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Women empowerment through education and training for economic growth and development: Challenges and implementation

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the essentials of women empowerment and its impact on global economic growth and development. It defines women empowerment as a revolutionary approach to transform power relations to favour women in order to narrow the gender gaps between men and women so that gender equality is established in society and gender inequality which characterizes the patriarchal society is prevented. Empowering women is making women independent of social control and controlling gender disparity. Society in any part of the world is male dominated, and patriarchy does not favour right and freedom to women in equality with men's right and freedom. Women empowerment changes social life and prevents gender inequality which blocks the path of women's honour and dignity. Education, training, awareness, and financial support are the basis of women empowerment. Women need to be socially, politically and economically empowered to develop the world. Without women empowerment gender equality is impossible and women empowerment leads to gender equality that paves the way for sustainable development.

Keywords: Women empowerment, gender disparity, gender equality, social change, economic development, sustainable growth, global development

Introduction

Women's empowerment is a global demand. It is a contention not confined only to feminism but it has a profound implication as far as the universal issue of human justice to women is concerned. It is a necessity for social, economic and political development and a key to dignity to womanhood. Women's empowerment opens up the gate way to social and economic development of every society and community. "Women empowerment is a radical approach concerned with transforming with power relation in favour of female gender and considered essential for global progress" (Bhatia, Shivanji & Singh, Seema, 2019) [7]. It is empowerment that enables women to make their choices which lead to the improvement of their well-being. The role of women in the development of the world can never be discounted but women have long been disgraced in the society. Society has sometimes described them as the 'weaker sex'. This label is responsible for not proper evaluation of their role in social growth and economic development and proper appreciation of their contributions to the world civilization (Pandey, Kalyan, 2004) [10]. The world society is basically male dominated and women are victims of patriarchy. They are often repressed, suppressed, neglected, oppressed, exploited and marginalized. Gender discrimination tortures and reduces them to the secondary status in the society (Pandey, Kalyan, 2004) [10]. Proper importance is not attributed to the role of women in the necessity for social and economic development. Women's ability to contribute to the sustainable development of a country is disregarded. Politics is by and large concerned with men. "The place of women in society is relegated to contributing minimally to the social development of the country. In addition to it, Women's rights are not properly being protested in order for women to participate in various issues of their country but are subjected abysmal violation" (Bayeh, Endacachew, 2018) [6]. Social and national development is not to reach the point of expectation if women are not properly empowered. Empowerment for women can play a very significant role in raising women from this secondary status and thus make them self-reliant, and ensure their dignity and honour as human beings.

Women's empowerment is possible through education and training and women of all classes, categories, without any discrimination can pave the way for social and national development for every country and will finally lead the world towards development in all domains. But women's empowerment is a very challenging task. It needs national leaders' firm determination, broader views, human social attitude towards women and sustained efforts of the society. Empowered women will participate in the movement for social changes, economic development, contribute to the enhancement of the quality of life and raise and improve workforce. No narrowness will allowed in the process of women's empowerment.

Aims of the Study

The present study is concerned with the essentiality of women's empowerment for the sake of removal of gender inequality, bridging gender gaps and women's self-reliance and preparing the ground for individual, social, national and global development. Women's empowerment is a necessity but a very demanding task to achieve it. The present study aims at bringing out the factors standing in the way of women's empowerment. Some of the major factors are:

- Patriarchy,
- Social mores and religious taboos,
- Lack of social and political encouragement,
- Lack of proper assessment and evaluation of women's abilities,
- Lack of education, training, awareness and literacy
- Regarding women as the weaker sex.

The study highlights these factors as barriers to women's empowerment and suggests the ways and means how to empower women. The steps required to empower them are

- To remove patriarchal control or domination over women,
- To allow rights and freedom for women,
- To provide education and training to women,
- To create consciousness in women,
- To allow women to make their choices and take their own decisions,
- To ensure and provide all possible social and political supports to women.

Review of Related Literature

The research papers and articles which were reviewed for this study bring it to light that women empowerment is crucial to social and economic development and thus the main foundation of global development. Batliwala (2007) ^[5] writes that women empowerment is a radical approach to transform relations in favour female gender that leads to better gender equality. According to Hilloway, *et al* (2017) ^[12] Gender equality and women empowerment lead to global progress which can be expedited and raised through affordable financial services to women. Page and Czuba (1999) ^[13] are of the view that empowerment is multidimensional process that do much to help people gain control over their own life. Empowerment is a process that fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society through the actualization of important issues. Kabeer (1999) ^[14] defines women empowerment as the ability to make strategic life choice in context where this ability was previously denied to them. United Nations (2018) stresses that gender equality is the

core to human rights and a bedrock for achieving sustainable development. Increasing women participation in political leadership and decision making is essential for economic and social development. Ahmed *et al* (2001) ^[2] writes that the issue of women's empowerment and gender equality is at the top agenda across the world, as gender inequality is wide-spread in all cultures. In developing countries, gender disparity is highly rampant compared to the developed countries. Alvarez and Lopaz (2013) ^[3] stress that empowerment of women is essential not only for gender equality but also for sustainable development. Women's empowerment is women's right and education, training and awareness are required for them to be empowered. Solomon and Memar (2014) ^[15] find that women's empowerment is the pillar of economic development and social progress and the only way to prevent gender inequality. Sen, Amurtya (2009) ^[16] expresses his opinion that gender equality is important in its own right. Development is a process of expanding freedom equally for all people.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are

- To define women empowerment from a practical point of view,
- To focus on the importance of women empowerment on social changes'
- To focus on gender equality,
- To focus on the impact of gender inequality on sustainable development,
- To focus on the factors leading to women empowerment,
- To explore the challenges of women empowerment.

Methodology of the Study

The present study is qualitative in nature. It is a descriptive analysis of the impact of women empowerment upon the individual life of women, their social life, their social status and economic growth. The investigation for the study was based on the process of data collected from 100 women from different parts of West Bengal through online based opinion questionnaires in order to examine the impact of empowerment on women. The collected data were classified, examined and interpreted to get the idea of the challenges of empowering women and the factors required to empower them.

Conceptualization of Women's Empowerment

Women empowerment is a social programme with a wide ranging economic goal to be achieved through raising the status of women in the society and enhancement the quality of their life. The implementation of this programme essentially needs education, awareness, literacy and training for women and a sustained effort to promote their sense of self-reliance, their abilities to determine their own choices and their right to influence social changes for themselves and others. Women's empowerment implies "women's ability to make strategic life choices where that ability had been previously denied them" (Malhotra *et al*, 2009) ^[17]. Empowerment is central to women's all round development. It is the broad way to free women from all social and cultural constraints and sometimes religious mores and taboos. Empowerment is the best weapon for women to fight against patriarchy that always attempted to subjugate them to men in almost all societies and communities of the

world. Empowerment for women is basic to women's dignity, right and freedom. It involves the action of upgrading the status of women through education, training and other supports that will enable them to attain self-reliance. To empower women is to prevent gender disparities, to pave the way for equality of women with men, to ensure dignity to women as human beings, to improve the quality of individual, family, social and national life, to raise workforce and to bring about economic development. Women's empowerment is all about allowing and equipping women to make life-determining choices across different issues in the country (Bayey, Endalcachew, 2018) ^[6]. "Empowered women can contribute to the nation-building drive launched at the national level" (NCERT Books, Guru). Women empowerment is all about making women both socially and financially independent. It is the process in which women make their own decisions. Women's empowerment increases women's self-esteem, abilities, to create rational decisions on the matter of radical change in the status of social and national life.

Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality

Empowering women is preventing gender inequality. Women are generally treated unequal to men in social life, in productive activities, in decision making, in social and political activities and even in rights and freedom because they were not let be empowered. Empowerment has a direct effect on the question of equality for women. It narrows the gap of equality between men and women in all domains of life. Empowered women will regain equality, right and freedom which have been so long denied to them. Gender equality is understood to mean that the "rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of individuals will depend on whether they are born male or female" (Warth and Koparanova, 2012) ^[18]. Gender equality exists in the situation where "all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles, that the different aspirations and needs of women and men are considered valued and favoured equally" (Holzner *et al*, 2010) ^[19]. The ultimate goal of gender equality is the non-existence of discrimination on the basis of one's gender (Alvarez and Lopez, 2013) ^[3]. Gender equality is the foundation of social and economic development in all societies in the world. Women empowerment leads to gender equality and gradually helps eradicate gender inequality which is experienced as a big barrier to national and global development. Gender equality and women empowerment are essential to progress and it can be enhanced by providing affordable financial services to women (Holloway, Niazi and Rouse, 2017) ^[12]. Empowered women not only help in the process of sustainable growth but also construct its main pillar. Sustainable development is not possible without women's empowerment and gender equality. Gender equality is both a human right and a pre-condition for and indicator of, sustainable development (Alvarez and Lopez, 2013) ^[3]. Women cannot be kept outside the agenda of social and economic development because they form about 50 percent of world population and thereby they are half of the total workforce of the world. To prevent women from participating in all activities in all domains with men means to dwarf sustainable growth and development. "Women's empowerment and gender equality are discussed as a means to bring about sustainable

development in the country" (Bayeh, Endolcshew, 2018) ^[6]. Gender disparities form a palpable reality in the world. The gaps between men and women are very hard to bridge. To discount women's abilities and skills has become the mindset of the world. "Women earn less and less economically productive than men almost everywhere across the world, and women have less opportunity to shape their lives and make decisions than do men" (Finance & Development, 2012). The World Bank has stressed gender equality for the sake of global development "Greater gender equality can enhance economic productivity, improve development outcomes for the next generation, and make institutions and policies more representative" (World Bank's 2012 World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development)

Gender Equality and Economic Growth

Women's empowerment removes gender inequality and unlocks the door for gender equality. It bridges the gaps between men and women and provides equal opportunities to women to become fit competitors for men in every step in life. It ensures dignity, freedom and rights to women. This is the impact of women's empowerment on the social side of life. Women's empowerment has a deep and wide ranging impact on economy. Greater gender equality as the result of women's empowerment enhances economic efficiency and improves other development outcomes (Finance and Development, 2012). Women's empowerment leads to the increase in productivity through their skills and talents if properly or fully used. "Elimination of barriers against women working in certain sectors or occupations could increase output by raising women's participation and labour productivity by as much as 25 percent in some countries through better allocation of their skills and talent" (Cuberes and Tegnier Baque, 2011) ^[20]. If women are properly empowered, economic, political and social actors can change policy choices and make institutions more representative of a range of voices. Women's empowerment is the basis of women's participation in earning, freedom of decision of choices and rights as human beings. Gender equality is the result of women's empowerment. Gender equality encourages equal participation in all economic and constructive and nation re-building activities. "For the effective and sustainable economic growth of any country, the equal participation of both sexes is crucial. It is a well-established fact that the achievement of economic growth is contingent upon the full use of the skills and qualification of women" (OECD, 2008). "Economic development, as one component of sustainable development of a country is unthinkable without the involvement of women" (Solomon and Memar, 2014) ^[15]. It cannot be denied that women are the source of economic strength. This strength is instrumental in achieving other pillars of sustainable development. The economic empowerment is crucial for them to become active participants in the politics of the country. India is a country with still a wide gap between men and women. Though there is constitutional for equality of women in all spheres of social and political life. They are still unequal in the eye of society. They are often denied freedom and equality with men. India is a land with 50 percent women population. Naturally, women are the pillar of social progress and national economic growth and development. India's economic development depends much on equal participation of both men and women in all sorts of

economic activities, but the pre-condition of the activities is Indian women's empowerment through education, training and awareness and the fulfillment of the condition will lead to gender equality that will gradually narrow gender gaps that in turn can contribute to higher economic growth. Gender disparities block the passage of economic growth and development. It is essential to level the disparities. "Many gender disparities remain even as countries develop, which calls for sustained and focused public action. Corrective policies will yield substantial development payoffs if they focus on persistent gender inequalities that matter most for welfare. To be effective, these measures must target the causes of inequality without ignoring the domestic political economy" (Finance & Development, 2012).

Challenges of Women's Empowerment

Empowering women is a high necessity for sustainable development in all countries but it is a very challenging job. India needs sustainable development mainly in economic sector to attain the global recognition and status as a developed country. India is developing at a rapid step; national growth is registered; growth and development in the socio-economic domain is proudly displayed but women who constitute around 50 percent of the total population in India continue to carry the mark of gender inequality and thus to remain mostly unempowered. "The census 2011 counts women population @ 48.5 percent of the total population of India. In the changing dynamics of the society women empowerment is much relevant and very important. Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has spoken for women empowerment on 82nd "Mann Ki Baat". Education plays an important role in society. Education enables people to build confidence to take decisions in a better way. Skilling and Micro-Finance can get women financially stable and therefore she is no longer dependent upon others in the society. Giving education to women means giving education to the whole society, (Muniraju and Urvashi, 2022) [9]. The Constitution of India provides for women empowerment and prohibits discrimination against women in the society. Article 15 directs the State of India to make special provision for women. "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" is a national programme for mass awareness to educate all girl children on India. The Government of India emphasizes earning and education for the sake of women empowerment. Despite these national programmes and goals women in India are not skilled and empowered. Who are earning are considered empowered. One of the objectives of empowerment is financial independence. Women who are educated, skilled and earning are considered empowered and found better in their individual and social life better than uneducated, unskilled woman workers. The goal of the Government is less to empower women and more to develop the nation under the leadership of women. The challenges that stand in the way of empowering women in India include education and training for women, skilling unskilled woman workers, financial support, work reservation, and special opportunities for women, social encouragement and independence of male control, etc. Our Government is trying hard to ensure gender equality for them.

Priorities for Women's Empowerment

Empowerment is an all-comprehensive term. It is

multidimensional. Women's empowerment encompasses women's full abilities to effectively participate in all social, political and economic activities to earn money according to their education, training and skills. It will earn social recognition for them in their abilities to make social and political decisions and attain self-reliance. "Women empowerment has received increased scholarly attention in last several decades as an avenue of enhancing mobility, health, economic condition, and participation in decision-making by women (Afrin, 2008) [1]". Gender equality is the cardinal requirement for women's empowerment and forms the foundation for the attainment of sustainable development. Women's empowerment includes women's political empowerment, economic empowerment, social empowerment and can be attained for them through goal directed education, training, awareness and social and political support for them as inspiration for empowerment. "Administrative framework, social standards, independence in basic leadership, social versatility and systems additionally significantly affect women's empowerment procedures" (Bandiera *et al*, 2018) [21]. Political empowerment is advancement of political inclusivity and supporting political involvement as per rights and legitimate job of women. "Political empowerment can be accomplished through political awareness, position of power, support in political action and participation in political groups" (Chatterjee *et al*, 2016) [22]. Economic empowerment for women is another outcome of women's empowerment. Women need to be socially empowered. This means women's independence of male control. They must enjoy freedom of individual and social life. All restrictions imposed upon them by patriarchy need to be withdrawn so that they are able to lead their social life of honour and dignity. "Social empowerment means giving power or authority to an individual to improve their livelihood. Person-to-person communication and correspondence, and more noteworthy, social versatility, help in empowerment of women" (Swain & Wallentin, 2009) [23]. Social empowerment is not possible without economic empowerment, and social and political empowerment for women will remain incomplete without economic empowerment. Women's empowerment represents the unification of the three types of empowerment. Taylor (2000) [24] writes that "all the dimensions of empowerment, such as social, political and economic empowerment are all well-integrated and cannot be secluded".

Implementation of Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is of wide dimensions. Gender equality is central to women's empowerment. It is the way to provide justice to women. Women cannot be said to have been empowered if they are not free from male control. Gender inequality is a major barrier to women's empowerment. Women need education to bridge the gender gap. Education can play a crucial role in the empowerment of women. Women need training to become skilled workers. Skilled women workers will find it easy to find works for earning. A skilled, educated worker can earn well according to ability and she is considered empowered. Social encouragement might create power in women to be self-reliant and independent of social control. Women need to be trained to join all social and economic activities. They need to be made aware of their rights as given by the Constitution. They must be encouraged to participate in

politics to represent themselves to the government in order to have justice for women. Facilities and opportunities need to be provided to them to find works and jobs so that they can earn. More opportunities for education and training will enable women to be empowered. Above all, education, training, awareness, financial support and their social and political participation will empower them and protect them against gender inequality and disparity.

Conclusion

Women are deprived, tortured and exploited in society. This is almost a common picture of the world. This is a reality of women's life in the world. The rate of education of women is much lower than men. Women enjoy less freedom and rights than men. Women's participation in social and political activities is unequal with respect to men's freedom and rights. They are victims of gender inequality. Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential to national and global progress and it can be enhanced by providing affordable financial support to women. Indian women have now low levels of both education and skilled worker force participation. The necessity for women empowerment has been coming to the surface in India for a few decades. "Series of political events since 2014 in India has heightened social concerns about women's role in economic life as well as critical roles within their households" (Demirguc Kunt, *et al.*, 2000) ^[25].

Women need education and adequate support for empowerment. Education and empowerment for women should top the national agenda for socio-economic development, gender equality and social justice as per the main spirit of the Constitution of India. More measures for the welfare and empowerment of women need to be adopted for social and economic progress of India. Quality education, skills development oriented training, work oriented education opportunities, and education facilities need to be ensured for women to become empowered.

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