

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this paper is to acquire an understanding of the factors that have an influence upon the status of women in India. In India, since ancient times, women have been regarded as subordinates to men. The girls were considered as liabilities for the families and their birth was also not appreciated. But gradually over the period of time, there have been improvements made in the status of women. With improvements taking place, they are getting enrolled in educational institutions, acquiring higher education and empowerment opportunities. In the present existence, women, belonging to all categories and backgrounds are generating adequate awareness in terms of attaining better livelihoods opportunities. The main areas that have been taken into account in this research paper include, position of women in India: an overview, measures for women's upliftment, the objectives of the National Policy for Empowerment of Women, and factors influencing the status of women in India.

Keywords: Changes, Factors, Improvements, Status, Women

The women in India are often regarded as the sources of reverence and appreciation by the individuals for the indispensable contribution that they render within the public life as well as for certain qualities that they possess to a major extent, as compared to women in other parts of the world. There are number of socio-religious customs and rituals, which has an effect upon social, economic and cultural status of women in India. With the advent of industrialization, globalization and introduction of modern and innovative methods and strategies in all areas and fields, socio-economic changes are being depicted in the status of women. With socio-economic changes, women have progressed to a much greater extent. In the present existence, they are acquiring educational and employment opportunities and promoting effective growth and development. The acquisition of education and obtaining employment opportunities are the major factors that have rendered a significant contribution in promoting empowerment opportunities among them.

In the Indian society, the place of women have been confined to their homes to a much greater extent. They are wholeheartedly dedicated towards the implementation of household chores, child development, and taking care of the needs and requirements of other family members. In rural communities, apart from management of household responsibilities, women are also engaged in agriculture and farming practices, animal husbandry, production of handicrafts, participation in household or cottage industries, and so forth (Women in India, n.d.). Whereas, in urban communities, women are engaged in numerous jobs. They are either home-makers and perform the task of household management, or they are engaged in well reputed employment opportunities in educational institutions, organizations, offices etc. or they establish their own businesses of various products or services.

The role of women has not been given much significance. Though they render a significant contribution towards progress of the country. Women are regarded as important contributors, not only in restructuring the socio-economic structure of the community, but also in building up a strong economic structure. Women can make an equal contribution as men, provided they should be given same opportunities. Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is, there has been prevalence of crime and violence against women throughout the country, within as well as outside the home in educational institutions, workplaces, public places and so forth. These acts are proving to be major barriers within the course of their progression. Hence, to lead to effective growth and development of the country, it is vital to formulate measures that would curb criminal and violent acts and promote women empowerment.

POSITION OF WOMEN IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

The status of women in India has been a chequered one, as it has observed many ups and downs. In the Vedic age, they were worshipped as Goddesses. In the Muslim age, their status experienced a decline and in the British regime, they were looked upon as the slaves of slaves. Since the country achieved its independence, measures were being put into practice to promote expansion opportunities among them. In India, women have made progress in number of fields. These are, health, education, economic, technology, etc. They are being getting engaged in number of professions, such as, engineers, pilots, journalists, teachers, researchers, directors, administrators, judges, state governors, ambassadors, members of the parliament and ministers. In various fields, concern has been expressed in terms of their emancipation. Independence is considered to be of paramount significance. Within all fields, it is vital to create opportunities that would promote their economic and social independence (Status of Women in India, n.d.).

Within the course of time, efforts are made to ensure that women are able to earn their livelihoods opportunities in an appropriate manner. The efforts were primarily dedicated towards ensuring that they are not dependent upon others. In ancient times, the major job responsibilities of the women were within the house. They were dedicated towards taking care of the needs and requirements of the members of the household and child development. Whereas, in the present existence, they are acquiring higher education and are being engaged in reputed job opportunities. Hence, in this way, they have a vital role to play within as well as outside the household. In some cases, job responsibilities are so intense that they are unable to get involved in other tasks and activities. The income that they generate leads to overall well-being and they are able to generate awareness in terms of rights and responsibilities within as well as outside the home (Status of Women in India, n.d.).

The year 1990 was observed as the year of the girl child. The major areas of concern were, well-being, status in the family and community and the factors that would lead to her effective growth and development. The year of the girl child had the major objective of generating awareness among the individuals that girls also have aspirations and objectives to achieve. Opportunities need to be created for them that would promote their goodwill. The post-independence period, particularly in the case of women, has been a continuation of women in pre-independence era of social reforms,

economic uplift-ment and political integration. Though women are experiencing number of challenges in terms of attainment of struggle for equality, justice, and equal rights and opportunities (Status of Women in India, n.d.). Furthermore, it needs to be ensured that women and girls should be treated with respect and there should not be prevalence of any criminal acts against them.

MEASURES FOR WOMEN'S UPLIFT-MENT

India attained independence from the British rule in 1947 and was declared a democratic republic in 1950. The Constitution of India guaranteed social, economic, and political justice and equality of status and opportunities. Fundamental freedom of expression, belief, faith, worship, association, and action are guaranteed by the Constitution of India to all the citizens. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to formulate measures that would make provision of equal opportunities against women and eliminate the socio-economic, political and educational disadvantages that are experienced by them. There has been a progressive increase in the plan outlays over the last six decades of planned development to meet the needs of women and children. There has been a transformation from the 'welfare' oriented approach in the first five year plans to 'development' and 'empowerment' of women in the consecutive five year plans (Statistics on Women in India, 2007).

Perspectives on Advancement of Women through Five Year Plans

The perspectives on advancement of women through five year plans have been stated as follows: (Statistics on Women in India, 2007).

First Five Year Plan (1951-1956) – It was primarily oriented towards promoting welfare of women. The Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) undertook a number of welfare measures through the voluntary sector. The programs for women were put into operation through the National Extension Service Programs through Community Development Blocks.

Second Five Year Plan (1956-1961) – In this plan, efforts were made to organize mahilamandals, i.e. women's groups at the grass-roots levels to ensure a better implementation of welfare schemes.

Third, Fourth, Fifth and other Interim Plans (1961-1974) – These plans provided a high priority to promote education among women. Measures were implemented to make improvements in maternal and child health services. In addition, supplementary feeding for children and nursing and expectant mothers were introduced.

Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-1985) – This plan is regarded as a landmark in women's development. The plan adopted a multidisciplinary approach, taking into consideration the areas of health, education and employment.

Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-1990) – Development programs for women were continued with the main objective of augmenting their economic and social status and bring them into the mainstream of national development. The major significant step is to identify and promote the beneficiary-oriented programs, which extended direct benefits to women.

Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997) – This plan attempted to ensure that the benefits of development from different sectors did not bypass women. Special programs were implemented to supplement the general development programs. The benefits made available to women in the areas of health, education and employment were monitored attentively. Women were enabled to function as equal partners and participants in the developmental processes with the reservation of membership in the local bodies. This approach identifies the transformation from development to empowerment of women.

Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) – This plan envisaged the empowerment of women and the socially disadvantaged groups, such as, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and minorities as the agents of socio-economic change and development. Other areas that are focused upon include, promoting and developing people's participatory institutions, like Panchayati Raj Institutions, co-operatives and self-help groups, strengthening efforts to build self-reliance, the convergence of services from different sectors and women's component plan at the central and state levels.

Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) – This plan was formulated to ensure requisite access of women to information, resources and services and bring about advancements in the gender equality goals.

Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012) – This plan was formulated with the main objective of undertaking special measures for gender empowerment and equity. The Ministry of Women and Child Development would make synergistic use of the gender budget and gender mainstreaming process.

The Objectives of the National Policy for Empowerment of Women

The objectives of the national policy for empowerment of women have been stated as follows: (Statistics on Women in India, 2007).

1. Creating an environment through the formulation of positive economic and social policies for promoting the overall development of women and enabling them to recognise their complete potential.
2. The de-jure and de-facto enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedom by women should be promoted on equal basis as men. These should be in terms of social, economic, cultural, political and civil.
3. Women should be provided equal access to participation and decision making in terms of social, political, cultural and economic aspects.
4. In the areas of health care, education, career and vocational guidance, employment opportunities, equal remuneration, occupational health, safety, social security, and other rights and opportunities, women should be provided equal access.
5. Strengthening of the legal systems that aim at eliminating all forms of discrimination against women.
6. Bringing about changes in the attitudes of the individuals and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women.

7. Mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development process.
8. Elimination of discriminatory treatment and all forms of criminal and violent acts against women and children.
9. Building and strengthening partnerships with the civil society, particularly women's organizations.
10. Implementation of policies and strategies that address the needs of women, residing in the conditions of poverty and backwardness.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

The factors that influence the status of women in India have been stated as follows:

Child Marriage

The practice of child marriage is referred to the marriage, when girls are, particularly below the age of 18 years. Although most of the nations have declared the age of 18 as the legal minimum age to enter into marriage for the girls. But in India, primarily in rural communities, there is still prevalence of child marriage. This practice has a major effect upon the girls as compared to boys. In many developing countries, the early marriage of girls is widespread. In 2002, the population council predicted that over the following decade, more than 100 million girls, on a comprehensive scale would get married, before they have attained 18 years of age. In most cases, they are married against their wishes (International Women's Health Program, 2009). Child marriage is regarded as the major barrier towards acquisition of education, employment opportunities, and bringing about improvements in the overall quality of life. The girls are the ones, who suffer to a major extent than boys. They are meant to look after the household chores and even get deprived of education and participation in leisure and recreational activities.

Health and Nutrition

Health and nutrition are regarded as factors that are of utmost significance. The women and girls, who are residing in the conditions of poverty and backwardness are malnourished to a major extent. They experience problems in fulfilling their nutritional requirements on a daily basis. The individuals need to possess adequate awareness in terms of looking after one's health conditions. To maintain one's health care needs, it is vital for the individuals to obtain proper diet and nutrition, get engaged into some form of physical activities, generate awareness in terms of hygiene and cleanliness, keep the environment clean within as well as outside the home, obtain clean drinking water and establish positive thinking. Educated women, residing in urban areas are normally aware of these strategies, whereas, rural women are normally unaware, particularly those, who are not educated. Programs and schemes have been initiated to promote health and nutrition among women and children. Women and child development programs have the main objective of promoting their well-being.

Education

The main purpose of education is to enhance the academic skills and abilities among individuals and generate awareness in terms of various areas. When girls and women are educated, they are able to acquire an efficient understanding of the opportunities that would enable them to sustain their livelihoods better. With the acquisition of education, girls and women, would not only be able to acquire employment opportunities, but they would be able to carry out the household responsibilities too in a well-organized manner. In some rural communities, girls have been discouraged from acquisition of education and were trained in terms of implementation of household responsibilities. But in the present existence, changes have come about in the viewpoints and perspectives of the individuals and communities that girls should also be encouraged towards acquisition of education. Hence, girls and women are even getting enrolled in higher educational institutions and acquiring Bachelors, Masters and doctoral degrees.

Empowerment Opportunities

The empowerment opportunities among women in India are primarily dependent upon number of factors. These include, geographical location, educational qualifications, caste, class, ethnicity, socio-economic background and age. The policies on women's empowerment exist at the national, state and local levels. The number of fields, in which women are to acquire empowerment opportunities include, health care, education, economic opportunities, gender-based violence and political participation. The influence of the patriarchal structure can be seen in urban as well as in rural India. The empowerment opportunities among women are less recognised within rural communities. This is of particular concern, as most of the population of the country resides in rural communities, despite a high rate of urbanization and expansion of cities. Within rural communities, women experience inequality to a greater extent (Upadhyay, n.d.). Furthermore, they are not permitted to get involved in the decision making processes and important decisions are made by the male members. These are the major barriers within the course of attainment of empowerment opportunities.

Crime against Women

Throughout the country, there has been prevalence of crime against women. Girls and women have been subjected to various forms of criminal and violent acts. These take place within as well as outside the home. The various forms of criminal acts are, verbal abuse, physical abuse, trafficking, acid attacks, sexual harassment, rape, and murder. In addition to these, girls as well as boys, who are minors, i.e. below 18 years of age even get subjected to trafficking, and child labour. These acts have a detrimental effect upon their physical as well as psychological well-being. In addition, they also get deprived from acquisition of education and other childhood activities. There have been formulation of measures that are meant to curb criminal and violent acts against girls and women. Children should not be employed in any hazardous jobs. Whereas, opportunities should be created for them to enhance their academic skills and get engaged in activities that would enable them to feel pleasurable and contented.

Women and Economy

Women play a major role in the economy of the nation, including home-makers. It has been stated that educating a woman means, educating the entire nation. When women are educated, then they would be able to render a significant contribution towards bringing up the family in a well-organized manner. When women perform the role of home-makers, then they are required to make purchases of various items from the marketplace. Most of the shopping outlets are directed towards women. They are ultimately the largest consumers in the market. In the Indian market, where culture is upheld by women, then it is their responsibility to ensure that within the house, there are provision of all goods and materials, which would enable the family members to carry out their tasks and activities in a well-organized manner. Women are regarded as the most crucial consumers of the market. Whereas, the corporates, which target female consumers, lack the female workforce within the organization (Women and economy: The Indian perspective, 2017).

Support Services to Women

The major objective of making provision of support services to women is promoting their effective growth and development. The support services that are made available have different goals and objectives. These include, alleviation of poverty, crime and violence, promotion of empowerment opportunities, education, employment opportunities and so forth. In the present existence, women are undergoing number of problems and challenges in getting involved in various tasks and activities. These include, acquisition of education, employment opportunities, empowerment opportunities, and so forth. In addition, there has been prevalence of crime and violence against them within various areas, these include, educational institutions, workplaces, public places and within the household. These acts are the ones that prove to be major impediments within the course of progression. Hence, in order to bring about improvements within their overall quality of life, they need support services. The major support services are, counselling and guidance services, health care centres, government and non-government organizations.

Political Participation of Women

Research studies show that higher number of women in the parliament generally contribute to greater attention towards the issues and problems that are experienced by women. The political participation of women is regarded as the fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and democracy. It facilitates the direct involvement of women in the decision making processes and is also regarded as the source of promoting better accountability of women. Political participation of women begins with the increasing number of women in the decision making positions. What are required to be put into operation are the gender sensitive governance reforms that will make all the elected officials more operative at promoting gender equality in the public policy and ensuring their implementation. The political participation of women are primarily centred upon governance and the decision making processes. It is vital to ensure that the decision making processes are, participatory, responsive, equitable and inclusive (Political Participation of Women, n.d.).

Role of Women in Household Management

Role of women in household management is regarded to be of utmost significance. Not only in India, but in other countries of the world as well, men are meant to get engaged in employment and generate a source of income, whereas, women are meant to implement the household responsibilities. In the management of the household chores, it is vital for women to acquire knowledge and develop their skills and abilities in terms of number of areas. These include, cleaning, washing, preparation of meals, repair work, maintenance of all the materials, and equipment within the household, and taking care of needs and requirements of the family members. Women are involved in both categories, home-makers as well as working women. When the women are home-makers, then they are primarily dedicated towards household management, whereas, when they are engaged in jobs, then they need to look after the household as well as work responsibilities. Hence, it is vital for them to implement effective time management skills and create a balance between personal and professional life.

Participation in Employment Opportunities

Employment opportunities are regarded as indispensable areas that enable the individuals to sustain their living conditions satisfactorily. Educational qualifications, skills and abilities, socio-economic background and personality traits are the major areas that enable the individuals to acquire employment opportunities. Women are engaged in number of employment opportunities. In urban communities, on the basis of their educational qualifications and skills, they are engaged in reputed jobs. They are employed as teachers, educationists, researchers, lawyers, managers, directors, administrators, engineers and so forth. Whereas, in rural communities, they are mainly employed in the agricultural sector and production and manufacturing processes. The other areas in which women are employed include, industries and factories. In rural communities, there have been establishment of small scale industries, in which women acquire employment opportunities. Before getting employed in organizations and industries, it is vital for them to acquire proper training, particularly in terms of the organizations and job duties.

Participation in Decision Making

Decision making is regarded as an integral part of one's life. Individuals are required to make decisions in the implementation of various tasks and activities on a daily basis, within the household as well as workplace. The decisions can be major or minor. When major decisions need to be made, primarily which have an influence upon the overall living conditions of the individuals, then it is vital for the male members to obtain ideas and suggestions from female members as well. When women within and outside the home are allowed to give ideas and suggestions, then they feel contented. On the other hand, when minor decisions need to be made, then women should be allowed discretion. The participation of women in decision making makes them feel recognized. Giving suggestions and expressing one's perspectives enable them to form the viewpoint that they are revered and not discriminated against within their family as well as workplace.

Role of Women in Society

Not only in India, but in other countries of the world as well, women have been contributing a significant part in promoting the development of the communities as well as the entire nation. They are contributing towards economic growth of the country, by taking care of the needs and requirements of their families, households, working as well as owning businesses (Women in Society, n.d.). The role of women in society is primarily characterised by their role within the family and outside. Within home, they carry out the family and household responsibilities, whereas, outside the home, they are contributing towards promoting welfare of the society via their professional roles. These are, teachers, doctors, lawyers, researchers, educationists, administrators and so forth. When women are engaged in these professions, then they not only make effective use of their educational qualifications and skills, but also work towards promoting welfare of the community.

Contribution of Women in Science and Technology

The involvement of women in science and technology has encountered bias with regards to disciplines and academic and professional levels of responsibilities. The deep and extensive roots of science and technology in all spheres of life have a significant impact upon women. In the present existence, science and technology have influenced the lives of the individuals, belonging to all age groups and backgrounds to a major extent. The major contribution of women in this field has been recognized, since the period of human civilization. Science is regarded as the creation of structure. For the world and technology, the use of structure has been regarded as an aspect that would lead to growth and development. It is vital for women to observe the advancements in areas that are necessary to promote their empowerment. The major contributions that women have made in these areas have promoted empowerment opportunities among them (Lokeshwari, Kittur, Kumar & Mohan, 2013).

Women in Rural and Tribal Communities

Women in rural and tribal communities primarily belong to deprived, marginalized and socio-economically backward sections of the society. They in some cases, do not possess educational qualifications and are residing in the conditions of poverty and backwardness. For these women, management of household responsibilities is regarded as indispensable. The major household chores that they carry out include, cleaning, washing, preparation of meals, looking after the other members of the household, rearing of livestock and so forth. In some cases, they are engaged in the production and manufacturing of handicrafts, artworks and food items. Whereas, mostly, they are engaged in agriculture and farming practices. In these communities, the job responsibilities of women involve hard work to a major extent. They need to adequately prepare themselves to work effectively. When they go to work, they normally train their girls to take care of their younger siblings and elderly members of the family. Hence, skills and abilities are developed among them from the initial stage.

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