

SHODH SAMAGAM

ISSN : 2581-6918 (Online), 2582-1792 (PRINT)



A Study on the Issue and Obstacles of Women Empowerment in India in The 21st Century

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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Received on : 08/01/2024
Revised on : ----
Accepted on : 09/03/2024
Overall Similarity : 09% on 29/02/2024



Plagiarism Checker X - Report
Originality Assessment

Overall Similarity: **9%**

Date: Feb 29, 2024

Statistics: 428 words Plagiarized / 4549 Total words

Remarks: Low similarity detected, check with your supervisor if changes are required.



ABSTRACT

The phrase “Empowerment of Women” has gained a lot of popularity in the twenty-first century. The great majority of politicians, who are purportedly well-wishers of the people, never took the time to discuss their concerns and obligations in giving women’s empowerment first priority. Women have always been seen as inferior to males and their subservient. The advancement of women in India is significantly influenced by a wide range of factors, such as age, social standing, education level, and geographic area. The purpose of this study to examine the history of women’s education in pre-colonial, colonial, and modern India; necessity of women empowerment, the various ways that women are empowered; violence against women; women’s right, challenges in women empowerment; women schemes and the ways that women’s empowerment is changing Indian society in the twenty-first century and at the end give some suggestion also. Overall, this study demonstrates how women’s empowerment has advanced and transformed Indian society in the twenty-first century.

KEY WORDS

Women Empowerment, Education, Gender Inequality, Women Rights.

INTRODUCTION

It is the twenty-first century in which we live. In an effort to advance human wellbeing, we never stop working to remove different social, political, and economic limitations, obstacles, and conundrums. The contributions of men and women to this growth process

are about equal. Women work in every field, from creating inventions to taking care of the family. God created the amazing woman, a complex being with the capacity for kindness, flexibility, sincerity, and compassion. So, it is necessary to society should understand women Empowerment. As far as we are aware, empowerment is the act of granting someone the right or ability to do something. The definition of women's empowerment is now simple to comprehend: it is the act of granting women in society authority or power, or, alternatively, it is the act of enabling women to make decisions for their own personal lives as well as the benefit of society. Its goal is to establish gender equality in society. A powerful tool for boosting the political, social, educational, gender, and economic power of individual women or groups of women is women's empowerment. If and only if women have an education, will women's empowerment become more significant. Education is essential for women's welfare, development, and empowerment. In every society and nation, education is acknowledged as a crucial tool for bringing about social change and progress. Giving women the knowledge, skills, and self-assurance they need to completely engage in the process of development is largely accomplished through education. Though vital for everyone, education is especially crucial for women and girls' survival and self-determination. The issue of dowries, unemployment, and other social ills can be eliminated with the aid of women's education. It is also simple to establish social harmony. Future generations will be illiterate if women remain uneducated. Because of this, the Greek warrior Napoleon famously remarked, "Give me a few mothers who are educated, and I will give you a heroic race.". In an effort to end unfair practices and gender discrimination against women, the Indian Government has recently instituted a number of constitutional and legal rights. o protect Indian women in the workforce from all forms of crimes against women, a list of safety laws is available. Women have the same rights as men do. Aside from many other topics, they address all facets of life, including freedom from violence, economic security, political engagement, and health. Achieving sustainable development, peace and security, and the realization of human rights all depend on women's equal and complete enjoyment of all forms of discrimination. Many NGOs are vital to the empowerment of women. The Government offers numerous programs and schemes for the empowerment of women. In India, the empowerment of women is crucial to the nation's overall growth. Therefore, empowering women is a crucial tool for the nation in the twenty-first century in order to achieve full development.

Literature Review

According to Dhruba Hazarika (2011) in their study "Women Empowerment in India: A Brief Discussion." They were formerly granted status on par with males. However, they have encountered various challenges after the Vedic and eras of epic. They were frequently treated like slaves. Since the national movement in the early 20th century, their standing has steadily transformed. We may bring up the name of the British people in this context. Following India's independence, the country's leaders and drafters of the constitution vehemently advocated for women to have the same social standing as males. We now witness women holding respectable positions in a variety of sectors. However, they haven't completely eradicated all forms of harassment and prejudice in society.

Esther Duflo (2012) the research entitled "Women's Empowerment and Financial Progress" said that "development and women's empowerment are closely related: on the one hand, development can significantly reduce gender inequality; on the other hand, empowering women may contribute to development." . Is it feasible to pull any of these two valves to start a positive cycle? The proof available on both ends of the empowerment-development debate is examined in this study, which argues that since men and women's relationships are too fragile to sustain themselves, policymakers may need to continue committing to equality on their own in order to achieve gender equality.

Mariam Sohail (2014) the authors of the study "Women Empowerment and Economic Development- An Exploratory Study in Pakistan" discovered that although women make up a large portion of our society, they still face obstacles in obtaining their legal rights. Women ought to empower with their rights to a higher level of life, respect, health, education, jobs, and decision-making authority. This paper's study topic is: Is the

growth of the economy attributable to woman empowerment? Thirty female participants with higher positions in the banking, education, and transportation industries filled out questionnaires. The participants were questioned open-endedly and about their demographics. The following were open-ended questions: “Do you believe that women should have more power?” “What do you believe to be the primary obstacles to women’s empowerment?”

Rajesh Wari M. Shettar (2015) in her work titled “A Study on Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment in India,” expressed the opinion that women’s empowerment is contingent upon improvements to their economic and social position. Only by implementing specific economic and social initiatives with a focus towards comprehensive women’s growth and to help them recognize that they are endowed with the capacity to be independent, self-sufficient people. For a significant segment of the population, the spread of globalization liberalization of trade, and various other socioeconomic factors have provided some reprieve. Nevertheless, women’s empowerment in India still falls short in a number of areas.

Khatri, R. (2016) in her paper titled “The Impact of Learning towards Women Empowerment in India,” discusses the influence of education and literacy on women’s empowerment and offers recommendations for bettering the adjustments that must be taken into account for both women’s empowerment and economic development.

Suresh and Siva Kumar (2017) the Study “Women Empowerment in India- A Shifting Picture” noted that improving the economic, social, and political standing of women—those who have historically been marginalized in society—is fundamentally the process of empowering women. It involves protecting kids from all types of harm.

According to U.S. Agency for International Development (2020) entitled “Achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment” are essential to USAID’s development objectives and the effective delivery of humanitarian aid. This Policy demonstrates USAID’s commitment to enhancing the lives and position of women and girls across the world, enlisting the support of men and boys to assist accomplish the goals of this policy, and maintaining our dedication to defending the dignity of every person. USAID is dedicated to enabling women and girls to reach their full potential and develop into effective leaders for next generations, wherever we work. Societies that place a high value on, elevate, and empower women and girls build resilient nations, strong communities, stable economies, and long-lasting, good change. We are aware that empowering women and girls is crucial to enhancing our partner nations’ capacity for independence. This Policy offers the framework and direction for USAID’s investments in gender equality and women’s empowerment across all sectors.

Objective of the Study

- To study the background of women empowerment.
- To study the Need of Women Empowerment.
- To discuss the obstacles and issue faced by the women in India.
- To study the action made in India to empower women.
- To Know the Government schemes and programmes.
- To overview how women’s empowerment is transforming Indian society in the twenty-first century.

Research Methodology

The main types of this work are analytical and descriptive. An analysis of women’s empowerment in the Indian context has been attempted. Because of the necessity of this investigation, the data used comes exclusively from secondary sources, i.e. publications, periodicals, scholarly papers, online resources, and official Government documents, among others.

Need and Significance of the Study

Since it increases the amount and quality of human resources available for growth, women’s empowerment is essential to a society’s very progress. In order to secure the sustained growth of our nation, gender equality

and women's empowerment are crucial. Gender equality and women's empowerment are prerequisites for sustainable development, according to multiple global leaders and academics. Studies on women's empowerment in India are quite rare.

Few Research on women's empowerment in the twenty-first century has been done. One of the biggest issues of the twenty-first century is now women's empowerment. Thus, the investigator feels compelled to conduct "A Study on the Issue and Problems of Women Empowerment in India in The 21st Century"

Background of Women Empowerment

History of Women Empowerment in India

Great social reformers of the past, such as Swami Vivekananda, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Acharya Vinobha Bhave, and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, among others, fought tirelessly to elevate women's status in India and outlawed abhorrent customs like child marriage and sati. One of the earliest political organizations in India, the Indian National Congress, came out in 1917 to call for women's political rights. When the Indian constitution went into force in 1950, the policy of women's empowerment was well-integrated. Article 14 guarantees women's equality; Article 15(1) forbids discrimination based on gender; and Article 15(3) gives the state the authority to implement affirmative action in favour of women, to name a few. The Maternity Benefit Act of 1961, the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976, and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention and Protection Act) of 2013 are a few of the few specific legislation pertaining to women's rights that the Indian Parliament has approved. Additionally, the Indian Government introduced a national policy for women's empowerment in 2001. Among its many goals was the improvement of the legal framework with the ultimate goal of ending every type of prejudice against women.

However, India still has a long way to go before women can exercise their fundamental rights and live as freely as men. Furthermore, despite the fact that women and men have equal rights under the Indian constitution, gender inequality persists in both urban and rural areas.

Women Empowerment in Modern India

Following India's independence, the country's founders and drafters of the constitution acknowledged women's equality in society with males. The Hindu marital Act of 1955 established guardianship, monogamy, and the marital age of the mother and allowed for the breakup of marriage under certain situations. The Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956 permits a divorced or widowed woman of good mind to adopt a child. In a similar vein, the Prohibition of Dowry Act of 1961 stipulates that anybody who provides, accepts, or assists in the exchange or receipt of dowry faces a maximum sentence of six months in jail, a fine of up to Rs. 5,000, or both. In addition to guaranteeing gender equality, the Indian Constitution gives women particular benefits. Three articles of the constitution contain these. According to Article 14, the Government cannot refuse anybody equal rights beneath the constitution or fairness before the law is applied. According to Article 15, the Government cannot treat any person differently based on their sex. A unique clause in Article 15(3) permits the state to discriminate affirmatively in favour of women. The state is required under Article 42 to provide for maternity leave and fair and humane working conditions. Above all, the constitution views Articles 15(A) and (E) as imposing a basic obligation on every citizen to abstain from actions that diminish the dignity of women. In contemporary India, women have been educated since the country's independence. Significant recommendations for important women's education have been made by the University Education Commission (1948–49), Modular Commission (1952–53), Kothari Commission (1964–66), National Policy in Education (1968), and National Policy for Education (1986). Today, the Indian Government is taking steps to ensure that every Indian woman has access to education. Women's literacy rates appear to have increased in the modern era. In India, female literacy has surpassed male literacy, and women's education has become mandatory. Currently, primary school education for both boys and girls is free in India up until the age of 14. This is due to the Constitution of India. Numerous initiatives are implemented to advance women's education following independence.

Need for Woman Empowerment

Jawaharlal Nehru once stated, “You can tell the condition of a country by looking at the status of its women.” According to Rameshwari Pandya, empowering women has emerged as the answer to several societal issues (2008). Women in the twenty-first century need to overcome their inherent flaws and long-held beliefs about male domination. She must be able to combat the problems facing this world. Although there are a few ideas of successful women in every industry, these statistics are readily available. Even though women hold the top positions in India prime minister, president, speaker of the Lok Sabha, and most prominent positions in the business sector we yet frequently witness abuse at home, dowry murders, and other forms of mistreatment of women.

Women today are excluded from certain career opportunities and treated differently simply because they are female. Strong prejudices and extreme poverty against women produce a cruel cycle of injustice that prevents them from realizing their full potential. It is concerning how frequently brutal attacks and rape occur. The key to achieving gender equality and significantly reducing gender bias for women is empowerment. Women are vital to the growth of many industries and make both visible and invisible contributions to economic advancement. Therefore, in order to break the terrible cycle in which Indian women have been so badly ensnared, women must be empowered on the social, political, economic, and cultural fronts at the same time. The reality is that women, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds and those living in rural areas, are subjected to appalling conditions and are exploited.

Obstacles and Issues Faced by Women in India

- **Gender-Based Violence:** It is one of the main elements that greatly influences women’s empowerment in our nation. Women in India are viewed as second-class citizens in a culture that is controlled by men. However, the ratio of men to women has significantly decreased as a result of abortions of female fetuses that are sex-selective. The conventional wisdom is that a boy kid is the family’s heir and an asset, whereas a girl child is seen as a liability. The lack of equal chances for women in school has hindered their ability to pursue new career paths. For the same labor or employment, women get paid less than males. There is a false belief that women lack emotional strength and are therefore incapable of handling women as compare to men.
- **Restricted Educational Opportunities:** Education: Women’s lower educational attainment poses a significant obstacle to our nation’s efforts to empower women. Even though we have made great strides in education since independence, women’s educational attainment still lags much below that of males. According to the 2011 census, there is a large difference in the male literacy rate, or 82.14%, whereas the proportion of female literacy is just 64.4%, and the higher education system has a higher degree of gender bias (Suguna, 2011). In addition, women are falling far behind in professional and specialized education and training, which has a significant impact on Indian women’s employability and caliber of leadership. Therefore, it is believed that providing women with an education is the only way to empower them, provide them the ability to obtain better employment, and allow them to work shoulder to shoulder with men
- **Economic Inequality:** Women face discrimination at work based on their gender, income disparities, and restricted access to formal employment. This increases their total socioeconomic susceptibility and makes them less economically independent.
- **Healthcare Disparities:** Another danger and significant barrier to women’s empowerment is the question of their safety and well-being, as a woman’s health is crucial to the welfare of her family, her nation, and society at large. Health risks, maternal health care, and malnutrition are some of the significant health issues that prevent women from reaching their chosen life objectives. Women are not safe in public or private settings, including offices, streets, markets, travel destinations, bus stations, railroads, hotels, and even homes. The main goal of safety measures should be to empower women.

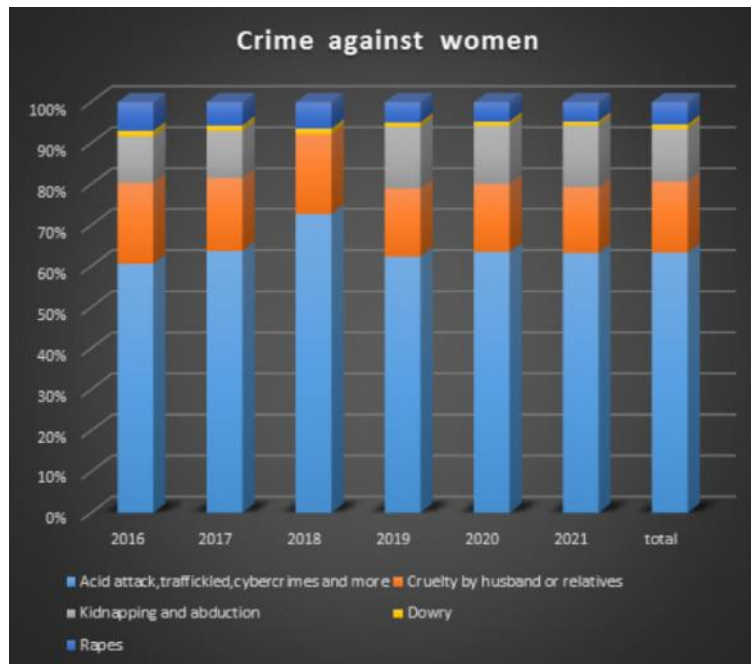
- **Child Marriage:** In India, 47% of women between the ages of 20 and 24 were married before the legal age of 18, and that number rose to 56% in rural regions, according to UNICEF’s “State of the World’s Children-2009” report. Also, the study revealed that 40% of most child weddings worldwide take place in India.
- **Family Responsibility:** In India, prejudice against women in domestic relationships poses a serious danger to women’s emancipation. There is a widespread belief in society that women should bear the brunt of raising a family. Women are responsible for taking care of the home, raising children, doing menial tasks, and caring for the elderly and disabled in the family. Their performance is hampered and their potential is impeded by household duties. This load occasionally prevents women from having the same social authority as males.
- **Cultural and Social Norms:** Laws and practices that are deeply ingrained in patriarchy continue to shape how society perceives women. Discriminatory behaviours including son preference, female infanticide, and mobility restrictions exacerbate gender inequality.
- **Politics:** Women continue to be underrepresented in the political arena and have less decision-making power. Despite constitutional protections, women’s political empowerment faces challenges like lack of support and stereotypes.
- **Technology Gender gaps:** Women’s engagement in the digital economy and access to information are restricted by the gender gap in technology. Additionally, it results in differences in the ways that women access and use technology.
- **Corporate Skills:** In the public and private sectors of the workforce, women are under represented in terms of professional skill sets. Owing to these disparities in education and skill acquisition across genders, women’s access to new job prospects is restricted. It is quite difficult for Indian women to be equal because of this disparity with males and severely impedes the empowerment of women
- **Crime against women’s:** Crime against women is an expensive public health issue as well as a societal threat. It can manifest as verbal or physical abuse, beatings, rapes, murder, and threats. The latest NCRB data for the six years (2016 to 2021) shows that overall crimes against women 26.35% rose. The majority of cases categorized as crimes against women were reported under ‘cruelty by husband or his relatives’ (31.26%), followed by acid attack, trafficked, cybercrime (26.35%), ‘kidnapping and abduction of women’ (14%) and ‘rape’ (18.5%) and dowry death(25%)

Years	Incident of crimes(acid attack, trafficked, cyber-crimes) cases	Cruelty by husband or his relatives	Kidnapping and abduction	Dowry	Rape
2016	338,954	110,378	63,000	7,628	39,068
2017	365,296	102,279	65,983	7,466	32,559
2018	378,365	101,193	1,05,734	7,167	33,356
2019	405,326	107,524	97,843	6,721	32,023
2020	381,279	100,000	84,805	6,528	28,153
2021	428,278	108,914	101,707	6,795	31,677
Total	2,297,498	630,288	462,372	42,305	196,836

(Source: National Crime Record Bureau 2016-2021)

The disturbing rise in crimes against women in India is revealed in the National Crime Records Bureau’s (NCRB) annual report. The data reveals a startling increase between 2021 and 2020, with 4, 45,256 incidents reported in 2022 alone—nearly 51 FIRs every hour. The NCRB’s annual crime report, “Crime in India 2022,” revealed that the rate of crimes against women per lakh population was 66.4, while the charge filing in

these instances was recorded at 75.8. The bureau works under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs and is entrusted with gathering and analyzing crime statistics.



Actions Made in India to Empower Women

- The Indian Constitution guarantees women's equality by outlining (Article 14) their equal privileges.
- Prohibition against discrimination based on sex, religion, caste or birthplace (Article 15(1)),
- Equal employment opportunities for all inhabitants (Article 16), etc.
- Every Indian citizen has an obligation to abstain from actions that diminish the dignity of women. Article 51-A (e):
 - Direct elections shall be used to fill one-third of the total number of seats in each (Article 243-D (3)).
 - Designates a third of all panchayat chairperson positions, at every level, as being exclusively designated for women. (Article 243-D (4)).
 - Designates a third of the total seats in each municipality to be filled by direct election as reserved for women. Article 243-T (3).
 - The state Legislature may adopt a system for the reservation of women's seats as chairpersons in the municipalities. Article 243-T (4).

Government Schemes and Programmes for Indian Women

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) and the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) are implementing various welfare schemes and programmes for Indian women. These schemes and programmes are listed below:

- Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG)-Sabla.
- Women Empowerment and Livelihood Programme in Mid-Gangetic Plain (WELPMP).
- Swadhar Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances (SSWDC).
- Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY).
- Scheme for Combating Trafficking.
- Family Counselling Centres (FCCs).
- Support to Training & Employment Programme for Women (STEP).

- One stop centre scheme (OTCS).
- Women Helpline Scheme(WHS).
- Working Women Hostel (WWH).
- Condensed courses of Education for Adult Women (CCE).
- Integrated Scheme for Women's Empowerment (ISWE).
- Gender Budgeting Scheme (GBS).
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme (BBBP).

How Women's Empowerment is Transforming Indian Society in the Twenty-first Century?

The term "women empowerment" is used in both broad and particular contexts. It generally refers to granting women all the freedoms and possibilities while also making them self-sufficient. Particularly speaking, women. Improving women's standing in the social power system is known as empowerment. The process of giving women the authority they need to know their rights and carry out their obligations to others and themselves as effectively as possible is known as women's empowerment. Gender-based prejudice is eliminated via women's empowerment in all societal structures and institutions. The ability of women to engage as equal players in a society's political, social, cultural, and economic systems is known as women's empowerment. Due to three significant advantages—economic growth, social stability, and entrepreneurship—women should take into account their strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and threats as they proceed to realize their own potential and achieve their goals through self-development. This process of empowerment has become a crucial component of our development. The position of women in India has seen significant changes throughout the last several millennia. It is more remarkable that women are actively taking part in elections and the political process, which is elevating their standing. In free India, a large number of women actively supported and took part in the nationalist struggle, helping them to win prominent positions and offices in public life and Government. Women's education has not only helped them understand political issues, but they are also progressively taking an active role in politics. Some people are registering as party members, going to conventions and meetings, and implementing political agendas. Some women are rising to positions of influence in politics and are playing a key role in influencing public perception in the direction of improving the status of women in society.

Practical Implication

The current study has established a course for the discussion of minority women's understanding of Government programs. Awareness of the program is a crucial factor in determining any scheme's degree of effectiveness. Even the scheme's utilization rate is a relatively small proportion. There is a discrepancy in terms of awareness among women of colour about the plans. The empowerment of women in all spheres is vital for constructing a robust nation. Women's empowerment has evolved from its previous emphasis on economic empowerment to one that now encompasses political, social, educational, and psychological empowerment. This may be an effective technique in ensuring that the strategy is well-understood and that the endeavour is successful.

CONCLUSION

Consequently, we see that women's empowerment for global development, as well as their active engagement in and direction of their own growth, are now recognized in 21st-century civilizations. In order to empower women in the twenty-first century, women's education is crucial. Learning is an essential instrument for raising the social standing of women and girls and allowing them to take part in choices that impact their lives. Women who are empowered are capable of making their own decisions. A nation's social, political, and economic progress may be achieved via the empowerment of women.. Thus, the study's conclusion is that in

order for regular women to apply for and receive benefits—and thereby realize the economic empowerment of ethnic minority women—the Government must take more appropriate actions to increase awareness of the various welfare systems that are currently in place and streamline the application process. In order to assist groups that empower women and carry out awareness-raising and education campaigns, collaboration with the Government, social organizations, and media is required. Therefore, a country woman has to be empowered in all aspects

Suggestion/Recommendation

- To boost women's empowerment, the Government ought to place greater emphasis on female education.
- The Government needs to educate women about the importance of education and the resources available to them for help.
- More opportunities for women's empowerment should be established by the Government.
- More initiatives aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship might significantly improve the status and empower Indian women.
- Governments must also spend more money to create an atmosphere that is attentive to and favourable for females.
- Implement changes to ensure that women have equal access to financial resources, ownership, and management of land and other types of property. All women must also be guaranteed equal pay for equal effort.
- Improve the application of enabling technologies to support, especially information and communication technology the women's empowerment.
- Putting an end to prejudice against women and girls in all its manifestations.
- Eradicate all types of violence, including trafficking and sexual and other forms of exploitation, against all women and girls in both public and private domains.
- Abolish all cruel, barbaric customs, including child marriage, female genital mutilation, and female foeticide/infanticide.
- Assure women's effective involvement in public life, politics, society, and the economy at all decision-making levels.
- Adopt and fortify sensible laws and policies that support gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in all spheres of society.
- There should be more action done to improve women's wellness. It is imperative to reduce maternal mortality, especially in communities without adequate healthcare services. Women's nutritional demands must be appropriately attended to at all time their life cycle.

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