

6. The Role of Empowering Women and Achieving Gender Equality to the Sustainable Development in India

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Abstract:

Women empowerment is a debatable subject. At earlier time of Stone Age period, women had equal status and power with that of men. But when they started facing some difficulties during post-Vedic and epic ages. History shows that many a time, women were treated as that of slaves.

*It was observed that right from the early 20th century (national movement), the status of women had been changing gradually and this credit goes to the British people. It is only after the independence of India, under the leadership of **Dr. Ambedkar**, the constitutional makers and national leaders started strongly demanding and also reiterating the equal social position of women with men.*

Today, it is overwhelming to see that good proportionate of women in India are in the respectable positions in all walks of the fields.

The purpose of this paper is to uncover the role of empowering women and achieving gender equality in the sustainable development.

To achieve this purpose, based on the Data analysed, findings of the study show that the role of women across different dimensions of sustainable development is less reflected in many countries. The use of a women's labour force in the economic development of the country is minimal.

The political sphere of some countries is, by and large, reserved for men alone. The place of women in society is also relegated to contributing minimally to the social development of the country. In addition, women's rights are not properly being protected in order for women to participate in various the issues of their countries but are subjected to abysmal violations. Moreover, women are highly affected by environmental problems, and less emphasis is given to their participation in protecting the environment.

I concluded that unless women are empowered and gender equality is achieved so that women can play their role in economic, social, political, and environmental areas, the country will not achieve sustainable development with the recognition of only men's participation in all these areas.

The fact that women constitute half the entire population of the country makes empowering them to be an active part of all development initiatives in the country a compelling circumstance.

Hence, this paper calls for the strong commitment of the government to empower women and utilize all the potentials of the country to bring about sustainable development.

Keywords:

Women's empowerment Gender equality, Gender inequality, human rights, Sustainable development, Economic growth, Political development/good governance, and Social development in India.

6.1 Introduction:

- Women empowerment is a significant topic of discussion, mainly in underdeveloped and developing nations. They have lately realized that they aspire cannot be achieved unless we achieve gender equality by empowering their women. The economic empowerment of women refers to their right to control the economic decisions, income, assets and other equivalents; improving their economic as well as social status.
- Women empowerment means promoting women in their social and economic development, allowing them equal opportunities of employment, education, economic development and which empowers women to know that they too can achieve their aspirations as the men of the society and help them do that.

The issue of women's empowerment and gender equality is at the top of agendas across the world, as gender inequality is widespread in all cultures. In developing countries, gender disparity is highly rampant compared to the developed countries.

For example in Ethiopia, gender-based discrimination and inequalities are very much apparent, although the government is working aggressively towards alleviating such problems. As a result, low empowerment of women and high gender gap still impede the development process of the country.

In the same way, women's empowerment refers to “women's ability to make strategic life choices where that ability had been previously denied them”. Accordingly, empowerment is central to the processes of maintaining the benefits of women at individual, household, community and broader levels. Another, almost-related and equally important concept in this paper is gender equality. Gender equality is understood to mean that the “rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female”.

It is also defined as a situation where “... all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles; that the different aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally”.

Improving female empowerment is an important human rights and development goal that needs better monitoring. Increasing the empowerment of women is a major human rights and development goal, but progress in women's empowerment lags behind development goals in other domains, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

In addition to its intrinsic human rights value, empowering women can result in benefits for societies at large. For example, increases in women's empowerment can lower infant and child mortality; and improve health and nutrition. Improvements in women's education are also linked to strong gains in income.

To this end, empowerment of women has an indispensable role, which is why the researcher preferred to use both terms together throughout the discussion. In this study, both terms are used frequently to have.

6.1.1 Need of women's Empowerment in India:

The status of Indian women has declined from ancient period to medieval period. Though in modern era Indian women have held significant political and administrative post; still, on the contrary there is a majority of rural women who are confined to their homes and don't have access to even basic health amenities and education.

The female literacy rate in India lags behind the male literacy rate by a significant ration. Literacy rate for men in India is 81.3% and that of women is 60.6%. Many Indian girls they don't have access to the school and even if they do, they drop out during early years. Only 29% of Indian young women have completed ten or more years of education.

Law education rate among women have completed main workforce, resulting in their social and economic deterioration. Women in urban areas are well employed than their village counterpart; nearly 30% employees in the Indian software industry constitute women. On the contrary nearly 90% of rural women are employed as daily wage labors, mainly in agriculture and allied sectors. According to a study woman in India with same years of experience and qualification are paid 20% less than their male counter parts having same years of experience and qualification or credentials.

6.1.2 Barriers to Women Empowerment in India:

Indian society is a complex with varied customs, rituals, beliefs and traditions. Sometimes these age old beliefs and customs constitute the most significant barriers to the empowerment of women in India are explained below: -

- **Societal Norms**

Many societies in India restrict women from leaving the house, given to their orthodox belief and age old traditions. Women in such societies are not allowed to go to outside either for education or for employment and are forced to live in isolated and dejected life. Women living under such conditions become accustomed to being inferior to men and are unable to change their present social and economic state.

- **Workplace Sexual harassment**

Workplace sexual harassment is the most significant barrier to women empowerment in India. Private sectors like hospitality industry, software industry, educational institutions, and hospital are some of the worse affected. It is manifestation of deep rooted male supremacy in the society. There had been a steep rise of about 170% in the workplace sexual harassment of women in India in the past couple of decades.

- **Gender discrimination**

Majority of women in India still face gender discrimination at work place as well as in the society. Many societies don't allow the women to go out for employment or education.

They are not allowed to take independent decisions either for work or for family, and are treated inferior to men. Such discrimination of the women leads their socio economic decline and hugely contradicts 'Women Empowerment'.

- **Pay disparity**

Women in India are paid less than their male counterparts. The situation is worse in unorganized sectors where women are employed as daily wage labors.

Women working for the same number of hours and doing the same work are paid less than the men, which implies unequal powers between men and women.

Even the women who are employed in organized sectors are paid less than their male counterparts having equivalent qualification and hugely contradicts 'Women Empowerment'.

- **Illiteracy**

Female illiteracy and their high dropout rate is one the empowerment of women in India. In Urban Indian girls are at par with boys in terms of education but they significantly lag behind in rural areas.

The literacy rate of women is 64.6%, while the men are 80.9%. Lot of Indian girls join school, dropout in the initial years without having passed even 10th grade.

- **Child marriage**

Though, in India has successfully reduced child marriages in the past few decades, through a number of laws, initiatives taken by the government.

Still a report in early 2018 by the UNICEF (United Nations Children Emergency Found) states that nearly 1.5 Million girls in India get married before they turn 18. Early marriage reduces the growth prospects of girls who soon are moving onto adulthood.

- **Government's role in Women Empowerment in India**

The government of India has implemented many programs for the empowerment of women. Many of these programs are for providing employment, education, health accessible to the masses.

These programs have been especially incorporated keeping in mind the needs and conditions of Indian women, to ensure their participation. Some of these programs are –

MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme), Sarva Siksha, Abhiyaan, Janani suraksh (reduce maternal mortality) etc. the ministry of women and child development, government of India has implemented various new schemes specifically aimed at the empowerment of Indian women. Some of those significant schemes are: -

- Women Helpline schemes
- Support to training and employment programme for women (STEP).
- Beti Bachao Bet Padhao scheme.
- Ujjawal Scheme
- Reservation for women in panchayati Raj Institution
- Mahila Shakti Kendras.

6.2 Conceptualization of Terms:

6.2.1 What is women's empowerment?

According to the **World Bank's definition**: " Empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices into desired actions and outcomes.

Legal definition of women empowerment: Women empowerment implies the ability in women to take decisions with regard to their life and work and giving equal rights to them in all spheres like personal, social, economic, political, legal etc.

According to the scholars: Women empowerment involves the action of boosting the status of women through literacy, education, training and raising awareness.

Empowerment can be defined as a "multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives.

It is a process that fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important".

In the same way, women's empowerment refers to "women's ability to make strategic life choices where that ability had been previously denied them".

Accordingly, empowerment is central to the processes of maintaining the benefits of women at individual, household, community and broader levels.

Hence, women's empowerment is all about allowing and equipping women to make life-determining choices across different issues in their countries.

a. Women's empowerment has (5) five components:

Women's sense of self-worth which includes: -

1. Their right to have and to determine choices.
2. Their right to have access to opportunities and resources.
3. Their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home.
4. Their right to influence the direction of social; and
5. Their right to equal opportunity.

The index is based on six categories of empowerment:

- Violence against women,
- Employment,
- Education,
- Reproductive healthcare,
- Decision making; and
- Access to contraceptives.

6.2.2 Women's Empowerment Principles in Brief:

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human right and nondiscrimination.
3. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women.
5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
7. Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

Principle 1: Leadership Promotes Gender Equality.

- a. Affirm high-level support and direct top-level policies for gender equality and human rights.
- b. Establish company-wide goals and targets for gender equality and include progress as a factor in managers' performance reviews.
- c. Engage internal and external stakeholders in the development of company policies, programmes and implementation plans that advance equality.
- d. Ensure that all policies are gender-sensitive – identifying factors that impact women and men differently – and that corporate culture advances equality and inclusion

Principle 2: Equal Opportunity, Inclusion and Nondiscrimination.

- a. Pay equal remuneration, including benefits, for work of equal value and strive to pay a living wage to all women and men.
- b. Ensure that workplace policies and practices are free from gender-based discrimination.
- c. Implement gender-sensitive recruitment and retention practices and proactively recruit and appoint women to managerial and executive positions and to the corporate board of directors.
- d. Assure sufficient participation of women – 30% or greater – in decision-making and governance at all levels and across all business areas.
- e. Offer flexible work options, leave and re-entry opportunities to positions of equal pay and status. f. Support access to child and dependent care by providing services, resources and information to both women and men.

Principle 3: Health, Safety and Freedom from Violence.

- a. Taking into account differential impacts on women and men, provide safe working conditions and protection from exposure to hazardous

- materials and disclose potential risks, including to reproductive health.
- b. Establish a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of violence at work, including verbal and/or physical abuse, and prevent sexual harassment.
 - c. Strive to offer health insurance or other needed services – including for survivors of domestic violence – and ensure equal access for all employees.
 - d. Respect women and men workers' rights to time off for medical care and counseling for themselves and their dependents.
 - e. In consultation with employees, identify and address security issues, including the safety of women traveling to and from work and on company-related business.
 - f. Train security staff and managers to recognize signs of violence against women and understand laws and company policies on human trafficking, labour and sexual exploitation.

Principle 4: Education and Training.

- a. Invest in workplace policies and programmes that open avenues for advancement of women at all levels and across all business areas, and encourage women to enter nontraditional job fields.
- b. Ensure equal access to all company-supported education and training programmes, including literacy classes, vocational and information technology training.
- c. Provide equal opportunities for formal and informal networking and mentoring.
- d. Offer opportunities to promote the business case for women's empowerment and the positive impact of inclusion for men as well as women.

Principle 5: Enterprise Development, Supply Chain and Marketing Practices.

- a. Expand business relationships with women-owned enterprises, including small businesses, and women entrepreneurs.
- b. Support gender-sensitive solutions to credit and lending barriers.
- c. Ask business partners and peers to respect the company's commitment to advancing equality and inclusion.
- d. Respect the dignity of women in all marketing and other company materials.
- e. Ensure that company products, services and facilities are not used for human trafficking and/or labour or sexual exploitation.

Principle 6: Community Leadership and Engagement.

- a. Lead by example – showcase company commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment.
- b. Leverage influence, alone or in partnership, to advocate for gender equality and collaborate with business partners, suppliers and community leaders to promote inclusion.
- b. Work with community stakeholders, officials and others to eliminate discrimination and exploitation and open opportunities for women and girls.
- c. Promote and recognize women's leadership in, and contributions to, their communities and ensure sufficient representation of women in any community consultation.
- d. Use philanthropy and grants programmes to support company commitment to inclusion, equality and human rights.

Principle 7: Transparency, Measuring and Reporting.

- a. Make public the company policies and implementation plan for promoting gender equality.
- b. Establish benchmarks that quantify inclusion of women at all levels.

- c. Measure and report on progress, both internally and externally, using data disaggregated by gender.
- d. Incorporate gender markers into ongoing reporting obligations.

“FEMALE EMPOWERMENT INDEX (FEMI), FOR EXAMPLE IN NIGERIA”

The Female Empowerment Index, the FEMI has increased significantly during the 23-year survey period. With the exception of the access to contraception category, values in 2013 are the highest they have ever been, with lower levels of violence, and higher levels of health, education, decision making, and gainful employment for women across Nigeria.

The national level FEMI was 0.34 in 1990 and 0.48 in 2013. However, the state and regional variation in the FEMI was substantial for all survey years.

For individual states it ranged from 0.16 to 0.62 in 1990 and from 0.19 to 0.75 in 2013. The FEMI gap between the North and South actually widened during the survey period, going from 0.25 in 1990 to 0.32 in 2013.

While the FEMI is attractive as it provides a single number, it is interesting to consider trends in individual categories and how they contribute to changes in the FEMI.

Improvements in the FEMI between 1990 and 1999 were largely driven by improved access to contraceptives in the South and improved employment in the North. From 1999-2003, there was reduced access to contraceptives in much of the country, but the FEMI did not decrease as there were gains in the other categories, particularly employment.

From 2003-2008, the primary drivers of change in the FEMI were more varied, including a mix of improvements in violence, decision making,

contraception, and employment. Changes between the 2008–2013 surveys came from a relatively equal mix of improvements in all six FEMI categories.

Discussion:

There is much interest in improving the empowerment of women as illustrated by its inclusion of women's empowerment in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Better monitoring of women's empowerment can be an important step toward improving it; but this has proven to be a very difficult task, both conceptually and methodologically. There are many different possible definitions of empowerment, and it is not entirely clear which definitions to use and how to measure them. In addition, limitations in data availability have led to sub-optimal measurements of empowerment.

Brief History of Women Empowerment in India:

Equal right for men and women are established under Article 14 to 16 in the Indian Constitution, which came into effect on 26th January, 1950.

Discriminated based on gender is strictly prohibited. Indian women received universal suffrage during India's independence in 1947, long before several western countries granted women the right to vote. India was the second country in modern history to have a female leader, Indira Gandhi, in 1966 after another South Asian stat, Sri Lanka, elected Sirimavo Bandaranaike in 1960.

New Delhi has also taken a concerted effort to ratify key international conventions to end discrimination against women. It is a founding member of the international labour organization (ILO) and has ratified 47th conventions and one protocol.

As India is progressive to become world's fastest growing economy in near future, it must also focus on 'women Empowerment' We must understand that women empowerment is a process which hopes to bring gender equality and a balanced economy.

Indian women had been President, Prime Minister, civil servant, doctors, lawyers etc, but still a good majority of them needs help and support, support to be educated, to do what they want to do, to travel safe, to work safe and to be independent; making their own decisions. The way to the socio-economic development of India goes through the socio-economic development of her women folk.

6.3 Why Should We Empower Women and Achieve Gender Equality:

The importance of empowering women is a critical aspect to achieving gender equality, where both men and women have equal opportunities for education, healthcare, economic participation and personal development. A number of studies have shown that sustainable development is impossible without women's empowerment and gender equality. Consequently, it is asserted that gender equality is both a human rights issue and a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable development. It is also affirmed that gender disparity is prevalent across the cultures of the world and that without serious steps to tackle it, sustainable development cannot be achieved.

Furthermore, UN Women (2014) rightly outlined that to create a just and sustainable world and to enhance women's roles in sustaining their families and communities, achieving gender equality is paramount. On the other hand, if gender equality is not maintained, it will retard the country's development. In line with this idea, interestingly underlines that "an increasing number of studies indicate that gender inequalities are extracting high economic costs and leading to social inequities and environmental degradation around the world."

Therefore, in this paper, women's empowerment and gender equality are discussed as a means to bring about sustainable development in the country.

6.3.1 Behind the Glamour of Women Empowerment:

Women's empowerment is valuable for the development and advancement of the family, community as well as the nation

Hilary Clinton former United State Secretary of United State of America she said ‘ ‘ Women is the largest untapped reservoir of talent in the world ‘ ‘

There are needs of changing the perspective about empowered women in any country, behind the Glamour are as follows: -

1. A single mother raising her child is an empowered woman.
2. A women supporting her family is an empowered woman.
3. A daily wager women earning for the livelihood of the family is an empowered woman.
4. A girl doing studies against the will of her parent is an empowered woman.
5. A women doing daily chores of the household is an empowered woman.

Therefore, there is great need of women empowerment in any country at micro and meso level, in order to make the country where women can stand head to head with men.

Empowering women is essential to the health and social development of families, communities and countries. When women are living safe, fulfilled and productive lives, they can reach their full potential, contributing their skills to the workforce and can raise happier and healthier children.

KEYS:

6.3.2 Economic Growth:

One major justification why we should work so hard towards women's empowerment and gender equality is economics.

Economic development, as one component of sustainable development, is unthinkable without the involvement of women. For example, Ethiopia is one of the fastest economically growing countries in the world. However, like many developing countries, the women's labour force has not been properly utilized. Despite certain improvements following efforts from the government, the economic opportunities for and participation of Ethiopian women are still low.

Moreover, women account for 70% of the world's poor because of unequal economic opportunities. In this regard, valuing women's work is instrumental to rescuing women from a life of poverty so they might contribute to the country's economic growth.

It is well known that one significant factor inhibiting poverty reduction and economic growth across the developing world is the failure to value women's work. Women's economic empowerment, which is a precondition for sustainable development, requires sound gender-mainstreamed policies and strategies that can be better achieved if women are there to do it themselves. Hence, the political empowerment of women has multifaceted, nonpolitical positive results as well.

To conclude, empowering women and providing fair representation across the law-making, law-enforcing, and law-interpreting organs, as well as any government institutions, play a remarkable role in political development, in particular, and sustainable development of a country in general.

6.3.3 Social Development:

Social development is a key pillar of sustainable development. And social transformation as a component of sustainable development is unthinkable without the involvement of women. Even though Africa has witnessed commendable achievements in social development, its progress on gender and women's empowerment indicators is slow; it still has to face considerable challenges within post-2015 development frameworks.

In this respect, the researcher looked into the role of empowering and educating women in reducing population growth, maintaining healthy family/society and avoiding the badly socialized, stereotyped perception of society towards women. As one instrument of women's empowerment (OECD, 2012), educational access should be equally given to women. The education of girls and women plays a tremendous role in social development. However, Ethiopian women are not well educated compared with men.

Their access to education has been hindered by traditional customary attitudes. For this reason, the knowledge of women regarding family planning is very poor, especially in rural areas. As a result, they produce children in an unplanned way, thereby contributing to the alarming population increase. Currently, Ethiopia is the most populous country in Eastern Africa and the second-most populous in Africa, next to Nigeria.

6.3.4 Political Development/Good Governance:

Political development/good governance is an essential instrument for sustainable development. There is a strong assertion that a balanced achievement of all the pillars of sustainable development depends on the deliberate strategic and operational intervention of the government. Accordingly, good governance undoubtedly corroborates the achievement of economic and social development and environmental protection. As a result, there is a need for a well-established, quality

political or governance system. To this end, active involvement of women in decision-making positions will help foster the overall quality of governance in terms of boosting accountability and transparency, reducing corruption, and protecting the interest of marginalized sections of society; without women, achieving sustainable development is impossible.

To complicate matters, even the above-mentioned economic development will not be achieved unless women are placed in key political positions. This is due to the interplay between economy and politics: one influences the other. It is common to observe political actions taken by a government affecting and determining the economy of a country.

Consequently, if politics operate with the full and equal participation of women, the impact on the economy will be fair and beneficial to all.

For instance, if the Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation is gender-mainstreamed (operated by women as well, the entire economic environment in the country will be more amenable to women taking an active part and thereby contributing to the economic development of the country.

Moreover, to bring about social development, removing the badly socialized stereotyped perception of society towards women is also equally important. Gender is a socially and culturally constructed identity. Culture and social practices determine the lesser role, jobs, and status ascribed to Ethiopian women, whereas they were not born for that.

The stereotyped perception of society towards women is detrimental to the well-being of women as well as to the development of the entire country. There is a need to remove such culturally and socially deep-rooted attitudes so that women will be seen as equal to men and enjoy their rights, determine their lives, and fully contribute towards the development of their country.

6.3.5 Human Rights Protection:

Though the concept of human rights is subject to different connotations by different authorities, there exists an understanding that human rights are rights enjoyed by all human beings.

We enjoy them because we are human beings. The protection of human rights is vital to leading life with dignity and to promoting development.

Despite the debate at the development human rights nexus, there exists a strong argument that human rights should be respected in the course of development.

As rightly outlined, freedom is at core of the development process, since progress should be assessed based on whether peoples' freedoms are enhanced, and the achievement of development itself is dependent on the free agency of people. This shows that human rights and freedoms should be protected for the development of a given country. As stated above, human rights are the rights of all human beings, and a 'human being' embraces both genders: male and female.

Therefore, for development to be realized, all human beings, irrespective of gender, should enjoy human rights. Thus, human rights are protected by international human rights instruments for the enjoyment of all human beings regardless of, inter alia, their sex.

As UN noted, “, “achieving gender equality and realizing the human rights, dignity and capabilities of diverse groups of women is a central requirement of a just and sustainable world.”

In short, scholars have affirmed that the realization of human rights is vital in the development of a country. Most importantly, implementing the rights of the significant number of marginalized Ethiopian women for full participation in all levels of human activity will play a paramount role in hastening and sustaining the development the country is pursuing.

6.4 Conclusion:

Based on the findings obtained, this paper calls upon the government of any country to take the following measures to bring about women empowerment, gender equality, human rights, and sustainable development in the country as follows: -

- Empowering women and making full use of their labour force for economic growth.
- Educating and maintaining the health of women to enhance productivity and social development.
- Empowering women and providing them with fair representation across different decision-making levels of the government structure to better protect women's interests and to achieve quality governance.
- Protecting the rights of women to make them active participants in the economic, social, political, cultural, and other arenas of the country, thereby bringing about development.

Protecting the environment to bring about sustainable development, as the environment is the key source of the country's economy. Empowering women to play an equal role in the protection and management of the environment, with their special knowledge and expertise, is also essential.

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