



Women empowerment: Education, sports, politics, and mental health

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Abstract

"As women achieve power, the barriers will fall. As society sees what women can do, as women see what women can do, there will be more women out there doing things, and we'll all be better off for it." — Sandra Day O'Connor.

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that includes a state of mind as well as attitude of a person that helps people gain control over their own lives and in their society, by acting on issues that they consider as important. Empowerment occurs within sociological, psychological, and economic spheres and at various levels like individual, group, and community (Sharma, 2006) ^[17]. Women empowerment is any process that provides greater autonomy to women through the sharing of relevant information and provision of control over factors affecting their performance. (Sayulu, Sardar & Sridevi, 2005) ^[16]. the present paper is an attempt to highlight the importance of women's empowerment in today's rapidly evolving world. It focuses on empowering women in different domains like education, sports, politics, and mental health.

Keywords: Women empowerment, sociological, economic, psychological, community, mental health

Introduction

Around the ages, women played a very important role in the stability, progress, and long-term development of nations. There are so many women in the world who contribute to the different spheres of life like medicine, entertainment, sports, education, health, politics, Social work, etc. To name a few among them include Marie Curie, Helen Keller, Mother Teresa, Jane Austen, Maria Montessori, Oprah Winfrey, Serena Williams, and Angela Merkel. In India also, women contribute wholly in different areas. They have occupied a dignified position in family, work area, and society. Rani Lakshmi Bai, Anandibai Gopalrao Joshi, Sarojini Naidu, Savitribai Phule, Shakuntala Devi, Reita Faria. Indira Gandhi, Kalpana Chawla, Kiran Bedi, Lata Mangeshkar, Sushmita Sen, Arunima Sinha, P.T. Usha, Saina Nehwal, Indra Nooyi, and so many Indian women contributed a lot to our country as well as in the world. But despite the contributions of women in Indian history and the freedom movement the status of women was not good.

It has been noted in the history of humanity that men and women are not treated alike and assigned statuses alike. Women have not been able to lead a life exactly on par with men despite their urge for equality, self-worth, etc. Since independence, the status of Indian women has radically changed due to structural and cultural changes. Women got opportunities in education, employment, and political spheres. In the 21st century, women in India are almost assigned an equal status with men. Although most of their educational, economic, political, and other disabilities have been removed but still their status is not better as compared to women in other developed countries.

For upgrading the status of women in society the term women empowerment came into existence. Empowering women is the fundamental right of every woman. For the sustainable development of a nation, it is important to empower women and improve their status in political, social, educational, economic, and health areas.

Empowerment is a term generally used to describe a process by which powerless people become conscious of their situation and organize collectively to gain greater access to

public service or the benefits of economic growth. (Reddy, Kumar & Nalini, 2005) ^[15]. It can be viewed as a means of creating a social environment in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for social transformation. Empowerment strengthens the innate ability by way of acquiring knowledge, power, and experience (Hashemi, Schuler, & Riley, 1996) ^[4].

Empowerment is of two types. First empowerment in general is related to the poor or those who are powerless. Second, it is the empowerment of women. (Reddy, Kumar & Nalini, 2005) ^[15].

In the context of women, empowerment is referred to as a process whereby women become capable of organizing themselves to increase autonomy, assert their independent rights, make choices, and control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their subordination (Malhotra, 2004) ^[11]. Women's empowerment is the way or a social action in which women elaborate and recreate what it is to be in a circumstance that they previously were denied. (Kabeer, 2005) ^[7].

Women empowerment and education

Women empowerment is a global issue, which has gained momentum in recent years as the development of a society or a nation depends on the social as well as economic and psychological well-being of women. Women Empowerment means to create an environment for women where they have the right to make their own decisions. It ensures that women have equal rights and also gives them the confidence to claim their rights and to live their lives freely with a sense of self-worth and dignity. It gives women an opportunity for education and equal employment opportunities without any bias (Rahman, 2020) ^[14].

Women are the most important part of our society and nation and they can play a very crucial role in the development of the country. Education is the most important and valuable factor for women's empowerment, development, and welfare. Educated women can make crucial contributions toward the development of family and

society and ultimately country. (UNICEF, 2007) as cited in Rahman, 2020) ^[14]. Education is the strong power of women's empowerment because it enables them to change their lives wholly. As per to 2011 census female literacy rate is 65.46% and when the male literacy rate is approximately 82.14 %. It is said that woman has the power to bright future for upcoming generations. Therefore as soon as possible the growth rate of women's education should be uplifted. (Mahato & Barman as cited in Rahman, 2020) ^[14].

Education is a major milestone of women's empowerment because it enables them to respond to challenges, confront their traditional roles, and change their lives. Therefore one can't neglect the importance of education about women's empowerment. With the increasing change in women's education, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women (Bhat, 2015) ^[15]. Govt. of India has taken some initiatives towards girls' and women's education which include Shiksha Sahayog Yojana, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Balika Samridhi Yojana, sukanya Samridhi Yojana, post Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child and Swami Vivekananda Single Girl Child Scholarship for Research in Social Sciences.

Women play a vital role in making a nation progressive and guiding it towards development. If we want to bring about women empowerment in India, women need to be given equal opportunities for education to develop their skills without any sense of discrimination. To develop education and skill in women; schools, colleges, and universities should be established exclusively for women in large numbers in most of the areas of our country. In every census, women take a secondary place in education. So as early as possible the growth rate of women's education should be upgraded and this is only possible through educational opportunities and skill development. (Mahato & Barman as cited in Rahman, 2020) ^[14].

Women empowerment and sports

Another way to empower women is through sports. Sport has enormous power to generate real social, economic, and environmental change and contribute to sustainable development, social cohesion, and even challenge mindsets and prejudice. It has been recognized in many countries that sports can be a force to amplify women's voices and break down gender barriers and discrimination. It has been seen that women's participation in sports can help break down gender stereotypes, improve girls' and women's self-esteem and self-image, and contribute to the development of leadership skills (Puri, 2016) ^[12].

In particular, women in sports leadership could shape attitudes toward women's capabilities as leaders and decision-makers, especially in traditional male-domain society. Girls and women with disabilities are frequently subject to multiple forms of discrimination. The low level of participation by differently abled girls and women is in part a reflection of the double discrimination that they face, both as differently abled individuals and as females. Sports and physical activity programs targeting girls and women with disabilities have proven that this often isolated and neglected group of girls and women are confronted with their abilities rather than their disabilities through sports participation. The chance to meet other girls and women in similar circumstances as themselves gives them opportunities to share experiences and to learn about issues

that they are often deprived of knowledge about such as those relating to reproductive health. The participation of girls and women with disabilities in sports challenges prejudices about disabilities and impairments and ultimately positively contributes to their empowerment (Weimarlaan, n.d) ^[19]. In the Olympics and Para Olympics Saikhom Mirabai Chanu, P. V. Sindhu, Lovlina Borgohain, Avani Lekhara, Sheetal Devi have won various medals and set examples for other women to participate in sports and uplift their status in society.

Sports participation would have many benefits to come up in life as an empowered woman. Research on sports indicates that sports can benefit girls and women by enhancing physical health and well-being, Fostering self-esteem and empowerment, Facilitating social inclusion and integration, Challenging gender norms, and providing opportunities for leadership and achievement (Haseena, 2015) ^[5].

Women empowerment and politics

Another way to empower women can be through politics the participation of women in politics is a crucial step in the empowerment of women at all levels. The role of women in politics has been instrumental. She participated in the freedom struggle and gave her voice to the oppressors. They were to be seen matching the steps of men during every movement which led to the usurping of the British Empire. There were many notable names as Rani Lakshmi Bai, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, Aruna Asaf Ali, Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Sucheta Kriplani a host of others who were to be seen as saviors of Indian freedom struggle (Kumar, Dhamij & Dhamija, 2016) ^[10].

Women are brilliant in all spheres, but when it comes to politics and seat sharing – Men are accepted. This gender imbalance has been observed and felt for many years. This setup needs a change. Without women's participation, there cannot be a nation's progress. The role of Indian women in the freedom struggle is noteworthy. Thus, a woman's participation in politics can change the gender imbalance but it needs to change enforcement levels. Further active participation of women is required at decision-making levels so that proper laws are implemented against unlawful activities. There is growing momentum among government and civil society to foster and ensure women's participation in the political arena and specifically within local governance structures (Bhatla, Walia, Khanna & Verma, 2012) ^[1]. The importance of equal participation of women in politics and especially in decision-making positions is not simply about equal numbers, it is about cultivating an environment that values women's perspectives, recognizes women as change-makers, and leverages differences to improve democratic governance. Gender equality is at the heart of UNDP's mandate. It is a not only a matter of human rights, but also a driver of development progress. By empowering women as agents of change and leaders in the development processes that shape their lives, UNDP envisions a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient world (Pettigrove, 2015) ^[13]. In the recent 18th Lok Sabha elections 2024 in India, In spite of greater push for women's participation in electoral politics, of the total elected members, only 13.6 per cent or 74 MPs were women (India Today, 2024) ^[6].

Women empowerment and mental health

Another way to empower women is to enhance their mental health. Good mental health is very crucial for women who make up half of the population and are important members of their families during financial austerity periods (Bradshaw & Fordham, 2013) ^[3]. In this regard, changes in social attitudes are one of the methods for enhancing the mental health of women, and reducing their psychiatric problems and is one of the important steps in their empowerment (Shooshtari, Abedi, Bahrami, & Samouei, 2018) ^[18]. It has been observed that there are higher rates of psychiatric disorders in women especially anxiety and depression due to gender-based violence, poverty, low participation in making decisions, having less support from the family, intimate partner violence, workplace harassment, and rape victims. For improving the mental health of women, mental health services by mental health professionals like psychosocial interventions and community-based programs played an important role in alleviating suffering associated with psychiatric disorders, and emotional distress. National mental health programs and district mental health programs have already been implemented for the better mental health of the people. Participation of women in formulating mental health policies should be encouraged by govt and national and international organizations. because women play an important role in the success of health policies. If women are mentally healthy they can play a critical in the success of their family, society, and nation. (Kumar, Supriti, Nehra & Dahiya, 2013) ^[9].

Conclusion

Despite so many efforts undertaken by the government and NGOs the picture at present is not satisfactory related to women's empowerment. While India has taken some measures on human development, its global standing on gender equality remains low. While visible gains have been made through legal reforms and policies, human development, and grassroots initiatives, there is a long way to go in many areas of women empowerment. A more concerted effort is needed to close the urban-rural divide and ensure that women in rural areas also enjoy the same access to education, employment, healthcare, and decision-making as their urban counterparts. Women should be aware of the policies for their welfare and upliftment. The hardest challenge will be to change attitudes, given that many barriers to women's empowerment are attributed to patriarchal and patrilineal traditions that are deeply entrenched in our society (Kapur & Narayan, 2020) ^[8].

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