programs across the country through a single uniform number (Universalisation of Women Helpline Scheme, 2016). Toll-free Women Helpline number is 181 (Women Helpline (WHL) Scheme, 2022).

i) One Stop Center (OSC) Scheme

One Stop Center (OSC) is meant to support women affected by violence, in private and public spaces, within the family, community and at the workplace. Women facing physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic abuse, irrespective of age, class, caste, education status, marital status, race and culture will be given support. Under this Scheme, OSC in each State/UT will provide help to aggrieved women with services including medical, legal, and psychological

support. The OSCs will be linked with 181 and other existing help lines (One Stop Center Scheme, 2017).

Constitutional and other arrangements for Women Empowerment in India

Framers of the Indian constitution could successfully understand and recognize problems related to women in India and therefore made some special provisions for improvement of status of women in India. Some important Constitutional and other arrangements for women empowerment in India are as follows;

Constitutional arrangements

a) Article 14 of the Indian Constitution says that the State shall not deny to any person equality before the law and the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India (Article 14 in The Constitution Of India 1949, 2022).

b) Article 15 of the Indian Constitution says that the state cannot discriminate against any citizen on the grounds only of religion, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them (Article 15, 2022).

c) Article 23 of the Indian Constitution (amended in 2014) has prohibited traffic in human beings and begging and other similar forms of forced labor and any contravention of this provision shall be an offense punishable in accordance with law (Article 23 of the Constitution, 2014).

d) Article 24 of the Indian Constitution prohibits employment of any children below the age of fourteen years in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment (Article 24 in The Constitution Of India 1949, 2022).

e) Article 42 of the Indian Constitution allows the state to make provision for securing just and human conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 42, 2022).

f) Article 51A (e) of the Constitution of India imposes a fundamental duty to every Indian citizen to promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all people of India and to avoid practices derogatory to the dignity of woman (Article 51A(e) in The Constitution Of India 1949, 2022).

Other arrangements

i) Section 376 IPC (Indian Penal Code)

Section 376 of the IPC, 1860, deals with the punishment for rape of a woman. The Section prescribes punishment for rape in the form of imprisonment of either description which lasts up to at least 7 years, but may extend to 10 years or life imprisonment (imprisonment till the person dies a natural death in the prison), and the convict is also liable to pay fine (Deb, 2022).

ii) Section 509 IPC (Indian Penal Code)

Section 509 of the IPC (Indian Penal Code), deals with the punishment for insulting the modesty of any woman. If anybody is intending to insult the modesty of any woman, utters any word, makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object, intending that such word or sound shall be heard, or that such gesture or object shall be seen, by such woman, or intrudes upon the privacy of such woman, shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to

one year, or with fine, or with both (Section 509 in The Indian Penal Code, 2022).

iii) Some Important Acts of the Government for Women Empowerment

Some important laws in India enacted during the British rule for women empowerment includes the following;

- ◆ Prohibition the Practice of Sati Act, 1850
- ◆ Hindu Widow Remarriage Act, 1856
- ◆ Female Infanticide Act, 1870
- ◆ Indian Evidence Act, 1874
- ◆ The Age of Consent Act, 1891
- ◆ The Legal Practitioners (women) Act, 1923
- ◆ The Indian Succession Act, 1925
- ◆ The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929
- ◆ The Hindu Women Right to Property Act, 1937

Important laws in India enacted in the post-independence period for women empowerment includes the following;

- ◆ The Special Marriage Act, 1954
- ◆ The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955
- ◆ The Hindu Adaptation and Maintenance Act, 1956.
- ◆ The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956
- ◆ The Hindu Succession Act, 1956
- ◆ The Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act, 1956
- ◆ The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- ◆ The Maternity Benefit Act, 1961
- ◆ The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971
- ◆ The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976
- ◆ Indecent Representation of Women (prevention) Act, 1986
- ◆ National Commission for Women Act, 1990
- ◆ Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006
- ◆ Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (Jain, 2020).

Conclusion

Independent India's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said, "To awaken the people, it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves" (Kaur, 2021).

Despite various programs and policies of the government, women have little or no control over household assets or means of production even when these are owned by them formally. Their control over their own incomes is also limited. Despite the passage of Dowry Prohibition Act,

1961, dowry continues to remain a compulsory affair in different parts of India. Crimes against women such as dowry-related tortures and honor killing as well as rapes of women, are common. Criminals related to any crime against women often get protection by social and political godfathers. Moreover, women don't have easy access to information on the various projects of the government related to their health, education, economic empowerment and social benefit. It is true that the government of India has adopted many measures, schemes to fight for women empowerment, proper and strict implementation is essential. Unless the Acts, policies, rules, regulations etc. are strictly implemented the idea of women empowerment remains unachieved.

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