



GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all phases of life. Equality between men and women exists when both shares equal rights. At the same time they must share equal opportunities for financial independence through work or business. They must have equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions. Thus a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women by giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is important for the realization of human rights.

What is Women Empowerment?

Women Empowerment can be defined as the creation of an environment where women can make independent decisions on their personal development. Empowerment refers to increasing the economic, political, social, educational, gender, or spiritual strength of individuals and communities. Virginia Woolf points out in her novel *A Room of One's Own*

"Women and fiction remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems."

Gender equality and empowering women is a wide area to be discussed. The topic can be justified by putting a glance at certain aspects of women rights and the problems they are

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facing to achieve them. There are several challenges that are currently plaguing the issues of women's rights in India. We can achieve gender equality by educating girls increasing literacy in women, increasing early childhood development interventions, providing all human rights to women promoting women's political rights and participation etc. "Women right is a Human right."

Some of the challenges which we can undergo to avoid mishaps in the life of women and empower her are as follows:

Education:

As far as the education of women is concerned she lacks behind in education in comparison to men. All this begin basically from her family background. Women should have expansion in family support. She must be given equal treatment in primary and secondary education. Advancing the women rights advance humanity. After making a vast study on the rights of women we come across a serious problem that majority of children are not in school and most of them are girls. They fall prey for most of the domestic or social problems. As for instance, if a family can afford school fee for only one child, the boy is chosen to attend. On the contrary if someone needs to fetch water or do housework instead of going to school, a girl is likely to be chosen. Yet study after study shows that educating girls is the single solution to raise over all economic productivity, educating the next generation, improve nutrition and promote health.

As said in a study conducted by the Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism, "In spite of the UN Charter of Human Rights and the provisions of the Indian Constitution, women continue to be victims of exploitation. The view that the future generation of a family is carried on and preserved by boys-only has degraded the position of women in society. Similarly, it is noticed that majority of the women are lacking in the spirit of rebellion. If careful attention is not paid and major steps are not taken, the situation will become extremely critical."

Eradicating this gap and educating women about their real place in the world is a step that will largely set this entire movement rolling down the hill to crash and break the wall of intolerance, negligence and exploitation. While illiteracy levels in India continue to stand at about 54% for women and 76% for men, school enrollment, attendance and quality of education, especially for the girl-child threatens to deteriorate even further if appropriate measures are not put in place and mostly this is due to the lack of women education in India. 'Illiteracy is one of the main obstacles in women empowerment in India'.

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Poverty:

Poverty is considered the greatest threat to peace in the world, and eradication of poverty should be an international goal as important as the eradication of illiteracy. Due to abject poverty, women are exploited in domestic life and wives whose incomes are usurped by the man of the house. If poverty were not a concern, then the girl child will be able to follow her dreams without concerns of sexual exploitation, domestic abuse and illiteracy. Women make up half the world's population but represent an amazing 70% of the world's poor. We live in a world in which women living in poverty face gross inequalities and injustice from birth to death. From poor education to poor nutrition to susceptible and low pay employment, the sequence of discrimination that a woman may suffer during her entire life is unacceptable but all too common.

Millennium Development Goal is to promote gender equality and empower women. This MDG is critical for tackling poverty and improving prospects for women. But how can women break gender based stereotypes to minimize discrimination and reduce gender based violence when they are trapped in societies with socio-cultural practices which routinely discriminate them from having equal opportunities in education, health and livelihood? These women are invisible and the obstacles in their way prevent them from accessing the most basic human rights and needs. The outlook is austere. As Jane Austene in her novel *Persuasion* points out:

I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men. "Perhaps I shall. Yes, yes, if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything."

Women make up 70% of the world's working hours and earn only 10% of the world's income and half of what men earn. This leads to greater poverty, slower economic growth and a lower standard of living. In developing countries, millions of women also die each year as a result of gender-based violence. This deep-rooted gender discrimination creates a bleak outlook for women in developing countries. For millions of girls living in poverty, it is often those closest to them who work against the child's interests and their immediate environment is often dysfunctional and sometimes, downright harmful. Parents arrange marriages when

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you are a child. Neighbours say, if you are a girl, you must limit your activities to your home. Friends say, it is OK not to go to school.

So what is the solution? The World Bank believes that 'putting resources into poor women's hands while promoting gender equality in the household and in society results in large development payoffs'. It is therefore fundamental to nurture their self confidence and empower girls and young women living in poverty to make informed choices about their own lives as well as those of their communities.

Health and safety:

The empowerment of women begins with a guarantee of their health and safety. The health and safety concerns of women are paramounts for the well being of a country, and are an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country. However there are alarming concerns where maternal healthcare is concerned. Women must be care for proper maternal health. It is one of the most important goals in community health. Girls must be given a good star in early childhood. A child's earlier years are critical. Skills such as language acquisition, social competence, coping, the ability to think critically and learn all develop in first year of life. This can be possible only by providing adequate nutrition, nurturing health etc.

The ability of women to control their own fertility is absolutely fundamental to women's empowerment and equality. When a woman can make planning of her family, she can plan the rest of her life. When she is healthy, she can be more productive. And when her reproductive rights—including the right to decide the number, timing and spacing of her children, and to make decisions regarding reproduction free of discrimination and violence—are promoted and protected, she has freedom to participate more fully and equally in society. Mahatma Gandhi says about women in *Young India*:

"To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed, is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?"



How can women be empowered?

Empowering Women Socially:

Women are educated about the social benefits including awareness about the existing social problems in the society, good recognition & image in the family & community, role in making important decision in their family, plan & promote better education for their children, taking care of health of the aged and the children just to mention a few.

Women are also allowed to participate in political and public life. Therefore, they are given a chance to serve the community including fighting for the basics amenities & welfare needs of the village community such as:

- Safe drinking water
- Public sanitation
- Street light
- Chance to help the weaker people like disable and the aged

Empowering Women by Education:

Most women are given a chance of completing their education to the degree level by providing financial support. Due to poor economic condition they are discouraged and directed to get married and raise a family. There are number of women education grants that offer financial help for women from poor background in order to get educated.

There're various scholarships that benefits women in India to achieve their career by going back to school or various training institutions where they can complete their education. On the other side many NGO's in India offer support to women in order to benefit them in education. The government of India is also setting aside funds that are used to empower women. They also support them with other initiatives.

Women who have the desire to improve their lives are allowed to take these grants from the government and NGO's to empower themselves. The grants for women get most supports from different companies after realizing that women can perform better than men if they are well educated and equipped.

Empowering Women by Business:



The government of India set aside some reasonable amount of money for those women who have business ideas. They can borrow it and start business. Women are encouraged to start small business in order to have their own source of income thus they become independent. Various non-governmental organizations also offer financial support to women in India and encourage and teach them how they can be making their own money by starting various business activities.

The status of the women in India has greatly improved and there are many women who are holding high position in the government offices. This has proved that women can be even better than men if they are given an opportunity. Women are given equal opportunity like their male counterparts by the government.

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