SOCIO-ECONOMIC WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: SHARP FOCUS

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ABSTRACT

India is a country eminent for its rich heritage, customs and diversity in the world also has a darker side to it, “Status of Women.” A country where women have been worshipped as Goddess Durga, there has been “Sati” too. Alas, we can see that on one side; these Divinities are worshipped and respected by us; on the other side Sati’s are not even remembered and moaned for a day by the society.

An unvoiced and covert woman, have travelled a long way. To empower women is to empower the society and generations. In a significant need to empower women Government of India also, declared year 2001 as “YEAR OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT”.

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But still the question arises is what difference it has made to the women? Findings from numerous studies reveal that social-economic women empowerment is the back-bone of our nation, as women constitute 52% of our total population. They can rightly be called as “Change Agents”. Hence, women ought to be socially empowered by eradication of evils and crimes of socio-economic origin.

**Key Words:** Empower, Women, Socio-Economic Empowerment

**INTRODUCTION**

Empowerment refers to raising the spiritual, political, social or economic power of individual and society. It involves developing confidence in their own capacities and strengths. It is a process that entrust the power in people for the use in their life, their communities by deciding solely themselves on the issues that they consider as considerable and critical. In our *Bhagavad Gita* also, women are entrusted with eight strengths and men with three.

**CHANGES IN EMPOWERED WOMEN**

- Increase in Personal Knowledge.
  ↓
- Freedom of Speech and Expression
  ↓
- Freedom to take Decisions.
  ↓
- Faithfulness.
  ↓
- Creativity.
  ↓
- Self Dependency.
  ↓
- Equality.
  ↓
- Affinity in Relationship.
  ↓
- Economic Freedom.
  ↓
- Freedom from Suppression and Oppression.
  ↓
- Having Political Autonomy in the Society.

**SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

Empowering the women socially in very simple terms is, when she is free from clutches of social evils, she herself being a sole entity have discretionary power to take decisions, act upon it and enjoys freedom to her life and choices. It also refers to providing an
environment where she can breathe and not sigh; she is endowed with liberty and autonomy. She is respected in the society with high self-esteem and pride in herself without prejudice. She is free to explore and discover anything and everything.

The Inter-American Development Bank (2010) defined women social empowerment in terms of Expanding the rights, resources and capacity of women to make decisions and act independently in socio-economic and political spheres.[1]

The UN (2011). Defined socio women empowerment in terms of five components-

1. Women’s sense of self worth.
2. Women’s right to have and determine choices.
3. Women’s right to have access to opportunity and resources.
4. Women’s right to have the power to control their lives; both within and outside the homes.
5. Women’s ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just, social and economic orders, nationally and internationally.

Even after the efforts by social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy in early 19th century, India is still orthodox when talks of equality. [1]

Challenges for Social Empowerment of Women. [2]
- Female Infanticide- Female Child Sex Ratio is 914 per 1000 Males.
- Illiteracy- Rural Female Literacy Rate is very Low in comparison to rural male. Rural female literacy rate is only 58% while rural male is 78%
- Unemployment- Women Employment in Urban Area is very low being only 13.9% compared to rural area being 29.9%. With the Rise in poverty many women are forced to work at low paid jobs.
- Malnutrition- women especially in child bearing stage are often deficient in nutrition due to poverty as a result more maternal deaths in India is highest in the world and 87% of the pregnant women are anaemic.[2] “Women performed 66% of world’s work and produce 50% of the food and yet earn only 10% of the income and own only 1% of the property. Weather the issue is improving education in the developing world or fighting global climate, or addressing nearly any other challenge we face, empowering women is critical part of the equation.” (Bill Clinton, 2009.)[3]
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

According to ICRW Publication. “A Woman is Economically Empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically with power to make and act on economic decisions.”[4]

Economically empowering women are essential to achieve twin objective of making her self-dependent and to achieve broader development goals such as economic growth, poverty reduction, health, education, higher living standard and economic welfare. A woman is economically empowered when she is endowed with the strength to fight against suppression and oppression and having autonomy in taking economic decisions and to act upon it.

Challenges for Economic Empowerment of Women
- Family problems.
- Obtaining finance
- Paucity of sources of funds.
- Collateral security.
- Lack of experience.
- General outlook and Mindset of the society towards working women.
- Lack of technical training.
- Professional disrespect.
- Managing man power, material.
- Lack of exposure and information.
- Unfavourable working environment for women especially in night shifts.
- Work-life balance

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To bring in limelight the socio economic condition of the women.
- To discuss the probable hurdles and obstacles in process of women empowerment.
- To study the steps taken by the government and non government organizations to strengthen the women.
- To give suggestions for women empowerment.
- To study the effects and advantages of the empowered women.

FINDINGS

As secondary data have been explored through various journals and websites some facts that have been known regarding the social status of the women are very miserable and wicked. Few among them are:

- Top 5 Social Evils that Still Prevails According to Recent Survey of India TV News. [5]

A. No Education for Girls

If female literacy rate is low in our country then the growth of the country will also be sluggish because when a woman is not educated, it impacts every member of the family.
Rajasthan, U.P., Bihar have the lowest literacy rate. According to the 2011 census, Arunachal Pradesh (66.95%) is placed second lowest in literacy in our country, just above Bihar which records least literacy of (63.82%).

**B. Domestic Violence**

Violence against women is highly prevalent in India, almost 70% of women are victims of domestic violence. There is still high no. of dowry deaths than the deaths caused by the accidents and diseases of the females.

According to National Family Survey, 1 in 3 married adolescent girls have experienced physical violence from their husbands. The National Crime Records Bureau says a total of 244,270 incidents of crimes against women were reported in country in year 2013 compared with 228,650 in year 2012, an increase of 6.4%.

**C. Female Infanticide**

The deliberate killing of a newborn female child is called female infanticide. According to a report published in *INDIA TODAY*, nearly 2500 cases of female foeticide and infanticide takes place in Rajasthan every day. Veil is still a tradition for the woman and female infants are buried in graves.

**D. Prostitution**

Prostitution is the exchange of sexual services for money. While in some countries like Germany, prostitution is legal; in India owning a brothel is a crime. Child prostitution is a major problem in India involving around 1.2 million children.

In Rajasthan, the Bedia Tribal’s stance for girls is different from rest of India because girls are life line for this community as there is century old tradition of forcing daughters into prostitution when they attain adulthood.

**E. Dowry**

Evil practices like demand and acceptance of dowry is widespread in Rajasthan. The practice of payment of dowry is more rampant within middle class society.

Odisha top the chart in Dowry Death with latest statistics issued by National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) shows that Odhisa reported as many as 1487 cases under Dowry Prevention Act accounting for 6.5% of cases recorded in year 2012. [5]

* Significant Facts about Economic Status of Women in India

**A. Work Force Participation**

1. Female labour Force Participation (LFPR) generally tends to be below than male. Overall female LFPR declined by 10% between 2005 and 2010. Out of 131 countries globally, in year 2010 India is placed 11th from the bottom.[6]

2. India ranks the second lowest in the group of 20(G-20) economies when it comes to the women participation in the workforce according to the report published by AID GROUP (OXFAM).it is above only Saudi Arabia, a country that does not allow its women to drive in the year 2013.[7]

3. Women are more vulnerable to sexual harassments and exploitation at work in developing countries. In India, they earn 62% of men’s salary for equal works according to WEF. They are unable to effectively fight against harassments.
India passed a new law against sexual harassments under which organizations with more than 10 workers have to set up Grievance Committee to investigate all complaints. But according to study by (JNU) less than 20% employers in New Delhi comply with the rules. [7]

4. In 2011-12, less than 20% of total workers in non agricultural sectors were women. According to Indian Statistical Department Manipur, Tripura, Tamil Naidu and Kerala has the highest % share of women in wage employment in non agricultural sector. Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and U.P report the lowest. [7]

B. Essential to Agriculture

1. Women farmers control less land than do men and also have limited access to the inputs, seeds, credits and extension services. [8]
2. Less than 20% of the landholders are the women. [9]
3. Gender differences in access to the land and credit effect the relative ability of female and male farmers and entrepreneurs to invest operate to scale and avail benefits from new economic opportunities. [10]

C. World of Work

1. Women continue to participate in labour market on an unequal basis with men. In 2013, the male employment to population ratio stood at 72.2% while, the ratio for female was 47.1%. [11]
2. Globally, women are paid less than men. Women in most countries earn an average only 60% to 75% of men’s wages. [12]
3. Contributing factor include the fact that women are more likely to be wage workers and unpaid family workers; that women are more likely to engage in low productivity activities and to work in the informal sector, with less mobility to formal sector than males. [13]
4. The view of women as economic dependents and the likelihood that women are in unorganized sector are not represented by the unions. [14]

Steps Taken by Government to Empower Women

- Policies and Legislations :Women’s Development
  a) The Commission of Sati Prevention Act, 1987: The act provides for the more effective elimination of the sati practices and it is a punishable offence under IPC. It is the evil practice of burning alive the widow along with the body of deceased husband.
  b) The National Commission for Women Act, 1990: The Act is formed to examine, investigate and review the formulation and implementation of the various constitutional provisions, policies and legislations concerning women.
  c) National Policy on Empowerment of Women, 2001: This policy stresses on gender equality as mentioned in the constitution, the efforts made with stress on democratic polity, laws policies, plans and programmes to enable women succeed in different field.
  d) The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961: This act restrains the practices of giving and taking dowry. It defines dowry as any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given directly or indirectly at the time of marriage. The act penalises the practices under IPC.
e) **The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986:** This Act prohibits the indecent representation of women through the advertisements or in publications, writings, paintings, figures that shows obscenity. This is a crime under the law.

f) **Vishakha Guidelines, 1992:** This Writ Petition has been filed for implementation of fundamental rights of working women, under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution of India. This petition consists of guidelines to be complied by the employers at the workplace for protecting the women against sexual harassments. This act attempts to regulate and prohibit the misuse of pre-natal diagnostics.

g) **The Pre-natal Diagnostics Techniques (Regulation and Prevention) of Misuse Act, 1994:** This technique is for the purpose of pre-natal sex determination leading to female foeticide. It puts restrictions on use of such techniques by genetic counselling centres and clinics to detect sex.

h) **The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005:** This legislation provides for elimination of violence in any form occurring on the women within the family. The act provides protection to the wife or female live-in partner from violence at the hands of husband or male live-in partner or his relative.[15]

- **List of Government Schemes Available for Economic Empowerment of Women in India. [16]**

a) **Support to Training & Employment Programme for Women (STEP):**

   This scheme launched in 1986-87, seeks to enhance the skills of poor women and provide employment in sectors as cooperative groups, support services, strengthening market linkages. The scheme also provides support services in form of education, health checkups, crèches and housing. The ten traditional sectors under STEP FUNDING are agriculture, animal husbandry, dairy, fisheries, handlooms, handicrafts, khadi and village industries, sericulture, wasteland development and social forestry. [16]

b) **Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls(RGSEAG)-‘SABLA’:**

   This scheme was launched by the Government on 16/8/2010. The scheme is being implemented in 200 districts across the country on pilot basics. It aims at vocational training for girls above 16 years of age for economic empowerment. The objectives of the scheme are:

   1. Life skill education and accessing Public Services.
   2. Vocational training for girls 16 years and above under National Skill Development Programme. (NSDP).
   3. The success of SABLA requires collaboration with other departments such as Health, Education, and Youth Affairs etc.
   4. Nearly 100 lakh Girls per Annum are expected to benefit under the Scheme. The Amount of 750 crores has been allocated for SABLA for Year 2011-12.

C) **Central Social Welfare Board. (CSWB):** The scheme is being launched on pilot basis since Year 2008, with the objectives to fulfil the needs of area by mobilizing community action, Income generation through feasible activities for women, health awareness services, Career counselling and other social evils. [16]
• Economic Improvement
  a) National Mission for Empowerment of Women: This was launched on 8th March. The objectives of the mission are to:
     1. Promote economic development of the women.
     2. Eliminate violence against the women.
     3. Promote progress of the women through health and education.
     4. To check gender mainstreaming of the programmes, policies, institutional arrangements and organizations.[16]
  
b) Rashtriya Mahila Kosh-(National Credit Fund for Women): It was launched 1993 with a corpus of rupees. 31 crore. The main objective is to provide micro-credit to poor women for various livelihood support and income generating activities at concessional terms to bring about socio-economic development.[16]
  
c) Gender Budgeting and Economic Empowerment of Women: The Government of India is committed to remove gender inequality and thus, has adopted gender budgeting. The object of (GB) is to insure translation of the Government’s policy commitments on gender equity into budgetary allocations. To succeed in gender budgeting Government has formed Gender Budget Cells (GBC) within all Central Departments in year 2005.[16]

• Support Services
  1. The Scheme of Working Women Hostel.
  2. Working Women Hostel at Jasola, New Delhi.
  3. Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche Scheme.
  4. Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yogna (IGMSY)-Conditional Maternity Benefits’ (CMB) Scheme.[16]

• Some Indian Penal Codes of Crimes against Women
  1. Rape (Sec.376, IPC).
  2. Kidnapping, Abduction for specified purposes (Sec.363-373, IPC).
  3. Homicide for Dowry, Dowry Deaths (Sec.302/304-B, IPC).
  4. Torture-Both mental and physical (Sec.498A, IPC).
  5. Molestation (Sec.354, IPC).
  6. Sexual Harassment (Sec.509, IPC).
  7. Trafficking of Girls upto 21 yrs of age (Sec.366-B, IPC).

Steps Taken By Government of RAJASTHAN for Women Empowerment. [17]
State of Rajasthan tops the index in terms of the deplorable condition of women. Most of the social and economic evils are deeply rooted in this state. Looking at the pitiable condition of the state Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje said that the state government has taken various steps for women’s development and incorporated their suggestions in the budget. Several initiatives taken up by the state government for development of women are:

- Interest rates in the small scale industries sector has been reduced by 1% for Women.[17]
- An Independent “Women Empowerment Department “was created in the State.[17]
- The Chief Minister said the tax free sale of products manufactured by women’s self-help groups and concession provided in stamp duty on the purchase of agricultural land by women will help secure an important place for them.[17]
- Holding of women’s haat once a week at district headquarters for the better marketing of handicrafts and other women self made products.[17]
- Vasundhara Raje on Friday August 15, 2014 announced launch of “Bhamashah scheme” under which the bank a/c in the name of women of 1.5 crore families will be opened and aid and benefits directly transferred to their a/c.[18]
- Raje said that the "Bhamashah Scheme" will empower women and bring positive change in their lives. Women will be issued smart card. [18]
- Rajasthan government has started Helpline No. for Women Empowerment as Nirbhaya Helpline No.1800-1200020 in Jodhpur. Rajasthan police headquarter has also started women helpline no.1090 which works for 24 hours. These help lines safeguard the women against any crime . [19]
- Rajasthan Police has launched what’s app service to reach all citizens to specially insure women safety. It is launched in district of Jaipur, Jodhpur and Kota.[19]
- First Mahila Police Station was established in March, 1989 at Jaipur, all the cases like sexual harassment, rape and exploitation etc. Against women are registered at these stations and are investigated by women police officers. Today, there are 15 lady IPS Officers and 27 lady RPS Officers serving in the state. They are at par with male counterparts.[20]

STOP THIS SHAME
2. Mumbai - Shiv Sena leader arrested on rape charges after victim delivers pre-mature baby. (September 2014).
5. Andman & Nikobar - Enquiry into alleged exploitation of Jarawa woman. (February, 2014)
6. Rajasthan - MLA Udaip Lal Anjana booked for rape. (September, 2013)
7. Rajasthan - Banasthali student alleged sexual abuse. (October, 2012)
8. Andhra Pradesh - Men break into government shelter abduct women. (September, 2012)
10. Andhra Pradesh - Triable woman sexually exploited by a banker. (September, 2009).

[21]

WHAT CAN WE DO TO EMPOWER WOMEN?

Social Empowerment
- Education for women.
- Healthcare for women.
- Clean drinking, sanitation for women.
- A healthy diet.
- Proper and neat housing and surroundings.
- An ethical environment devoid of evils as violence, dowry and illiteracy etc.
- Stringent laws should be framed to end the exploitation on women and strict punishment should be enforced on the guilty.

Economic Empowerment
- Elimination of poverty by offering economic and social work avenues along with the necessary support services and infrastructure.
- Freedom to choose the occupation and profession.
- Setup and expansion of micro finance institutions so that maximum credit help can be given easily and timely.
- Benefits of global economy should be distributed evenly to narrow the gap and improve the working conditions.
- More and more acts, regulations and policies should be framed by the government for the economic advancement of the women at par with the men and to ensure their proper implementation
- Child care, crèches at workplace, educational facilities, recreational facilities, home for aged and disabled should be provided.

Benefits of Empowered Women
- Coming generations and entire society will be empowered by empowering women.
- Empowered women will lead to broadening the mindsets and thinking of the society.
- Economic Progress of women is economic progress of nation with increase in per capita and GDP and thus, higher living standards.
- Socio-economic developments will lead to end of social evils and economic stagnation of the country.
Women will become more socially aware and economically self–dependent.

A family will become more financially strong when women will contribute to family budget resulting in less of financial problems and thus, fewer conflicts in the family.

Nation will prosper both economically and socially leading to high global ranking.

Lastly, a civilized individual and cultured society can be formed.

**CONCLUSION**

In the quest of building India the great nation, let us work towards giving women their most deserved status as the biggest power resides in a woman. As, rightly said by **SWAMI VIVEKANAND** “That country and that nation which doesn’t respect women will never become great now and nor will ever in the future”. Thus, we should stress on culmination and not comprehensive outcomes on women empowerment, otherwise “Empowering Women in India” will just be a dream far away from the reality.

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