

Some Critical Determinants of Women Empowerment: A Perspective**Ms. Tanushree****Asst Professor (Banarsidas Chandiwala Institute of Professional Studies, Sector-11, Dwarka, New Delhi)****Ms. Gaura Nautiyal****Asst Professor (Banarsidas Chandiwala Institute of Professional Studies, Sector-11, Dwarka, New Delhi)****Abstract:**

The subject of empowerment of women is becoming a burning issue all over the world including India since the last few decades. Though women today have come a long way and are free to make their critical life choices, there still is scope for further strengthening and consolidating their position. It has to be realised that real empowerment lies in being able to make a positive difference in others' and your own life and being free to pursue your personal and professional goals in life. Though there can be a number of determinants which can be discussed in this regard, we have tried to limit our discussion to three major factors which influence women empowerment i.e. Role of Education, Gender equality in everyday life and Equal employment opportunities. Empowered women can change a society and a country for better and they can further inspire and encourage empowerment. What should not be forgotten, however, is that with great power comes great responsibility which lies in a responsible and optimal use of that power.

Keywords: Empowerment, critical choices, determinants, Education, Equality**Introduction and Literature Review:**

'The Empowered woman is powerful beyond measure and beautiful beyond description'.

-Steve Maraboli

Empowerment allows individuals to reach their full potential, to improve their political and social participation, and to believe in their own capabilities. Empowerment can be referred to as "strategic life choices" which refers to decisions that influence a person's life trajectory and subsequent ability to exercise autonomy and make choices (Kabeer, 2001).

The idea of power is at the root of the term empowerment. Power can be understood as operating in a number of different ways: power over, power to, power with, power within. The feminist movement has emphasized collective organization (power with) and has been influential in developing ideas about "power within." Power within refers to self confidence, self awareness and assertiveness. (Kantor, 2003) Empowerment of women is the key device which enables them to resurrect their status multifariously in the society and reconcile them to share virilities of the fast development world. This device is significant in view of the role that women can more effectively play in all vital areas (Thota 2012). Participation of women in decision making and empowerment will promote a change in their behavior and lifestyle. Empowering women through education, ideas, consciousness, mobilization and participatory approach can enable them to take their own decisions, make them self-reliant and self-confident (Dheepa & Barani, 2010).

The subject of empowerment of women has become a burning issue all over the world including India since last few decades. Many agencies of United Nations in their reports have emphasized that gender issue is to be given utmost priority. Empowerment itself has been measured by a woman's relative

physical mobility, economic security, decision-making ability, freedom from domestic violence, and political awareness and participation (Dyson & Moore, 1983).

The position and status of women all over the world has risen incredibly in the 20th century. We can find that it has been very low in 18th and 19th centuries in India and elsewhere when they were treated like 'objects' that can be bought and sold. For a long time women in India remained within the four walls of their household. Their dependence on men folk was total.

Though women today have come a long way and are free to make their critical life choices, there still is scope for further strengthening and consolidating their position. We have to realise that real empowerment lies in being able to make a positive difference in others' and your own life and being free to pursue your personal and professional goals in life.

Various studies and various researchers have focused on different aspects and determinants of women Empowerment. There have been several efforts to devise indicators of empowerment. In this effort, Naila Kabeer, Linda Mayoux, Anne Marie Goetz, Rahman, Ackerley, JSI (John Show International researchers), Sara Longwe and Hashmi have provided their own indicators.

JSI Six Domains of Empowerment

Domain	Expressions
1. Sense of Self & vision of a future	Assertiveness, plans for the future, future-oriented actions, relative freedom from threat of physical violence, awareness of own problems and options, actions indicating sense of security.
2. Mobility & visibility	Activities outside of the home, relative freedom from harassment in public spaces, interaction with men.
3. Economic Security	Property ownership, new skills and knowledge and increased income, engaged in new/non-traditional types of work
4. Status & decision-making power within the household	Self-confidence, controlling spending money, enhanced status in the family, has/controls/spends money, participation in/makes decisions on allocation of resources, not dominated by others
5. Ability to interact effectively in the public sphere	Awareness of legal status and services available, ability to get access to social services, political awareness, participation in credit program, provider of service in community.
6. Participation on non-family groups	Identified as a person outside of the family, forum for creating sense of solidarity with other women, self-expression and articulation of problems, participating in a group with autonomous structure.

JSI defines empowerment in a behavioral sense as the ability to take effective action encompassing inner state (sense of self, of one's autonomy, self-confidence, openness to new ideas, belief in one's own potential to act effectively) and a person's status and efficacy in social interactions. In particular, it is the ability to make and carry out significant decisions affecting one's own life and the lives of others.

Determinants of Women Empowerment:

It needs to be understood that there are certain critical determinants of women empowerment which go a long way in consolidating a woman's position in the society. Though there can be a large number of factors that can be talked about, we would like to limit our discussion to a few critical factors in this paper which are:

- Role of Education
- Gender equality in everyday life (end of biasness)
- Equal Employment opportunities (breaking stereotypes)

Role of Education

Education is the most effective tool of human empowerment. Educated people have the power to transform their lives and bring a positive change in society. Thus, education, which is a tool for social mobility is important for everybody in the community. It is only through education that the existing power structure can be challenged or modified. Upward mobility and empowerment are only made possible through the process of education.

Education is a veritable tool for national development. It empowers people and strengthens nations. It undoubtedly is the main tool for imparting skills and attitudes relevant to the contribution of the individual to the development of the society. It is a key every individual should possess in order to make significant contribution to national development. Education empowers. Women education has therefore been described as women empowerment. Enemuo (1999) assert that women education is a multidimensional process involving the empowerment and transformation of the economic, socio-psychological, political and legal circumstances of the powerless.

According to Sako (1999), it is the process of strengthening the existing capacities and capabilities of women in the society to enable them perform towards improving themselves, their families and the society as a whole. Women should thus be looked at as individuals that possess some hidden potentials to contribute to national development. They should therefore be encouraged to develop to their fullest potential through education.

Education prepares women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors which in turn is essential to build stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men, families and communities. The need for women education is also reinforced by the fact that purposeful

occupational achievement and satisfaction is ensured by deep self-awareness and understanding which can only be achieved through the provision of effective and functional education and guidance & counseling (Kumar et. al., 2013). It has to be understood that women cannot make meaningful and significant contribution to national development without the acquisition of formal education. This implies that there should be more efforts by the government, non-governmental organizations and the society at large in promoting and providing qualitative education that would enable women make significant contributions towards national development. Therefore, traditional practices and cultural beliefs among others that have hindered the full participation of women in formal education should be eradicated so as to make room for women to make significant contributions to national development (Henry et. al., 2012). Talking about India, the constitution of India guarantees the right to equality to all Indian women without discrimination. The literacy rate before independence was 2.6% which rose in 1961 to 15.3% and was

50% by the year 2001. And now, according to the 2011 Census, the male literacy rate is 82.14 while female literacy rate is 65.46. That means that even today, large womenfolk of our country are illiterate, weak and exploited. Moreover education is also not available to all equally. Gender inequality is reinforced in education which is proved by the fact that the literacy rate for the women is quite low as compared to men.

Table: Literacy Rate in India

Year	Persons	Males	Females
1901	5.3	9.8	0.7
1911	5.9	10.6	1.1
1921	7.2	12.2	1.8
1931	9.1	15.6	2.9
1941	16.1	24.9	7.3
1951	16.7	24.9	7.3
1961	24	34.4	13
1971	29.5	39.5	18.7
1981	36.2	46.9	24.8
1991	52.1	63.9	39.2
2001	65.38	76	54
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: Census of India(2011)

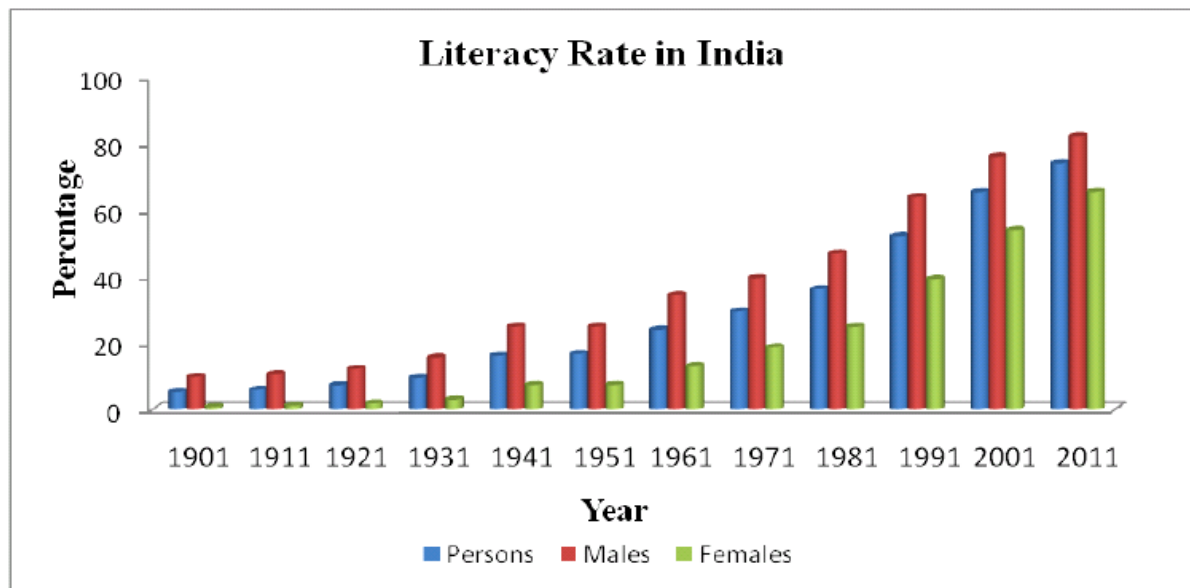


Fig: Literacy rate in India

Women Education lays the foundation for women empowerment. A few points which can be listed in this regard are:

Economic development and prosperity: Education gives women the confidence to come forward and contribute towards the development and prosperity of their family, society and their country.

Economic empowerment: So long as women remain backward and economically dependent on men, their helpless condition cannot be changed substantially. Economic empowerment and independence will only come through proper education and employment of women.

Improved life: In our country, a majority of girls are still living a suppressed and suboptimal life . Their rights are trodden down, sometimes situations challenging their self respect and esteem. Education opens new doors to a healthy and respectable lifestyle.

Dignity and Honor: Educated women are now looked upon with dignity and honor. They become a source of inspiration for millions of young girls who make them their role-models.

Social Justice: Educated women are more informed of their rights for justice. It would eventually lead to decline in instances of violence and injustice against women such as dowry, forced-prostitution, child-marriages, female feticide, etc.

Ability to choose a profession: Educated women can prove be highly successful in the fields that interest them. A girl-child should get equal opportunity for education, so that, she can plan her career and reach to the heights she aspires for.

Alleviate poverty: Women education is a pre-requisite to alleviate poverty. Women need to share equal burden of the massive task of eliminating poverty. This would demand a sizable contribution from educated women. There cannot be much social and economic changes unless girls and women are given their rights for education.

Gender Equality in Everyday Life:

Gender discrimination continues to be an enormous problem within Indian society. Traditional patriarchal norms have relegated women to secondary status within the household and workplace. This drastically affects women's health, financial status, education, and political involvement. Women are commonly married young, quickly become mothers, and are then burdened by stringent domestic and financial responsibilities. They are frequently malnourished since women typically are the last member of a household to eat and the last to receive medical attention.

India ranks 130 out of 155 countries in the Gender Inequality Index (GII) for 2014, way behind Bangladesh and Pakistan that rank 111 and 121 respectively, according to data in the United National Development Programme's latest Human Development Report (HDR) 2015.

The index captures inequalities in gender-specific indicators: reproductive health measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates, empowerment quantified by share of parliamentary seats and attainment in education, and economic activity measured by labour market participation rate. In all these indexes, India's performance is way below the South Asian average.

Due to the deep- rooted patriarchal mentality in the Indian society, women are still victimised, humiliated, tortured and exploited. Even after almost seven decades of Independence, women are still subjected to discrimination in social, economic and educational field. The discriminations observed against women are based on a biased perspective in our society. Discrimination against the girl child begins from the birth itself. Boys are preferred over girls, hence female infanticide is not an uncommon practice. The ordeal faced by most girls at birth is only the beginning of a lifelong struggle.

The traditional Indian society is patriarchal which is ruled by the diktatas of self proclaimed lords and custodians who act as the guardians of archaic and unjust traditions. The burden of traditions, culture and haonour is put on the shoulders of women which mars their growth. Various incidences of Honour killing reveal the distorted social fibre in the male dominated society. Of late women have been trying to challenge these mindsets which are resulting in huge Social and cultural debates, the latest case being that of women's right to worship in a prominent Temple in Maharashtra. Things would not change unless 'patriarchy' is replaced with 'parity'. The need of the hour is an egalitarian society, with no scope for superiority. There should be identification and elimination of forces that work to keep alive the tradition of male dominance over their female counterparts by issuing inhuman and unlawful diktats.

Another problem is that during all these years, the attention has mainly been on developing and devising new schemes, policies and programmes while ignoring proper monitoring systems resulting in implementation short sightedness. An example can be that despite having the Pre natal Diagnostic Technologies act and various other health programmes by the government, India still has a skewed Gender ratio and a high maternal mortality rate (MMR). Therefore, there is need to set up government or community based bodies to monitor the programs devised for welfare of the society in general and women in particular. Attention should be paid to proper implementation via monitoring and evaluation through social audits.

It can also be observed that although there are a number of laws to protect women from all kinds of violence, yet we can find significant increase in the cases of rapes, extortions, kidnappings, acid attacks, domestic violence etc. A main reason for this is the delay in legal procedures and presence of several loopholes in the functioning of the judiciary. Justice delayed is justice denied. Efforts have to be made to to restructure legal procedures to take speedy decisions and provide fair and in time justice to the victims of such cases. Setting up fast track courts, to impart speedy justice to victims of crimes against women is a good initiative by the judiciary and the Government of India.

Women and men generally lead equally busy work lives – when one considers the unpaid work of caring for children and housework to be at least as valuable as paid work in the workforce. Yet often there is a 'un-negotiated' burden of responsibility for women to take responsibility for the domestic issues and men to just 'go along with the flow'. A real change in woman's status in society will come when we look beyond the gender stereotypes at home. With both partners working, men should take up more or less equal responsibility in helping women at home and in taking care of family affairs and social obligations. Taking care of kids and elders, nurturing important relationships that your family has with others and being accountable for particular household tasks should not be just a women's headache but a man's domain as well.

Equal Employment Opportunities/ Removing Gender discrimination at Work

Real empowerment of women will be attained if they are provided equal employment opportunities, without sticking to gender stereotypes in workplace. Sex or gender discrimination in employment involves treating someone unfavorably because of the person's gender, whether they are applying for a job or are a current employee. Although women have made clear they have the ability and will to perform with the same skill and success in every endeavor engaged in by men, the issue of sex discrimination still holds many back. Gender discrimination, although predominantly an issue for women, can sometimes be directed towards men as well.

Though women today are proving that they are at par with men in any career they opt for, unfortunately, gender stereotypes and expectations are still widely prevalent in society. It is a well known fact that femininity has typically been perceived as soft, passive and pleasing, while masculinity is expected to appear rough, aggressive and strong. When women work outside home, they are preferred or expected to be in 'soft' professions such as medicine or teaching. There is nothing wrong with taking up these roles. The concern is the pressure by the society to fulfil them, as well as their deemed value. When we associate a particular gender with a particular job or career, we are knowingly or unknowingly denying gender equality. Moreover, the female workforce participation varies across socio-economic, demographic and cultural backgrounds. Talking specifically about the Indian society, lower value of women in society and family may be a cause for their low contribution in the professional arena.

Thus, gender discrimination is treating individuals differently in their employment specifically because an individual is a woman or a man. If you have been rejected for employment, fired, or otherwise harmed in employment because of your gender, then you may have suffered gender discrimination.

Here are some examples of potentially unlawful sex/gender discrimination that women, may face:

- **Hiring, Firing and Promotions:** Women apply for jobs for which they have experience and excellent qualifications, but they are not hired because some of the company's long-time clients are more comfortable dealing with men. The employer may also ask a female applicant uncomfortable questions that aren't posed to male job applicants -- such as whether she has, or plans to have, children in some time. Women many times are told that they are being laid off due to company cutbacks and reorganization, while men in the same job and with less seniority than them can keep their jobs. Women who might have worked for their company for several years, receiving exemplary reviews and awards for good work are denied promotions while the positions they applied for are instead filled by less qualified men.
- **Salary:** Women may work their way up the hierarchy and rise up the ranks, but they may find that men with similar training and work experience may be hired and paid more than them. It is not uncommon to find a woman employee who has been moved to a less desirable territory while a man with much lower performance is given her territory and client base, enabling him to make much more in commissions than the woman employee will make for several years.
- **Job Classification:** Women employees may work at a company for several years and put in many hours of overtime. However, after they return from their maternity leaves and tell their employer that they will not be able to put in as many hours of overtime, their position is changed to a lower level and effects their pay adversely, while male co-workers in similar positions are allowed to cut back their overtime hours for personal reasons without any changes to their positions or pay.
- **Organizational Benefits:** Many times a company's health insurance policy does not cover a woman employee's spouse, because it is conveniently assumed that he will have his own

benefits, while the male workers have their wives covered by the policy. Similarly while offering other benefits as well, a company may be more liberal with the male employees as they are supposed to be the main breadwinners of their families and hence more deserving for such benefits.

Such discrepancies and biasness in treatment can prove to be a major demotivator and organizations may have to lose their talented women employees because of denying equal employment opportunities to them. Women have proved time and again that they are equally good as their male counterparts if given equal opportunities and a fair and equitable treatment. Organizations should be gender sensitive but at the same time it has to be ensured that there is no covert or overt discrimination which any individual has to face because of his/ her gender.

In fact Organizations should come up with initiatives which help women to cope up with work life balance issues so that key women employees continue working with them. Proactive organizations realize the worth of their invaluable women workforce and go the extra mile to retain them and promote their engagement, a latest example being that of ICICI bank which has launched an initiative in March 2016 named 'iWork@home' to allow its women employees, the option to work from home. This allows women who may need to be at home either during pregnancy or childcare, to work from home for a period of upto one year. According to a study, undertaken by the bank about a year ago, two-thirds of the women employees quit their jobs for constraints arising out of maternity and childcare needs. Women opting for this programme can even seek an extension of the work-from-home period beyond one year. However, extension will be granted to only on careful consideration of performances. Besides this, the bank will also bear the costs for children and their caregivers when women managers have to travel out on business.

Conclusion: Women should be empowered and in turn use their power responsibly

Though the condition of women is increasingly becoming better with time and changing mindsets; with a focus to make a women to be independent and self-reliant, various policies and developmental programs have to be framed to equip the women with varied skill sets which would empower them in terms of social, economical, political, cultural and technological strands.

At the same time it has to be realised that women should not wrongly understand the concept of women empowerment. They need to understand that feminism is about gender balance and not about women's superiority over men or about enmity towards men.

There have been instances where women have been found misusing laws or public sympathy for selfish reasons in the name of Empowerment or feminism. Empowerment means, ability to use the resources for the betterment of their life and not to misuse the laws available to wreck vengeance on their partners or their organizations. We have to ask ourselves some questions: Would we ever get rid of crime against women if women start using laws as weapons and our legal system get choked with false cases? Is it empowerment if a woman plays gender card and settle scores with whosoever she wants?

False cases of crime against women should surely concern responsible women because it hurts their cause the most. False cases are no less a crime against actual victims of these crimes. "If cry of wolf is made too often, assistance might not come when actual wolf appears." Therefore we can conclude by saying that the participation of women in decision-making at all levels of public and private life is important as an issue of human rights as well as for the strengthening of the democratic process. Empowered women can change a society and a country for better and they can further inspire and

encourage empowerment. What should not be forgotten, however, is that with great power comes great responsibility which lies in a responsible and optimal use of that power for your own and others' upliftment.

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