

RULERS ATTITUDES TO EMPOWER WOMEN IN INDIA

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Abstract: The present paper is an attempt to analyze the status of women empowerment in India using various indicators based on data from secondary sources. The study reveals that women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men in spite of many efforts undertaken by government. Gender gap exists regarding access to education and employment. Household decision making power and freedom of movement of women vary considerably with their age, education and employment status. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society. More than half of the women believe wife beating to be justified for one reason or the other. Fewer women have final say on how to spend their earnings. Control over cash earnings increases with age, education and with place of residence. Women's exposure to media is also less relative to men. Rural women are more prone to domestic violence than that of urban women. A large gender gap exists in political participation too. The study concludes by an observation that access to education and employment are only the enabling factors to empowerment, achievement towards the goal, however, depends largely on the attitude of the people towards gender equality.

Keywords: *Thirsty to see world, Enjoy Liberty, Possessing Natural Rights, Desire to live hurdle free life.*

INTRODUCTION:

In the last five decades, the concept of women empowerment has undergone a sea change from welfare oriented approach to equity approach. It has been understood as the process by which the powerless gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives. Empowerment particularly includes control over resources and ideology. According to Sen and Batliwala (2000) it leads to a growing intrinsic capability- greater self-confidence, and an inner transformation of one's consciousness that enables one to overcome external barrier. This view mainly emphasizes on two important aspects. Firstly, it is a power to achieve desired goals but not a power over others. Secondly, idea of empowerment is more applicable to those who are powerless- whether they are male or female, or group of individuals, class or caste. Though concept of empowerment is not specific to women, yet it is unique in that and it cuts across all types of class and caste and also within families and households (Malhotra et al, 2002). Women empowerment is also defined as a change in the context of a women's life, which enables her increased capacity for leading a fulfilling human life. It gets reflected both in external qualities (viz. health, mobility, education and awareness, status in the family, participation in decision making, and also at the level of material security) and internal qualities (viz. self-awareness and self-confidence) [Human Development in South Asia (2000) as quoted by Mathew (2003)]. UNDP (1990) for the first time introduced the concept of Human Development Index (HDI) that evolved initially as a broader measure of socio-economic progress of a nation but it became popular as a measure of average achievements in human development for both the sexes. Contrary to the general belief that development is gender neutral, statistics show that women lag behind men all

over the world including India in almost all aspects of life. It is for this reason that the focus on human development has been to highlight the gender dimension and continuing inequalities confronting women since 1995 (UNDP 1995). The Report noted that without empowering women overall development of human beings is not possible. It further stressed that if development is not engendered, is endangered. To bring out the facts and figures relating to deprivation of women two indices, namely, Gender related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) were introduced. While GDI measures the achievements in the same dimensions and variables as the HDI, it also takes into account inequality in achievement between women and men (Anand and Sen, 1995). The greater the gender disparity in human development, the lower is country's GDI compared to its HDI. The GDI is the HDI adjusted downwards for gender inequality. On the other hand, GEM indicates whether women are able to actively participate in economic and political life. Theoretically, the index can take values between zero and infinity, with a value of unity reflecting an absolute equality in the respective attainments of males and females. A value higher than unity would imply that females have better attainments than males.

Construction of EDI and GDI:

As we know HDI is a summary measure of human development. It measures the average achievements in the three basic dimensions of human development such as knowledge (as measured by the adult literacy rate with two-thirds weight and the combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio with one-third weight - *Education Index*), longevity (a long and healthy life as measured by life expectancy at birth - *Health Index*), and

standard of living (as measured by GDP per capita in PPP terms in US dollars - *Income Index*). Performance in each dimension is expressed as a value between 0 and 1 by applying the following formulae:

I_1 (*Education Index*), I_2 (*Health Index*) are constructed by

(1) & I_3 (*Income Index*) by (2):

$$I_j = \frac{X_{ij} - \text{Min}(X)}{\text{Max}(X_i) - \text{Min}(X_i)} \quad (1)$$

$$I_3 = \frac{\text{Log}(X_{ij}) - \text{Log}\{\text{Min}(X_i)\}}{\text{Log}\{\text{Max}(X_i)\} - \text{Log}\{\text{Min}(X_i)\}} \quad (2)$$

Where X_{ij} refers to the actual value in respect of the concerned variables used in the construction of the above mentioned indices. The HDI is then calculated as a simple average of the dimension indices. While the HDI measures average achievement, the GDI adjusts the average achievement to reflect the inequalities between men and women in the same dimensions as used in HDI. The following three steps are involved in the construction of GDI:

Step-I: For each dimension of education and health, dimension indices are constructed for males and females separately using the formula (1) and for income index by formula (2);

Step-II: Equally Distributed Index (EDI) for each dimension is constructed using the formula (3) as follows:

$$\text{EDI} = \left[\frac{\text{Male population Share}}{\text{Dimension Index for Male}} + \frac{\text{Female Population Share}}{\text{Dimension Index for Female}} \right]^{-1} \quad (3)$$

Step-III: GDI is calculated by combining the three equally distributed indices in an un-weighted average using the formula (4):

$$\text{GDI}_j = \frac{1}{3} (\text{EDI}_1 + \text{EDI}_2 + \text{EDI}_3) \quad (4)$$

Construction of GEM:

Gender Empowerment Measure as we know focuses on women's opportunity rather than their capabilities. It captures gender inequality in three key areas such as (a)

Political participation and decision making power as measured by women's and men's percentage shares of parliamentary seats; (b) Economic participation and decision making power as measured by two indicators: (1) Women and men's percentage shares of position as legislators, senior officials and managers; and (2) Women and men's percentage shares of professional and technical positions; and (c) Power over economic resources as measured by women's and men's estimated earned income in US dollars in PPP terms.

For each of these three dimensions, an Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage (EDEP) is calculated as a population weighted average according to the general formula (5):

$$\text{EDEP} = \left[\frac{\text{Female Popn. Share}}{\text{Female Index}} + \frac{\text{Male Popn. Share}}{\text{Male Index}} \right]^{-1} \quad (5)$$

The EDEP for political participation and economic participation are each divided by 50 to construct the corresponding indexed EDEP whereas for economic resources simple EDEP is taken into consideration. All these three indices are averaged to construct the GEM.

Planning Commission (G.O.I., 2002) used a third index, namely, Gender Equality Index (GEI) in the National Human Development Report. The methodology for construction of GEI is the same as that of HDI. The point of departure involves expressing the index as a proportion of attainment level for females to that of males. Secondly, in estimating the index, the economic attainments for males and females have been captured by taking the respective worker-population ratio, unlike the use of per-capita monthly expenditure as in the HDI. This has been done, primarily, to avoid taking recourse to apportioning consumption or income, between males and females at the household or at an individual level, using criteria that could always be debated.

Educational and health attainments have been captured using the same set of indicators as in the case of HDI. Besides these three indices, a number of other socioeconomic and political indicators are being widely used to measure women empowerment (G.O.I., 2005-06).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

A number of studies have been undertaken on women empowerment at the global level and in India. Some studies dealt on methodological issues, some on empirical analysis and some others on the measures and tools of empowerment. We have presented in this section first some of the important studies which were undertaken at the international level followed by other studies conducted in India.

Moser (1993) focused on the interrelationship between gender and development, the formulation of gender policy and the implementation of gender planning and practices. The work of Shields (1995) provided an exploratory framework to understand and develop the concept of empowerment both from a theoretical and practical perspective with a particular focus on women's perception of the meaning of empowerment in their lives. Anand and Sen (1995) tried to develop a measure of gender inequality. Pillarisetti and Gillivray (1998) mainly emphasized on the methodology of construction, composition and determinant of GEM. Bardhan and Klasen (1999) critically examined GDI and GEM as two gender-related indicators of UNDP and argued that there are serious conceptual and empirical problems with both the measures and suggested some modifications to the measures including a revision of the earned income component of the GDI. Accordingly, based on their suggestions UNDP modified the procedure for calculating the GDI since 1999 without mentioning that it was different from previous year's procedure (Bardhan and Klasen, 2000).

Similarly Dijkstra and Hanmer (2000) assessed the concept of GDI and pointed out how it suffered from several limitations. According to them GDI conflates relative gender equality with absolute levels of human development and thus gives no information on comparative gender inequality among countries. Using GDI they further constructed a Relative Status of Women (RSW) index and admitted that RSW is also not an ideal measure of gender inequality. The paper was concluded by offering a conceptual framework that provides the basis for an alternative measure of gender inequality.

Dijkstra (2002) while providing a critical review of both the measures identified the strengths and weaknesses of these and suggested a new measure called Standardized Index of Gender Equality (SIGE) which attempts to encompass all possible dimensions of gender equality and avoids the conceptual and methodological problems of GDI and GEM. He further claimed that SIGE can serve as a first approximation of such an overall index. Malhotra et al (2002) in their paper highlighted methodological issues of measurement and analysis of women empowerment.

Dijkstra in 2006 argued that UNDP should take the lead in either constructing a new index for measuring gender equality or elaborating a revised GDI and GEM. He made a detailed recommendation for both the possibilities on the basis of a brief review of alternatives presented in the literature. Klasen (2006) suggested some modifications to the measures that addressed some of the identified problems associated with GDI and GEM. Schöler (2006) reviewed how the two indexes were used in academia and the press. His review revealed that the GDI in particular seems to be a measure that was not used appropriately. In most cases of misuse, the GDI was wrongly interpreted as a measure of gender inequality. Beteta (2006) in his paper

argued that the GEM is an incomplete and biased index on women's empowerment and measures inequality among the most educated and economically advantaged and fails to include important non-economic dimensions of decision-making power both at the household level and over women's own bodies and sexuality. After identifying and assessing potential indicators in those spheres which were absent in the GEM suggested for the construction of a new aggregated measure called Gender Empowerment Enabling Environment (GEEE).

Barkat (2008) while discussing the present status of women in Bangladesh opined that although women as mothers are held in high respect at the individual level, there was an unclear understanding of empowerment of women as a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation in decision making and control over her own life.

Klasen and Schöler (2009) extended their previous works by way of suggesting concrete proposals for the two gender-related indicators and by presenting illustrative results for those proposed measures. The most important proposals included the calculation of a male and female HDI, as well as a gender gap index (GGI) to replace the GDI. Regarding the GEM, the most important changes proposed were different ways to deal with the earned income component and also to replace it with a more straight-forward procedure to calculate the measure. Using his proposed methods he found different ranking of countries compared to that of GDI and GEM.

The work of Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2001) is an important contribution on women empowerment in the context of India. The authors used a policy of political reservation for women in India to study the impact of women's leadership on policy decision. They found that women were more likely to participate in policy making process if the leader of the village community was happened to be women. Mahanta (2002) sought to explain the question of women's access to or deprivation of basic human rights as the right to health, education and work, legal rights, rights of working women's, besides issues like domestic violence, all the while keeping the peculiar socio-cultural situation of the North East in mind. A workshop organized in 2003 by the Institute of Social Sciences and South Asia Partnership, Canada addressed the issues like "Proxy Women" who after being elected to Panchayat bodies were merely puppets in the hands of their husbands, relatives and other male Panchayat members; and emphasized on training programme for their capacity building. Assam Human Development Report (Govt. of Assam, 2003) threw some light on inequality in the achievement between men and women of Assam in different spheres of life. The report viewed that poverty, violence and lack of political participation were the main issues of concern for South Asian Women, and Assam was no exception. The study of Kishor and Gupta (2004) revealed that average women in India were

disempowered relative to men, and there had been little change in her empowerment over time. Parashar (2004) examined how mother's empowerment in India is linked with child nutrition and immunization and suggested women to be empowered simultaneously along several different dimensions if they and their children were to benefit across the whole spectrum of their health and survival needs. Sridevi (2005) in her paper provided a scientific method to measure empowerment. Study of Cote de Ivoire revealed that increased female share in household income leads to increased spending on human development enhancing items (as quoted by Ranis and Stewart, 2005). Blumberg (2005) viewed that economic empowerment of women was the key to gender equality and well being of a nation. This would not only enhance women's capacity of decision making but also lead to reduction in corruption, armed conflict and violence against females in the long run.

Karat (2005) in her works discussed the issues of violence against women, their survival, political participation and emancipation. Panda and Agarwal (2005) focused on the factor like women's property status in the context of her risk of marital violence and opined that if development means expansion of human capabilities, then freedom from domestic violence should be an integral part of any exercise for evaluating developmental progress.

Desai and Thakkar (2007) in their work discussed women's political participation, legal rights and education as tools for their empowerment. Deepa Narayan (2007) made an attempt to measure women empowerment for different countries and regions by using self assessed points on a ten steps ladder of power and rights, where at the bottom of the ladder stood people who were completely powerless and without rights and on the top stood those who had a lot of power and rights. Figueras (2008) in her work studied the effect of female political representation in State legislature on public goods, policy and expenditure in the context of India and opined that politician's gender and social position matters for policy.

Shariff (2009) suggested a specific measure for gender empowerment for India keeping in view culture specific conditions prevalent in the country. The dimensions and factors used in his paper are very different from those identified by the Government of India (G.O.I., 2009) which is aligned with the UNDP concept but weak data support of suspicious quality. He identified six dimensions for which dependable data are available from sample surveys and government records. The dimensions are literacy, work participation rate, decision making power (women's capacity of making purchases for daily household needs and participation in decision making for own health care), ownership of resources (immovable assets and bank accounts), reproduction and care (capacity to choose a modern contraceptive method and to ensure her own children completed with all essential

dozes of immunizations) and political participation (exercising franchise in parliamentary election and participation in panchayat councils). Using these dimensions he constructed GEI for major Indian states and found overall GEI to be 0.424 at the all India level and varying from the lowest value of 0.238 in Uttar Pradesh to the highest value of 0.646 in Kerala.

Mishra and Nayak (2010) in their work emphasized how education plays a central role in human development; as a matter of fact the other two components- health and income - are dependent on educational development. Education permits a person to inherit the wealth of knowledge amassed over generations. It also makes a person more acceptable and productive. Education increases the chances of fitness and employability. Additionally, education leads to fulfillment. Economists have found that a larger share of increase in productivity is attributable to education of the people. Skill formation, which has quite limited scope to inculcate among the illiterate, is a necessary condition to foster growth. Therefore, literacy and some extent of educational proficiency are of fundamental importance for skill formation. In particular, literacy among the females is of great importance, not only for participation in productive and civic activities, but also for rearing children for a better future.

Thus, from the above review of literature it is evident that quite a number of studies have already been undertaken on women empowerment and related issues. Entire gamut of literature has centered mainly around conceptual and measurement issues and the constraints to women empowerment. The present study in this respect analyzes the status of women empowerment in India by taking into consideration various dimensions of it such as women's household decision making power, financial autonomy, freedom of movement, political participation, acceptance of unequal gender role, exposure to media, access to education, experience of domestic violence, etc based on data from different sources.

The Case of India:

As far as India is concerned, the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution and finds a place in the Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the States to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Historically the status of Indian women has been influenced by their past. There is evidence to show that women in the Vedic age got most honored positions in the society (Seth, 2001). They had the right to education and were free to remain unmarried and devote their whole life to the pursuit of knowledge and self-realization. The married women performed all the works and sacrifices equally with their husbands. They were educated in various disciplines of knowledge such as astrology, geography, veterinary sciences and even in martial arts.

There were instances of women taking part in wars and fights. They were highly respected within and outside home. Gradually due to several socio-political changes, especially during the middle age, the glorious status of women declined. The urge for equality on the part of Indian women started getting momentum during the colonial times. Noted social reformers and national leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Annie Besant, Sorojini Naidu and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar made selfless efforts to create awareness among women about their status and were quite successful in removing various social evils such as sati pratha, child marriage, and polygamy. They also encouraged widow remarriage and women education. The reformers were successful in creating a base for development of women and their strive for equality. In course of time Indian society got transformed from traditional to a modern one. Consequently women became more liberal and aware of various ways of life. Since they are quite capable of breaking the traditional barriers imposed by the society are now challenging the patriarchal system though in a limited scale.

Since independence, the Government of India has been making various efforts to empower women. In various plan periods, the issues regarding women empowerment has been given priority. From fifth five year plan onwards there has been a remarkable shift from welfare oriented approach of women empowerment to development approach. The National Commission for women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights of women. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India provided opportunity to women to take part in active politics. The year 2001 was declared as the year of women's empowerment for enhancing their status. To achieve the goal, the government introduced different programmes, identified strategies, established different institutions and made various legal provisions. In spite of all these efforts and actions, women in India still lag behind the men. According to 2001 Census, female literacy rate in the country was 54.2 per cent as against 75.9 per cent in case of males (Table 6: G.O.I., 2001). Although literacy rates for both the sexes were witnessing increasing trend over the years from 1951 to 2001 the gap between them were also simultaneously increasing till 1981 and since then it has started declining but the progress has not been as much as was expected. The situation has been much worse in the rural and remote areas of the country. In spite of women going for higher education they are facing exclusion from their male counterparts and are alienated in various positions in governance. The incidence like early marriage, female feticides and infanticide, dowry, bride burning, rape, molestation, kidnapping etc are very frequent. The record of crime against women indicates an increasing trend (Sharma and Gupta, 2004: 122). The position of women in the country in the social, economic and political fields is by no means equal to that of their male counterparts.

Besides low female literacy, there are many other factors that have contributed to gender biasness. Girl child is still given less priority in certain parts of India. Past studies indicate that it is the people's perception in general that the birth of a girl child is less desirable and evokes less happiness than that of a boy child (Seth, 2001). It is ingrained in the Indian psyche, cutting across religion, caste and region. Since her birth she is victimized in all spheres including education, employment, nutrition and social status.

The World Economic Forum (2005), in its first gender gap study placed India at 53rd position among 58 nations, which shows a significant gap in male and female achievements. In the same study, the rank of India in terms of political empowerment was 24th at both primary and grassroots level. The National Population Policy 2000 specifically identified the low status of women in India as an important barrier to the achievement of goals towards maternal and child welfare (G.O.I., 2000).

SUMMARY AND FINDINGS:

Various indicators of women empowerment are analyzed using the data from various sources while discussing women's present status in India. The main emphasis is given to the indicators like women's household decision making power, financial autonomy, freedom of movement, women's acceptance of unequal gender roles, exposure to media, access to education, women's experience of domestic violence etc. Women's political participation is also analyzed by using indicators like percentage of women voters and women MPs. After analyzing the data it is found that household decision making power and freedom of movement of women vary considerably with age, education and employment. Freedom of movement of widow or divorcee is more than ever married or never married women. Similarly it is found that in the society the acceptance of unequal gender norms by women themselves are still prevailing. More than half of the women believe that wife beating is justified for any of the specific reasons like not cooking properly, not taking proper care of household and children, refuse to have sex with husband, showing disrespect to in-laws etc. However, this attitude is not varying much with age or household structure but decline sharply with education and places of residence. While studying women's access to education and employment it is found that gender gap exist in both the situations. A large gender gap in literacy exists and participation of girls at all stages of education is below 50%. Similarly less than 50% of women are employed and a significant portion of them are not paid for their work. However, having access to employment does not mean that women have full control over their earnings. Fewer women have final say on how to spend their earnings. Control over cash earnings increases with age and with place of residence in urban areas and education, but not vary significantly with household structure. Women's exposure to media is also less relative to men. Women's experience

of domestic violence shows that violence is not lessened by age. Rural women are more prone to domestic violence than urban women. Regarding women's political participation it is found that large gender gap exists in voting and less than ten per cent of total member in Lok Sabha are Women. This is because most of the women lack desired level of financial autonomy, literacy, strong personality, own decision making capacity, family support etc. Thus we see that these mutually interdependent factors reinforce each other and put women in a disadvantageous position relative to men. Various constraints in achieving the desired level of empowerment are also identified. Important among them are poverty, social norms and family structure, lack of awareness about legal and constitutional provision etc.

Generally speaking the women of India are relatively disempowered and they enjoy somewhat lower status than that of men. In spite of so many efforts undertaken by government and NGOs the picture at present is not satisfactory. Mere access to education and employment can only help in the process of empowerment. These are the tools or the enabling factors through which the process gets speeded up. However, achievement towards this goal depends more on attitude. Unless the attitude towards the acceptance of unequal gender role by the society and even the women themselves changed women cannot grab the opportunity provided to them through constitutional provision, law etc. Till then we cannot say that women are empowered in India in its real sense.

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