



Women Empowerment- Issues And Challenges

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Abstract:

The concept of empowerment is not a new one. References to the term date back to the 1960s, particularly in the Afro-American movement and in Paolo Freire's theory based on the development of a critical conscience. But the concept of empowerment was adopted after the Beijing Conference (1995). The Beijing Declaration presents women's empowerment as a key strategy for development: "Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace".

KEYWORDS:

Women, Empowerment, Higher Education, Issues, Challenges, Strategies

INDIAN SCENARIO:

Women Empowerment in India is a challenging task as we need to acknowledge the fact that gender based discrimination is a deep rooted social malice practiced in India in many forms since thousands of years. The malice is not going to go away in a few years or for that matter by attempting to work at it through half-hearted attempts.

Formulating laws and policies are not enough as it is seen that most of the times these laws and policies just remain on paper. The ground situation on the other hand just remains the same and in many instances worsens further. Addressing the malice of gender discrimination and women empowerment in India is long drawn battle against powerful structural forces of the society which are against women's growth and development.

BARRIERS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

1. Parental preference for boys going to school.
2. Higher dropout rate among girls.
3. Gender gaps in higher education

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4. Gender bias in curriculum
5. Cast System
6. Poverty
7. Dowry as cordon
8. Demographic Factors
9. Child Labour Practice
10. Poor School Environment for girls
11. Female age at marriage

STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME BARRIERS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

The following strategies can be considered for bringing phenomenal change in the plight women's education and empowerment in India,

1. Since the prevailing situation of poor or less enrolment of girls in schools closes the doors for development and prosperity of future generation of women, concerted efforts must be initiated jointly by the government, parents and civil society to achieve universal enrolment for girls without any compromise. The enrolment can be made even mandatory for every girl by the government in the realm of compulsory education.
2. The Ministry of Education both at Centre and State level should work out strategic steps to stop firmly the ongoing high drop-outs among girls especially in rural, tribal and slums areas with the serious involvement of voluntary organizations in every locality to realize zero drop-out among girls.
3. The poverty stricken families can be identified through proper research and necessary poverty alleviation services is provided to strengthen the income thereby to enable the families to send their children to schools and colleges without much financial difficulties.
4. Appropriate steps should be taken by the educational authorities with the participation of communities in order to bring the girl children to the main stream of education and development at every level including family and community.
5. The Midday meal scheme and other educational supportive services like free text books, Note books, Fee uniforms, Free Bicycles, Free bus, scholarships free bus pass and so on as done in the state of Maharashtra can be provided in all states and union territories to lift up the literacy level among girls.
6. The electronic and print media can play significant role in building a good and positive image about girls and women in general in the society by giving no focus for such advertisements and news fetching commercial gain at the cost of depicting women as an object.
7. The parents of children belonging to poor, underprivileged families must be specially educated with proper social formula to help them to understand the significance of education for their girl children as foundation for empowerment.
8. As social evils like dowry, child marriage, caste system and other practices deprive rights of education for children belonging to poor and underprivileged families and communities, they should be eliminated through well-designed packages of mass awareness programmes and social welfare measures with full support of public, political parties, NGOs and government agencies.

Challenges of Women Empowerment in Indian Context:

1. One of the major challenge of women empowerment in India is to change the attitude of society towards women.
2. The female child in Indian culture especially in rural, tribal and poor families is expected to develop the qualities of inferiority; subservience and domesticity which place severe limitations on her education and development
3. The lower enrolment of girls in schools is one of the foundational factors which stand as stumbling block for women empowerment in India.
4. In many families girl children play the role of second mother by shouldering the responsibilities of household work such as looking after the sibling, fetching water, collecting firewood, bringing fodder for cattle, cleaning and cooking etc.
5. There are many laws and there have been many amendments that have been carried out to end the discrimination against women and empower women in all aspects of life. But all these laws and amendments have become toothless as the fundamental problem lies in the attitude of the society which is highly biased against women.
6. Today there are lots of things that are happening in the name of women empowerment in India and lot of resources are spent in this direction. Keeping this in mind it is crucial to have a reality check on what is happening on paper and what is the actual ground situation.

7. Women have never been part of the mainstream society in India and they are still considered as a great liability.

DISCUSSION WITH CHALLENGES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT OVERCOMES THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. The greatest single factor which can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. It is indispensable that education enables women not only to gain more knowledge about the world outside of her hearth and home but helps her to get status, positive self esteem, and self confidence , necessary courage and inner strength to face challenges in life. Apparently it also facilitates them to procure a job and supplement the income of family and achieve social status. Education especially of women has a major impact on health and nutrition as an instrument of developing a sustainable strategy for population control. Moreover educated women can play an equally important role as men in nation building. Thus there is no denying fact that education empowers women. Indeed the different organs of the United Nations and experts on women's liberation argue for women's education as the basic step to attain equality with men.

One of the recommendations of National Policy on Education (1986) by the Government of India is to promote empowerment of women through the agency of education and it is considered to be a land mark in the approach to women's education of illiterate. The National Literacy Mission is another positive step towards eradication of illiteracy in the age group of 15-35 years. Women' education has assumed special significance in the context of India's planned development, as it is incorporated in every Five-year plans as the major programme for the development of women. Universalization of elementary education, enrolment and retention of girls in the schools, promotion of balwadies and crutches, raising number of schools and colleges of arts , science, and professional for girls , politechniques, girls hostels, multipurpose institutions and adult education programmes are some of the steps being taken by both central and state governments in India to boost-up women's education.

Higher Education is the most important in life. By having very high education, women are expected to get a very good job in order to save their own life. It is cannot be neglected that higher education is really important for everyone since it is the source of knowledge which must be implemented in everyday life. That's why the need to know what field every individual can hold is the most important one.

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