



Women Empowerment: A Need of Naxal affected Magadh Region

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ABSTRACT

The growth and development of human societies has been diversely analyzed across the globe. The distribution and existence of human races and the progress made thereof has put both the genders on the center stage, where, on one hand men have been shown responsible for major part of development and on the other women as deprived and neglected. This inequality between men and women is probably a most disturbing aspect of many modern societies, though gender inequity is a global phenomenon yet, it is more prominent in developing countries and countries having nondemocratic governments. It is most tragic part of human development that major part of female population of present day civilization is facing persistent hunger and abject poverty simply because of their subjugation, marginalization & systematic disempowerment. But of late it is the result of awakening of women's consciousness which has led women to re-define their roles from a subordinate, dependent and child bearing traditional women to the modern empowered women. The women of Magadh region are suffering from the under development of the region. Since the area is naxal affected, the government is not able to provide basic facilities and programmes made for empowering the women.

In this paper, several works made by the government is discussed and reviewed for empowering the women of India especially for the Magadh region, with the problems which they face in their day to day lives starting from child foeticide to sexual assaults.

Keywords: Women empowerment, naxals, Magadh, rural.

INTRODUCTION

Since hundreds of years, women were treated unequal to men in mostly all the ways. They were even not allowed to own the parental property, they did not have a share in the property of their parents and they had no freedom to choose their work or job and so on. Gender inequality has been part and parcel of an accepted male-dominated Indian society throughout history. Women were expected to be bound to the house, while men went out and worked. This division of labor was one of the major reasons why certain evils like 'Sati Pratha', "Pardah System", 'Child Marriage', 'Dowry System', etc. took birth in our society. The traditional Indian mentality assumes that the place of women is mainly concentrated to the household activities like kitchen work and upbringing of the children. There is systematic discrimination against women economically, socially, politically and culturally more so, in India. These discriminations & disabilities are practiced at all levels day in & day out. Women Empowerment is the ability of women to exercise full control over their actions. This means control over material assets, intellectual resources and even over their ideologies. It involves, at the psychological level, women's ability to assert them which has, so far, been constricted by the 'gender roles' assigned to them especially in a culture like India which resists changes [3].

Magadh region also faces the same issues but in worse manner. Because of the naxal movements in this area, women are unsafe and not allowed to get educated. The government programmes inbuilt for empowering the women have not reached to these women efficiently. In this area, women are politically, financially and mentally far behind. This is because of the male members of the family and surrounding environment which can allow them to join naxals and live in forests but cannot allow them to get educated and join a job or start a business for their living.

Concept of empowerment

The origins of the concept of empowerment go back to the civil rights movement in the USA in the 1960. It has since then been interpreted differently and filled with new meanings and is today used in such different sectors as business, social work, development discourse and by advocates of very different political agendas. The different definitions of empowerment range between defining it as a largely individual process of taking control of and responsibility for one's life and situation, and defining it as a political process of granting human rights and social justice to disadvantaged groups of people.

The empowerment of women is located within the discourse and agenda of gender equality and is increasingly being taken in the agendas of international development organizations, perhaps more as a means to achieve gender equality than as an end in itself [2]. The status of Women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millenniums. In early Vedic period Women enjoyed equal status with men. Rig-Veda & Upanishads mention several names of women sages and seers notably Gargi & Maitri. However later, the status of women began to deteriorate approximately from 500 B.C., the situation worsened with invasion of Mughal and later on by European invaders. Some reformatory movements by Guru Nanak, Jainism, Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Ishwarchandra Vidya Sagar, Pandita Rama Bai and others did give some relief. It is not that British didn't do anything for improving the condition of women. Some laws were enacted such as 'Abolition of practice of Sati', Widow Remarriage Act 1856 etc. The real change came after independence. Constitution of India guarantees equality to women (Article 14). There are other articles too which ensure rights of women e.g. no discrimination by the state [article15 (1)] equality of opportunity (Article16) etc. Feminist activism picked up momentum in India during later 1970s. Later on many groups and NGOs have been working for the Empowerment of women. We are proud that in India Women got voting right much before USA and some other European countries. After Independence the Constitution of India guarantees equality to women by introducing (Article 14, 15 (1) and 16) which ensure rights of women that is no discrimination by the State, equality of opportunity etc. Not only the above mentioned Articles but also during the 73rd and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Constitution of India provided for reservation of seats (at least one-third) in the local bodies of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Municipalities for women. Another Constitutional Amendment (84th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1998) reserving 33 per cent seats in Parliament and State Legislatures is in the pipeline. But even after 66 years of our independence, women are still one of the most powerless and marginalized sections of Indian society. The 2001 Census shows that the sex ratio for India is 933, which is among the lowest in the world. Percentage of female literacy is 54 per cent against male literacy of 75 per cent. Women's representation in Parliament and in the State Assemblies has never gone beyond 8 and 10 per cent respectively. Most of the working women remain outside the organized sector. Mere 2.5 percent women are administrators and managers. Violence and atrocities against women are on the rise.

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Gender discrimination is the major problem, which the Indian women face in the present day society. Many NGOs have tried to reach the Magadh region and have helped the women living there to start their own living and till some point they have succeeded in converting few women to start earning for giving a good life to their families but that's just a small part. Covering the whole Magadh region will need more support from government and NGOs.

Need for women empowerment in rural India

The female population makes almost half of the world's population. If we talk about India, we are at 191st position out of 201 countries in terms of female to male ratio. According to the United Nations, Sex ratio India has 930 females per 1000 males. Our constitution cherishes women's rights to equality, including freedom of voice, movement, and rights over their own bodies. Even ancient culture worshipped women in different avatars. Right from the Vedic era, women enjoyed equal status with men in all aspects of life. But today one cannot deny the fact that the majority of the country's women do not feel safe alone on the streets. Their issues related to health, hygiene, education, nutrition, sanitation, gender equality, social life participation, and nation-building contribution status scores way below in comparison to the Indian Men [4].

Issues that Indian women face:

Women in India are bound to face some of the most pressing challenges of time, such as poor health and hygiene, child marriage, rape, domestic violence, sexual harassment, honor killings, female infanticide, caste issues followed with a long list of other issues and challenges. She is always surrounded by social taboos and stigmas hindering her progress in each and every sphere of life. Even a god gifted biologic process to support fertility and creation i.e. menstruation in our country is stigmatized and surrounded by silence.

One critical aspect of women empowerment is to explicitly address women health, hygiene, and well-being. Poor health & hygiene of women is directly linked with a majority of issues such as school dropouts, gender inequality, lower participation in nation building, the higher the graph of health risks and many more. The Upliftment of women Health and Hygiene should not be considered as Government or Nonprofit Sector's responsibility only. In fact, the time demands to build more and more women empowerment companies. Once all established and emerging companies dealing with a vast range of products and solutions for women consumers will transform themselves into women empowerment companies, India can truly witness a speedy women empowerment.

How to empower women?

In the process of transformation to women empowerment companies, women-oriented brands have to think about social awareness above product or brand awareness. An empowered woman as a consumer can ultimately support a better business growth environment. There is an urgent need to create mass awareness about women health issues which are undermined. In the digital era, social media can be used as an effective means to spread a word with campaigns empowering women by educating society with women's problems and their needs.

Investing in women empowerment beyond CSR goals is also a great way to give back to those who have helped support business directly or indirectly? By exploring new social media avenues, high decibel campaigns, and aggressive awareness initiatives, responsible companies can proudly create a conducive environment for women empowerment.

As health and hygiene is one key factor to lead women empowerment, feminine hygiene and health companies have a larger role to play. As per a report by Donald W. Reynolds National Center for Business Journalism Globally, the feminine hygiene market is expected to be worth over \$36 billion (approx. INR 2.40 lakh crore) in the next six years. This promising growth is already inspiring new ideas, concepts and business models to create a new wave of feminine hygiene startups in the country. Every effort of such companies should rightly move towards breaking taboos, stigmas and challenging the odds. In this manner, they can ignite positive mindsets, spark conversations and generate a social wave of change to ensure health, hygiene, and wellbeing for women.

Government policies for empowering women:

— Working women hostel:

The government launched the Working Women Hostels to ensure availability of safe, convenient accommodation for working family, along with daycare facilities for their children, wherever possible in urban, semi-urban and rural areas.

Under the scheme, assistance is provided for construction of new hostels and expansion of existing ones. The working women hostels are available to any woman provided her gross income does not exceed Rs 50,000 per month in metropolitan cities and Rs 35,000 per month in any other place.

— Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP)

The STEP scheme was set up to provide skills to women so that they can take up gainful employment. It also provides the right competencies and training for women to become entrepreneurs. Open to every woman above the age of 16, it is run through a grant given to an institution/organization including NGOs directly.

According to the Ministry website, the assistance under STEP Scheme will be available in any sector for imparting skills related to employability and entrepreneurship, including but not limited to the agriculture, horticulture, food processing, handlooms, tailoring, stitching, embroidery, zari, handicrafts, computers & IT-enabled services along with soft skills and skills for the workplace, such as spoken English, gems and jewelry, travel and tourism, and hospitality.

— SWADHAR Greh Scheme

The SWADHAR Greh Scheme lunched in 2001 aims to provide temporary accommodation and rehabilitative service to homeless girls and women, who are left alone due to family discord, crime, violence and affected by mental stress, social ostracism etc. It caters to the primary need which includes food, shelter, clothing, medical treatment and care. It also promises to help with regain emotional strength for the women who are without any social and economic support. It also aims in providing legal aid and guidance for the initiative of readjustment with the family or society. In other words, the scheme helps these women to start a fresh new life.

Challenges

Women in India represent 29 percent of the labour force, down from 35 percent in 2004. More than half of the work done by women in India is unpaid, and almost all of it is informal and unprotected. Women are not well represented in most sectors, including business leaders. Though they comprise almost 40 percent of agricultural labour, they control only 9 percent of land in India. Women are also shut out of the formal financial system. Nearly half of India's women do not have a bank or savings accounts for their own use, and 60 percent of women have no valuable assets to their name. It is unsurprising then that at 17 percent, India has a lower share of women's contribution to the GDP than the global average of 37 percent. In addition, women face great physical insecurity. The rate of crimes against women in India stands at 53.9 percent in India. In Delhi, the capital city, 92 percent of women reported having experienced sexual or physical violence in public spaces [1].

Opportunities

The economic impact of achieving gender equality in India is estimated to be US\$700 billion of added GDP by 2025. The IMF estimates that equal participation of women in the workforce will increase India's GDP by 27 percent. More than half of India's women don't have cellphones, and 80 percent don't use them to connect them to the internet. Globally, women make or influence 80 percent of buying decisions and control US\$20 trillion in spending.

There are also social benefits to empowering women. Women spend 90 percent of their income on their families, and economically empowered women boost demand, have healthier and better-educated children, and raise human development levels. One in three private sector leaders reported that profits increased as a result of efforts to empower women in emerging markets [5].

CONCLUSION

For an Indian woman and citizen, freedom does not just mean those guaranteed under the Constitution. It also means more jobs, opportunities for entrepreneurship, increased safety, ease in day-to-day living, and protection of the girl child. In short, the road to women's empowerment in Magadh region has several factors dotting its path. To ensure women are empowered, the government and the public sector need to play important roles to enable their welfare in various sectors. Whether it's providing free cooking gas and education schemes or enabling women to leverage technology, a slew of schemes have been launched in recent years to empower women to be independent in their lives.

The naxal affected Magadh region of Bihar faces many challenges in the development of the women.

Empowering women will change the structure of the naxal affected areas and provide the state with new hands to support.

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